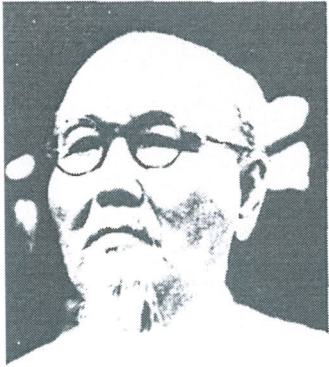


COLLECTORS COLUMN

on Tin mining in Malaysia - Selanger Pewter
by Song Peng-Khuon



Yong Koon 1868-1959,
founder of Selanger Pewter

INDICRAFTS made in the coun- where one lives or which one is ting make good purchases, and in laysia, the world's leading pro- per of tin concentrate, the best gain is pewterware, produced dly for both the foreign and restic markets. There are several panies making pewterware, each r its own distinctive designs. l they all use Malaysian refined combined with lead or other als to form the alloy which we pewter. See an earlier illustrated ele on pewter by Diane S. ichan in ARTS OF ASIA, May/June 5, pages 13-16).

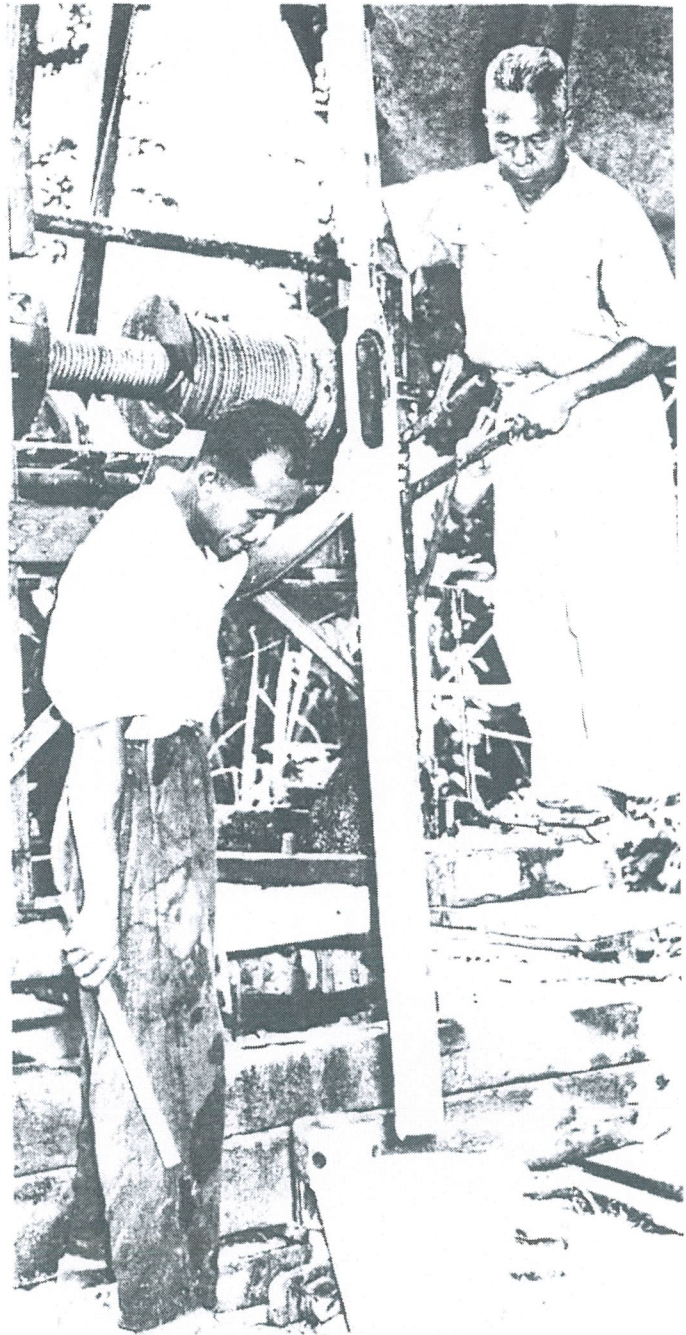
Pewter making was brought to insular Malaysia by Chinese migrants who came in the nine- th century to prospect and mine alluvial minerals found in abun- ce in the states of Perak and ngor. Their skill and enterprise bled them to make useful house- l utensils from crude tin ore to ch other metals were added to

