

COMPANY PROFILE



Kohwai & Young®

Brings you
a world of words
and colours to
brighten young minds



- Creator
- Copyright Holder
- Content Developer
- Publisher
- Packager
- Distributor



Serving Clients in more than 30 Countries Worldwide

As a children's publishing house with clients around the world, Kohwai & Young places great emphasis on ensuring that its products meet international standards of excellence, with content that has universal appeal.

Throughout the years, our wide and varied range of products has been well received in the international marketplace. Our publications have been translated into more than 24 languages, and exported to over 30 countries.

- Bangla
- Brazilian
- Bulgarian
- Chinese
- Croatian
- Czech
- French
- Hungarian
- Irish
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- Japanese
- Korean
- Maltese
- Mexican
- Norwegian
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Romanian
- Russian
- Serbian
- Spanish
- Slovak
- Thai
- Turkish





SEOUL BOOK FAIR



Our One-Stop Publishing And Packaging Operation

We are a publisher and packager of children's books for both the mass-market, preschool and educational market. Our publications include picture books, readers, textbooks, workbooks, atlases, teaching aids, multimedia products to educational programmes. As the creative originator and content developer of new products, we are the copyright holder of all our publications.

Together with our associates, we have built a one-stop, full-fledged children's publishing and packaging operation, with production and printing services for both domestic and international markets.

IMPRINTS:

Kohwai & Young®



A member of:

- MABOPA (Malaysian Book Publishers Association)
- MIPA (Malaysian Intellectual Property Association)
- MATRADE (Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation)
- SENIMAN (Malaysian Artists Association)
- SMI Association of Malaysia
- MBBY (Malaysian Board on Books for Young People)
- MOF (Ministry of Finance Malaysia - Registered Contractor)
- FINAS (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia - Licence Holder)
- MBEIA (Malaysian Book Exporters & Importers Association)



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NAMI ISLAND, SOUTH KOREA



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BOLOGNA BOOK FAIR



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HONG KONG



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KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA



EARL'S COURT, ENGLAND



PICADILLY CIRCUS, ENGLAND



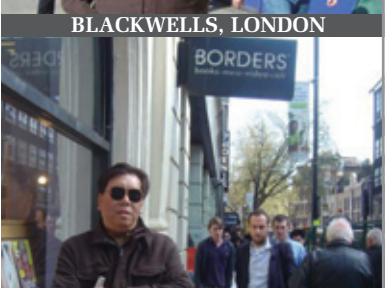
AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



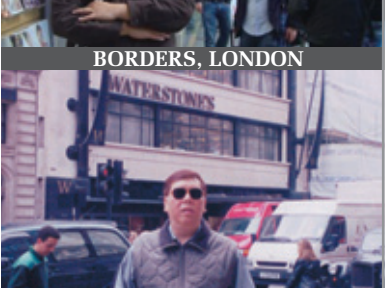
LUCERN, SWITZERLAND



BLACKWELLS, LONDON



BORDERS, LONDON



WATERSTONES, LONDON



4

FOYLES, LONDON



BOOK ETC, LONDON



SLOVENIA



TAIPING ZOO, MALAYSIA

President's Message

Since our founding nearly 30 years ago in 1992, we have specialized in children's books that are bursting with vibrant, colourful photographs and illustrations. Our philosophy has always been that the most successful children's books are those that appeal first to the child's eye and then to their mind.

For the earliest preschoolers who are just beginning to learn their alphabet, phonics, colours, numbers, shapes and sizes, our books have a tremendous visual appeal. This promotes a love of books, a love of reading, and a desire to progress in their education. Brightly illustrated books lead to bright minds. When we nurture a love of books and reading, we instill in every child a healthy curiosity to understand and succeed in the world. Our international partners that have published our books in over twenty languages seem to share this view.

Since our range of publications was first exhibited at the Frankfurt International Book Fair in 1994, and at the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 1995, we have been participating actively in numerous fairs. As well, the different cultures we have experienced and friends we met in our travels all over the world are a source of inspiration to produce books that appeal and attract young readers.

