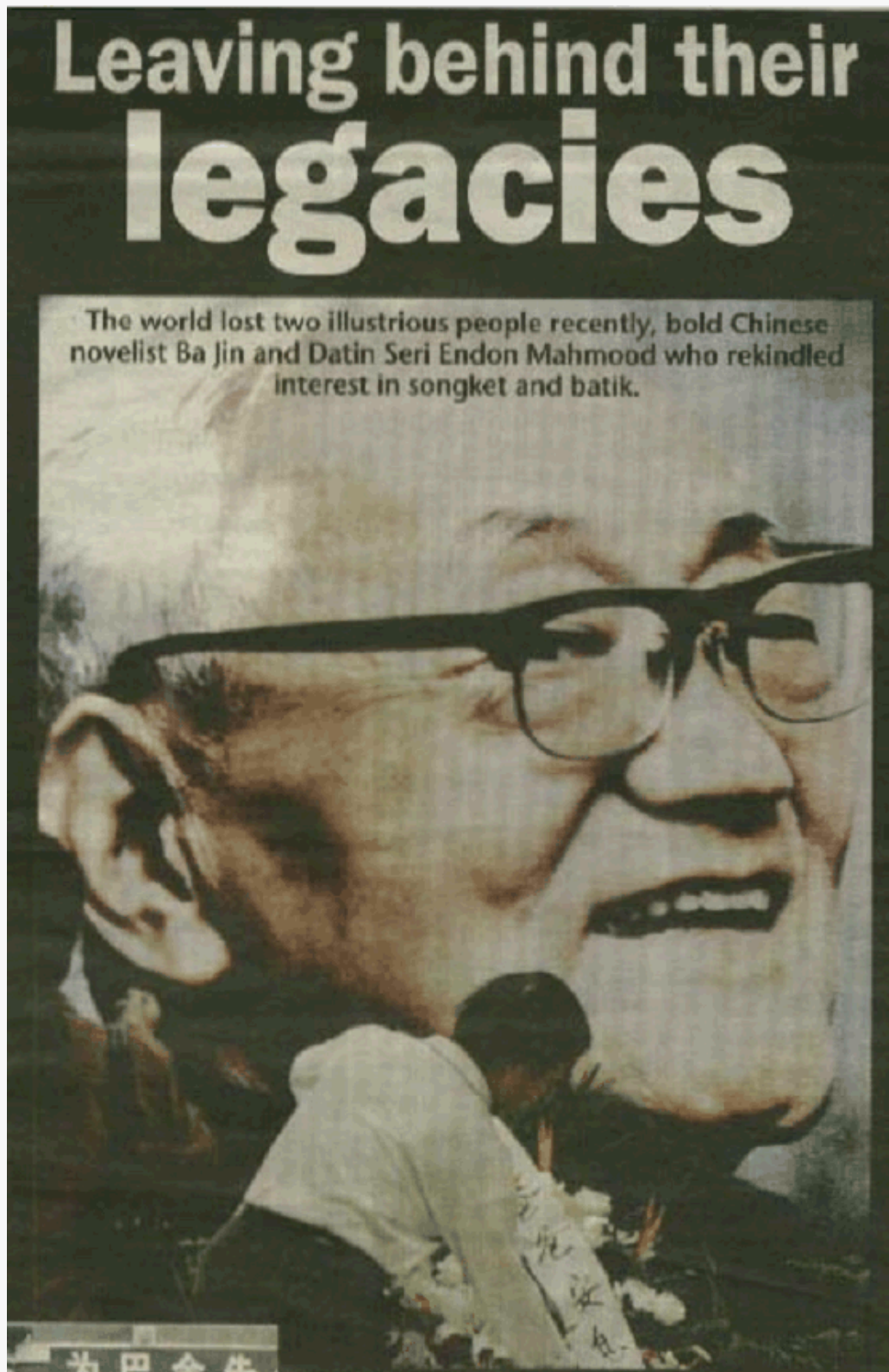


Leaving behind their legacies

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Article

New Sunday Times - 10/30/2005



TWO very well-loved personalities passed away last week, one abroad and the other at home.

Internationally, the world mourned the death of one of the past century's literary greats, Ba Jin, at the age of 101.

Also known as Pa Chin, he is one of the most widely read Chinese writers of the 20th century.

Arguably his novel, *Family*, has become required reading in many university courses throughout the world on the history of China and East Asia.

It is one of three novels regarded as bestsellers. The other two are *The Spring* and *The Autumn*.

The novels generally draw on the struggles and tragedies, hate and love of the young generation in a saga of familial decline.

