

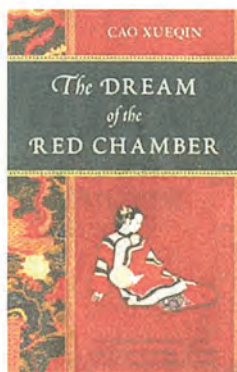


MY BOOK OF LIFE

Amid the current debate on English literature's relevance and declining popularity in schools, SundayLife! talks to 12 people about the books that changed their lives.

Jennani Durai





Look & listen

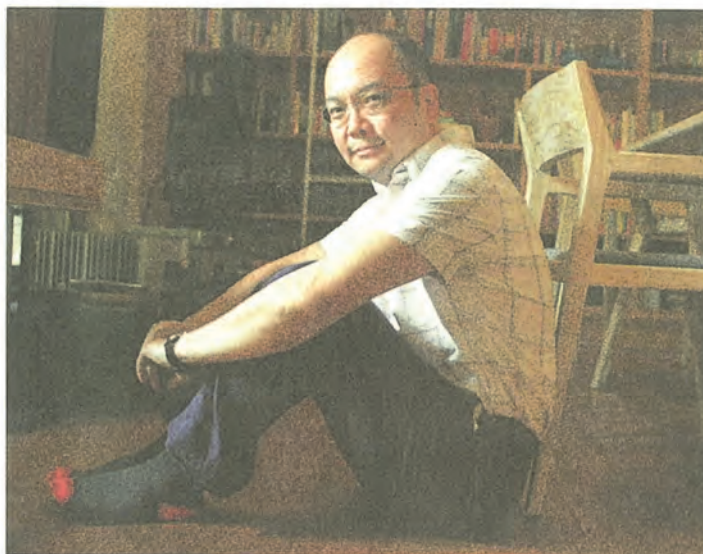


PHOTO: ST FILE

"It has taught me to relate to others by observing and listening."

TAN KAY NGEЕ, 56

Architect

Book: The Dream Of The Red Chamber by Cao Xue Qin

Synopsis: This Chinese literary classic tells the story of ill-fated lovers and first cousins Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu against the backdrop of the family's declining fortunes.

"I first read it during my A levels, but came to appreciate it on another level when I was in London during the 1980s, when I was given a rare edition of it with footnotes and comments added by my friend.

The novel has over 100 characters, with around 20 to 30 main characters. The amazing part of it is how

the writer manages to describe all the personalities in impeccable detail.

The book is amazing. It touches on not only the customs, the habits, the entertainment and funeral rites during that early 18th-century Qing Dynasty period of China, but it also describes elaborately the banquets, the landscaping as well as the internal and external spaces – the splendour of architecture.

If I had to single out one way, among the many, that it has changed me – it must be how it has taught me to relate to others by observing and listening.

I studied O-level Chinese literature, and then A-level Chinese and English literature.

Even then, in the 1970s, most people thought that I was nuts. So I do not believe that it is an exclusively modern phenomenon that young people would neglect literature."