With our creative innovations and commitment to service, we are focused on making a greater impact in the industry. Our dynamic and dedicated marketing team handles key accounts in the school, library and retail markets, and we are happy for the opportunity to formulate a profitable strategy that will work for you. We look forward to a successful alliance with you!

Warmest regards,

Kohwai Tam
President



KINDERDIJK, NETHERLANDS



DOMINION THEATRE, LONDON



PARIS, FRANCE



BEIJING, CHINA



BOLOGNA, ITALY



HONG KONG



ATHENS, GREECE



LIAONING, CHINA



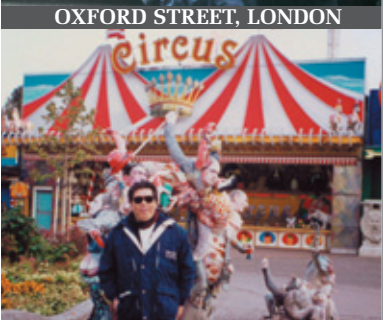
VENICE, ITALY



MARBLE ARCH, LONDON



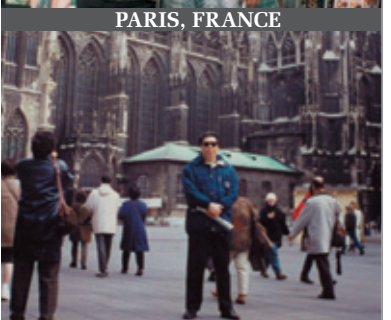
OXFORD STREET, LONDON



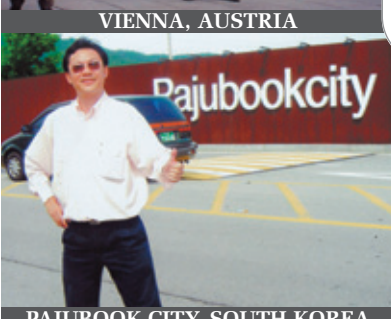
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PAJUBOOK CITY, SOUTH KOREA



BOLOGNA, ITALY



MOSCOW, RUSSIA



SHANGHAI, CHINA

Directors

Mr. Kohwai Tam, the founder and president of Kohwai & Young Publications, has more than 30 years of experience in the fields of marketing, advertising and publishing. Although visually-impaired from an automobile accident, Kohwai is still very actively involved in the running of the company. With books having colourful, high quality illustrations as well as engaging texts, Kohwai hopes that his publishing projects will bring joy and 'colours' to the minds of less fortunate children of the world.



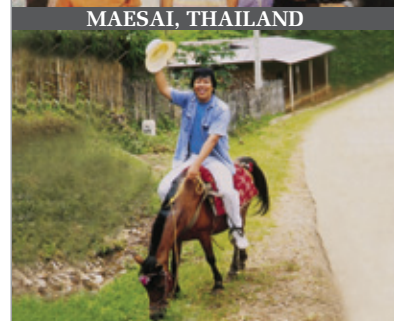
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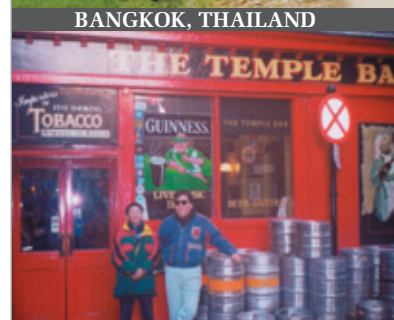
FRANKFURT, GERMANY



MAESAI, THAILAND



BANGKOK, THAILAND



DUBLIN, IRELAND

Mr. Young Poh Loon, co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Kohwai & Young Publications, has more than 18 years of experience in the creative and production sectors in the advertising industry. A graduate in Communication Arts, he has worked at international advertising agencies such as Ted Bates Malaysia and AP Foote Cone & Belding. Mr. Young brings considerable international expertise in photography, video production and digital audio-visual technique to his position at Kohwai & Young Publications.