render the resultant alloy more ductile. From these humble begin- nings the art of pewtering has developed into an industry which complements Malaysia's important tin mining business, and pewter goods are produced and sold in several important towns and cities of Malaysia.

In the past, the spinning method was used in pewter making, mainly because it was easier and less expensive. After tin metal concentrates had been smelted down by intense heat, large sheets of crudely refined tin were produced. Once these had cooled completely, in specially made wooden moulds, they were sold to waiting pewterers who used these tin sheets, which contained impurities and elements of other metals, for making their pewterware. They pressed and shaped the sheets into cylindrical containers fitted with bottoms of varying sizes, and into cups, vases, and other items. These, however, were all rather weak and unimpressive because of the use of the spinning method—but the early pewter makers failed to realise this.

Nowadays the tin with which they work is almost 100 percent pure. The use of Straits refined tin ingots, weighing 100 lbs each and smelted by two of the world's largest tin smelters, Datuk Keramat Smelting in Penang, and Straits Trading in Butterworth, has made it possible to produce outstanding examples of pewterware.

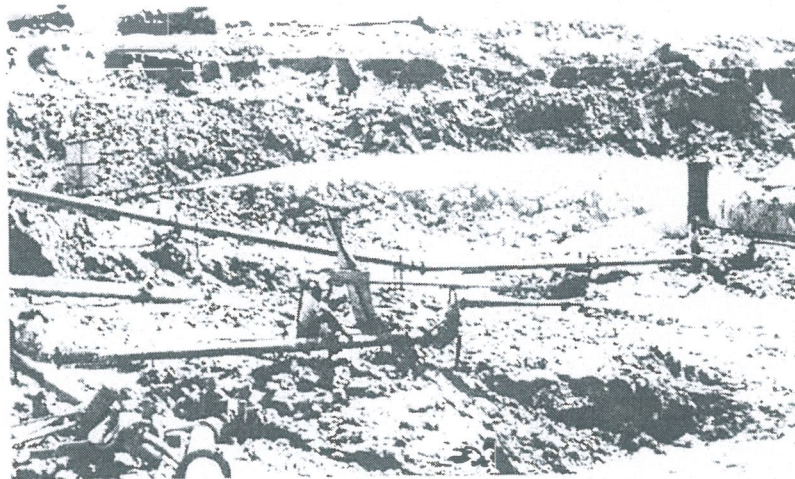
The casting method is another technique which has resulted in the improvement of the manufacture of pewter. A large factory such as



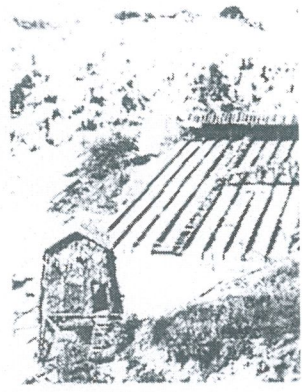
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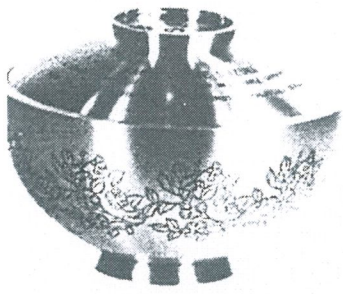
Site of mining activities