Over time, Ba Jin's influence extended beyond the world of literature, and he is recognised not only as a writer but also a reformist and a thinker among his peers.

During the political and cultural movement against imperialism and feudalism in Beijing in 1919, notably "The May Fourth Movement", Ba Jin reportedly was filled with democratic idealism.

Writers then were allowed to create a literature of new values and consciousness among the Chinese.

But later he lamented that "The May Fourth Movement" had lost its tradition and momentum, especially towards the end of the previous century.

Though his stance has somewhat helped Chinese literature recover some of the May Fourth tradition, his passing away is said to have left a vacuum because Ba Jin had no strong disciple to inherit his rare writing style, according to a Peking university professor.

Hence, to the present younger generation of Chinese, Ba Jin is no more than a name and his demise could mean the end of his literary style which is regarded as very unique in modern Chinese literature.

In short, he will leave a legacy of a bygone age, irreplaceable in Chinese literary history.



PASSING OF A GREAT WRITER: These two women were overcome by grief at Ba Jin's funeral in Shanghai on Oct 24.

Ba Jin, whose given name was Li Yaotang or Li Feigan, was probably the last of all the major writers active in the first half of the previous century.

In the past six years, he had lost the ability to speak and walk due to Parkinson's disease and complications of the lungs. He died of cancer at a hospital in Shanghai.

His work, however, will live on as a reminder of his great stature and contribution.

On one occasion he wrote: "Loving truth and living honestly is my attitude to life. Be true to yourself and be true to others, and thus you can be the judge of your behaviour."

Such is the courage of a truly intellectual giant whose ability and passion was always to be true to himself and to others.

In this way, he believed that one could find the happiness of life, which has been concealed from too many of us.

As China lost an irreplaceable son, Malaysia mourned the loss of an irreplaceable daughter whose dedication and commitment to heritage art and high culture are beyond words.

The much loved Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, the wife and life companion of the Prime Minister for four decades, has left an impact on Malaysia and among the international community of art lovers.

Her tireless efforts to promote and brand Malaysian heritage and culture will leave a rich and unforgettable imprint on the minds of many, just like that of Malaysian batik.

The Seri Endon Trophy, for example, is specially created to further motivate batik designers in reaching new heights. Indeed, batik design has now surpassed the confines of textiles and garments.

There are now carpets that have taken up the batik designs. This is besides the many gifts and decorations that are truly Malaysian in essence.

In early December 2003, Endon launched the "Batik Extravaganza", marking the beginning of her active role to bring dignity to local fabric art and heritage.

Rightly, therefore, on the occasion of the Kuala Lumpur International Batik Convention 2005 planned for Dec 8, themed "The Business of Batik", Endon should be appropriately acknowledged as the person who took batik beyond the shores of Malaysia.

In addition, Endon's contribution to the development of the majestic Malaysian *songket* will also be remembered.

This is a new frontier that the world is just beginning to appreciate in a big way, thanks to her effort to revive yet another slumping cottage industry.

Endon, it is said, mooted the idea for *songket* to be worn at official functions, just like she had successfully done for the *baju kebaya*.

The *nyonya kebaya*, as it is better known today, represents the creativity of the *Peranakan* womenfolk of Malaysia.

In the *kebaya*, Endon's elegance and charm will remain neatly embroidered in every stitch.

She gave the *nyonya kebaya* prominence in a book of the same name in 2002. Early this year, it was reprinted under a different title, *A Century of Straits Chinese Costumes*.

Indeed, the *kebaya* is now featured as a hand-painted porcelain collection made of fine bone china with motifs from the actual *kebaya*s in her collection.

Each makes an excellent gift item and represents a significant legacy of Endon in a bid to carve a niche in the world of haute couture.

Indeed, all these epitomise the courageous and creative attempts Endon took to create new markets for hundreds of small rural producers.

She resurrected the long forgotten, if not dying, cultural heritage of the country. This is our proud tradition and national identity Endon's role was in returning it to its rightful place as the pride of the nation.

Indeed, her labour of love in traditional textiles and designs has led to Malaysia's first national textile museum which is scheduled to open next year.

The museum will be a reference and study centre on local fabrics, an institution that deservingly will be named after Endon herself.

Sadly, Endon, 64, passed away on Oct 20 in the blessed month of Ramadan.

For four year she had braved silently a debilitating cancer without drawing attention to herself. In so doing, she became a model to many cancer sufferers.

In the course of battling for her life, she demonstrated strong support for traditional and complementary medicine.

Endon's absence will be dearly missed by all. May Allah bless her soul and place it among the loved and obedient.

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