E-mail: young@kohwaiyoung.com

Our Creative Team Of Writers

Robert (Bob) Williams is a professional writer, book editor and educational consultant with over sixteen years of experience in children's and young adult book publishing. He holds a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Canada's prestigious McGill University in Montreal, where he lives with his wife and two children.



Ernest Lindstrom is a well-established Canadian writer of literature, non-fiction, poetry, children's literature and educational texts. He holds master's degrees in both English Literature and Library and Information Sciences from two of Canada's finest colleges, the University of Toronto and Université de Montréal. Mr. Lindstrom lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario, with his wife and two children.

Rosemary (Rose) Wilson is a professional ESL (English as second language) teacher and educationist based in Montreal, Canada. She has also enjoyed a long career as a publisher, writer and editor-in-chief of a highly respected publishing company that has produced critically-acclaimed works of children's and young adult literature. Ms. Wilson grew up in the American Midwest and completed her education in both Communication Arts and TESL at Loyola University in Montreal.



Maxine Slater holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism from City University (London, U.K.) and Concordia University (Montreal, Canada). Ms. Slater is a well-established children's writer-editor in both educational and trade book publishing. As well, she has a professional background as a marketing consultant for several arts and educational organizations. Ms. Slater lives in Montreal with her husband and son.

Lynn Mott is a professional writer and editor with over 14 years of experience. Her specializations are in children's educational publications and in technical documentation for the high-technology industries. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from Carleton University, in Ottawa, Canada. She currently lives with her husband and son in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

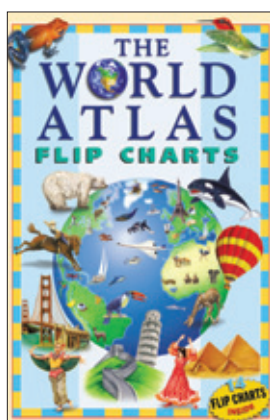


Kate Gladden is a professional writer with a wide range of experience, as the author of novels, short stories, educational plays and several children's books. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of Washington in Seattle, U.S.A. She now lives in Oregon with her husband, two dogs and two cats.

Jessie Kodish has been an educator of young children for more than 15 years. She is a graduate from the U.S.A. with a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Science in Child Psychology and Diploma in Montessori Education. She is the Director of Alpha-Kidz International Preschool and Kindergarten, U.S.A. for children aged 3 to 6. She has conducted Teacher's Montessori Training and Phonics Workshops, and is also a published children's book writer.



International Best Seller

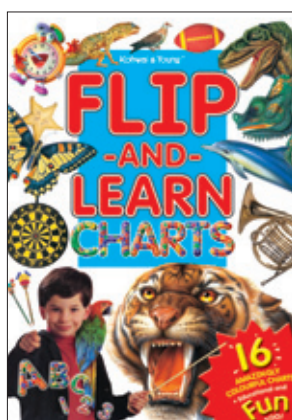


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FLIP CHARTS
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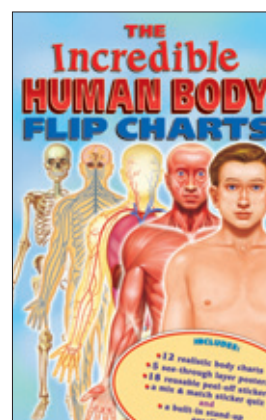
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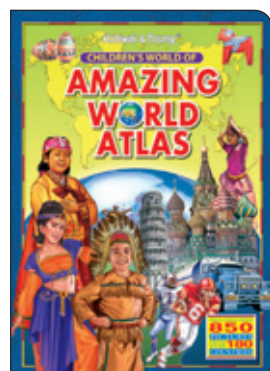
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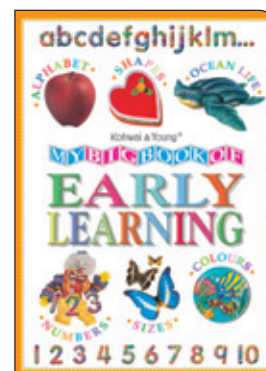
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- Russian ● Mexican

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BIG BOOK
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Dato' Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Binti Wan Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister was at Taska Parliament Story Telling session. Our Big Book "Singa dengan Tikus" was used in this session, February 2020.