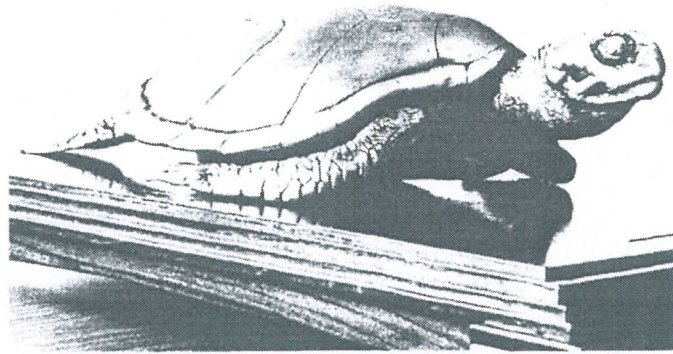
Hydraulic pump shooting water at alluvial soil in search of tin ore



Platform to catch heavy depo



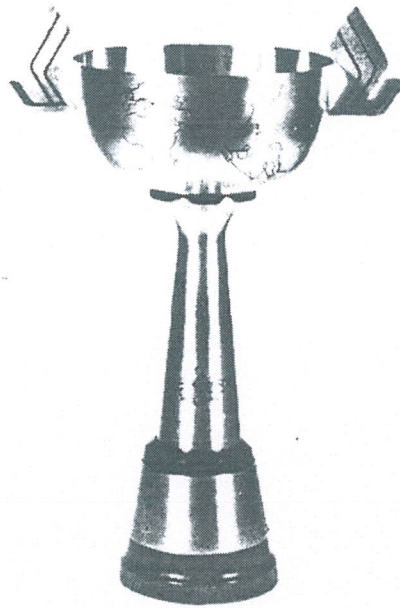
A commemorative pewter howl



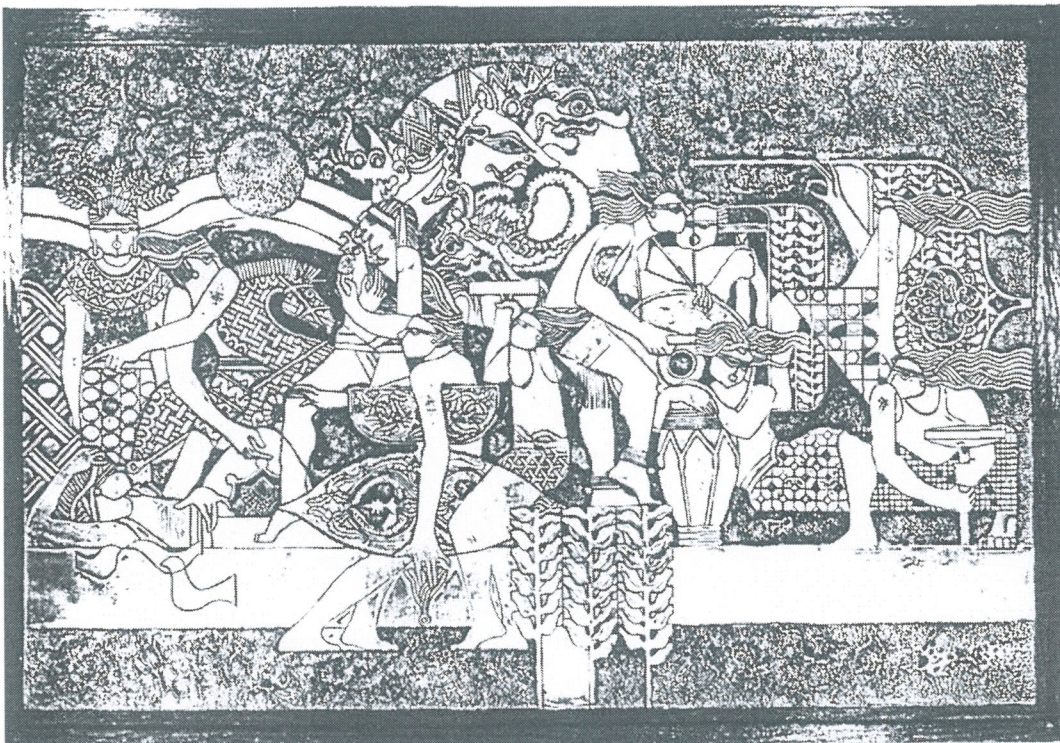
Giant pewter turtle (length 23 inches) made for Pantai Motel