Mr. Young receiving the Mabopa 25th year membership award from YB Tuan Haji Khalid B. Abd Samad, Federal Territory Minister. April 2019.



Mr. Kohwai was interviewed live on BFM 98.9 "Open for Business with Freda Liu" where he talked about the business model, the history & objectives of Kohwai & Young as well as the challenges in the local & international fronts. September 2011





Awards

Kohwai & Young receiving the 'Best Illustrator 1994' award presented by Y.A.B. Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.



Kohwai & Young receiving the 'Best Book Making 2005' award presented by Y.A.B. Tan Sri Haji Mohd. Isa bin Dato' Haji Abdul Samad, Federal Territory Minister of Malaysia.



Kohwai & Young receiving the 'Best Illustrator for Buku Bitara MBBY 2006' award presented by the Y. Bhg. Tan Sri Abdul Rafie bin Mahat with Datin Paduka Hj Shahanee Hanoum.



Kohwai & Young received the Certificate of "2008 IBBY Honour List" for the Illustration Award (from the International Board on Books for Young People at Copenhagen, Denmark).





With DYMM Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, the Sultan of Selangor



With Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the 4th and 7th Prime Minister



With YAB Marina Mahathir



Kohwai & Young receiving the 'APECP Excellent Child Contributor Award' for the Children's Publications Award Category, presented by DYTU Tuanku Hajjah Lailatul Shahreen Akashah Khalil, Raja Puan Muda Perlis.



With Datuk Mohamad Nor Khalid (Lat)



With YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Haj, Malaysia's 1st Prime Minister



"2021 IBBY Malaysia Honour List" award for 'My Big, Big World'. Mr. Young receiving "2021 IBBY Malaysia Honour List" award for 'My Big, Big World' from Dato' Ahmad Redza Bin Ahmad Khairuddin, President IBBY Malaysia.



With Tan Sri Kamaruzaman Shari, Datuk Bandar Kuala Lumpur



With Dato' Dr. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, Malaysia's first astronaut



With Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister



With Dato' Dr. Haji Ahamad bin Sipon, Director-General, MOE



With YAB Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Samsuddin, Deputy Education Minister



With YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Hj Abdul Razak, the 6th Prime Minister

Colours in my mind



Tam is not the regular sort of art editor; he is clinically blind. But he has worked around his disability.

By LIM YIN FOONG

ART editor Kohwai Tam scans the work of his artist part by part, his face barely an inch away from the artwork.

It's an editor's job to keep an eye on the artwork, but not that close, of course.

Tam is not the regular sort of art editor; he is clinically blind.

When he lifts his head from the artwork and focuses his gaze on you, it is hard to imagine that all he sees are vague shapes and movements.

A road accident in 1980 left him with a condition known as retina detachment.

Fruitless eye surgeries have left him with only four per cent visibility in his left eye, known as "tunnel vision." His right eye is blind.

To many, this would be an obstacle for the job which the 39-year-old art editor carries out. His responsibilities include choosing book titles, formulating story-lines and concepts, editing pictures, doing extensive reading for research, and overseeing book printing and production — a job which requires a lot of eye work.

Tam, however, has managed to manoeuvre around his disability by working out a system with his partner — managing director and art director P.L. Young — and his team of artists at Adlaunch which publishes children's books.

"I visualise a concept in mind; I have trained my mind to work like a PageMaker layout screen. Most times, I rely on my memory bank of images to come up with a new concept," he explains.

Which is why it is not uncommon to catch him leaning back on his chair with his eyes closed. Far from sleeping, he's working out graphics in his mind.