Pewter medallions created for Ninth Southeast Asian Games



Singapore Airlines trophy



Mural showing Malaysia's various cultural activities. Figures are tooled on to the pewter, with embossed effect

Selangor Pewter buys several tons of refined tin ingots at a time from Straits Trading, and then melts down each 100-lb ingot in order to cast its pewter alloy. Hardening agents such as antimony and copper are added to the alloy while lead is removed (Selangor only produces lead-free wares, which are consequently very safe for domestic use) and the cast tin alloy is then poured into different types of moulds, making the various items. Because the pewter objects produced by this method have not been made from spun or pressed tin sheets, they withstand stress better: the tin retains its molecular structure, which it does not do when spun on a spinning machine.

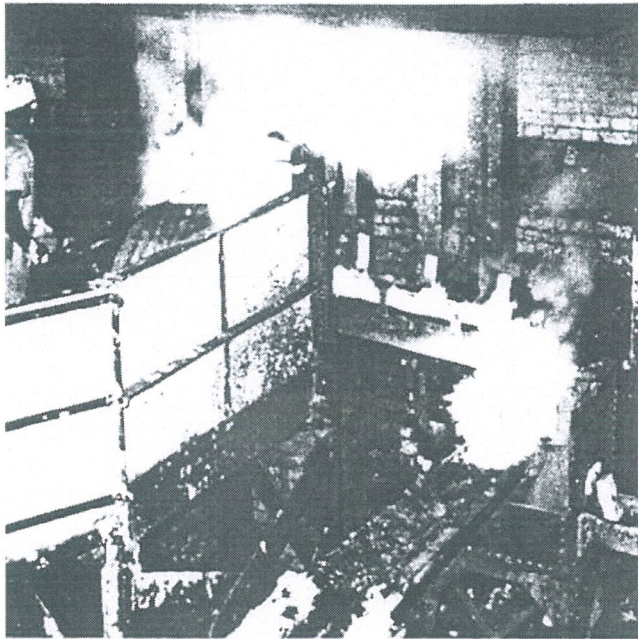
After the tops of pewter bowls have been fitted with lids and beer mugs with bottoms, they are first machine polished and then polished by hand, to bring out their lustre. Next, handles are soldered on to jugs and stands are attached to goblets, with great skill to make sure that there is no visible joint. Every item made is carefully examined by an inspection team trained to notice weakly soldered joints and other faults, and a pewter object that does not meet high standards will be rejected.

Selangor Pewter, which has a factory near Kuala Lumpur, a smaller factory in Singapore, warehouses and offices in Melbourne, Zurich and Los Angeles as well as retail outlets all over the world, was founded in 1885 by a young man from Swatow named Yong Ke (1868-1959). In the 1930s it was still a small business, and Yong Ke would make his pewter utensils while his customers waited: he conducted his business from door to door, always carrying the tools of his trade with him. Today his grandchildren are managing the fast-growing family business which is now probably the largest private pewter-making company in the world.

In addition to a wide range of functional items, the company is sometimes commissioned to produce special objects to commemorate an occasion (the covered bowl), individual ornaments (the turtle created for the Pantai Motel), or a mural. In 1978 pewter medallions were designed and made for the winners of the Ninth Southeast Asian Games held in Kuala Lumpur. The medals were inset with gold, silver and bronze, for the first, second and third position prizes.



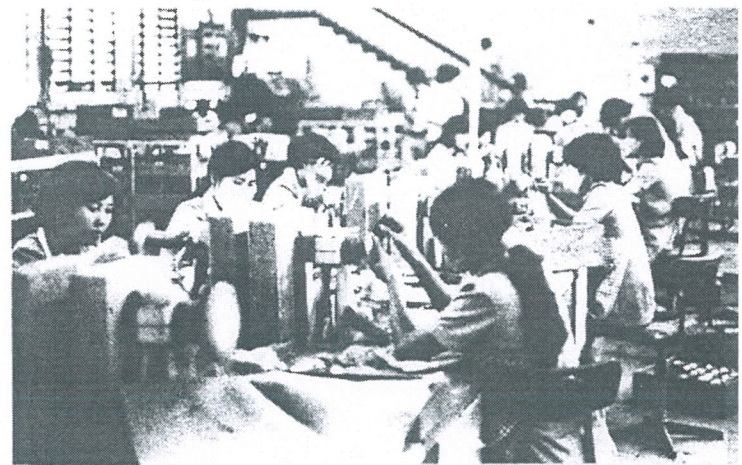
ft. mechanical drilling unit prospecting earth samples for tin
 ove, bagging cassiterite concentrate ready to go to the smelter
 low, metal which is being smelted runs out in a molten stream



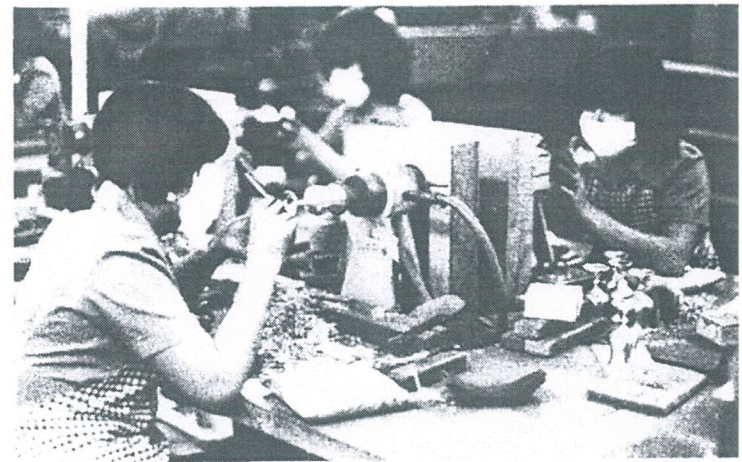
Engraving design on plate



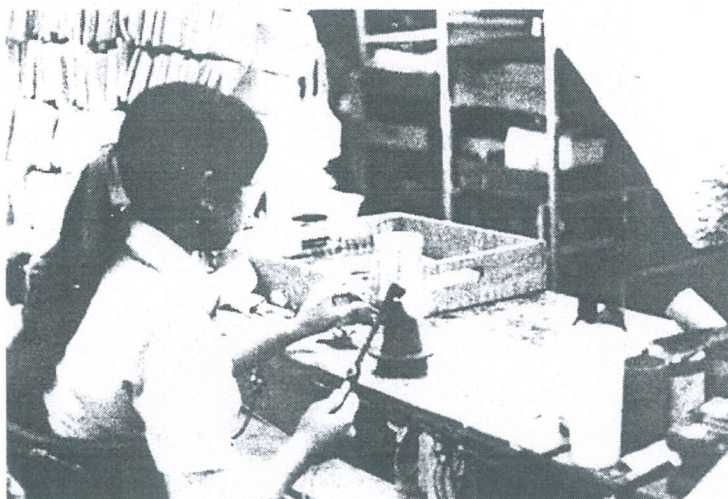
Making carton boxes



Next stage is polishing by hand, in this division of the factory



These girls are machine polishing pewter goblets - the first stage



Soldering section of the Selangor Pewter Factory at Kuala Lumpur



Fitting on candlestands made in sections and cast separately

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