Conveying the concept to the rest of his team is tougher. Tam and Young, however, have worked together long enough to understand each other's ideas.

Tam explains the concept to Young, who sketches it and they discuss the colours. As Tam is unable to see colours except

● SEE NEXT PAGE

THE
Star

SECTION

FRIDAY
May 13 1994
Edited by:
GILBERT YAP

THE STAR FRIDAY May 13 1994

PROFILE

SECTION 2 / 3

Fighting Tam beats all odds

● FROM PAGE ONE

for the bright primary ones, they communicate through technical measurements.

The sketches and selected colours are then passed on to the artists who will come up with the finished artwork. This is then inspected by Tam, who will scan the work part by part to form the whole picture in his mind.

With his tunnel vision, Tam is only able to see certain typefaces and bright primary colours and even that, only at very close range.

"This works to my advantage as I can weed out the dull colours which do not attract children," he explains.

Adlaunch, formed by Tam and Young in 1987, only began publishing children's books in 1991.

Tam had been in hospital recovering from an eye operation when he heard a radio news report about the need for a larger population for economic growth. This meant more children in the country.

While looking through his son's ABC book, the idea of publishing children's books occurred to him.

"I felt that I could at least handle children's books with its big prints and bright colours!"

Tam convinced Young of the idea, and both did research and took up storytelling courses at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Tam, who has 19 years of experience in the advertising industry and Young, 11, decided to incorporate advertising techniques into children's books.

Thus, the Gururimau series of children's activity books was born, and to date, the company has produced 129 titles.

Both partners plan to attend the Frankfurt International Book Fair in October where they hope to make an impact with their publications.

"After all, we are selling First World books at Third World prices."

Tam and Young also hope to use Adlaunch to help the blind community. They have recruited several visually-impaired people who can be trained to do certain types of work in the company.

Tam, who recently studied Braille, hopes to come up with children's activity books in Braille.

His goal for Adlaunch is to turn it into Malaysia's number one children's book publishing company in two years. The company is now number three.

Tam feels that since his accident, he has adapted very well and tries to lead a normal life. He goes horse-riding and frequents discos.

After the accident, he attended a rehabilitation course, learning to move around with a cane. This was to equip him to travel. For the next three months, he will be visiting kindergartens nationwide with his sales manager to promote the Gururimau books.

It is Tam's indomitable spirit and strong will which motivates him and the people he works with.

Says Young: "Tam is a fighter, and refuses to accept the fact that he is blind."

Adds Tam: "Anything is possible, but the most possible is the will power to do what you want to do."

"After all, you are in this world for only 60 to 80 years. You should try to achieve the highest level of anything you do while you can."



“Anything is possible, but the most possible is the will power to do what you want to do. After all, you are in this world for only 60 to 80 years. You should try to achieve the highest level of anything you do while you can.”

— Kohwai Tam

Tele Kitchen
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THE LEADER

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1993

No: 9

PP 6208/1093

DISTRIBUTION: 170,000 COPIES

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PAGE 17
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PAGE 23

EVERLY BROTHERS come marching home

Against all the odds...



Story: Mary Anne Tan
Picture: Patrick Ho

Kohwai Tam may be 38, but he only reads children's books.

Unlike most men his age who prefer best-selling novels, Kohwai's collection of books are in the larger print.

They also consist of big colourful pictures, the kind favoured by children.

His preference is not because he is child-like or an illiterate.

Kohwai is visually impaired. He has only four per cent vision in his left eye and suffers from tunnel vision, as a result of a motorcycle accident in 1980.

What little sight he has is gradually disappearing and large prints are about the only thing he can see.

Kohwai, however, is different from other visually-impaired people.

While most master various handicrafts like weaving, he chose to work in the strenuous publishing field.

He is probably the only visually-impaired publisher of children's books in this country. Kohwai believes that his failing eyesight makes him more aware of the nuances of colours, designs and typefaces.

"My limited vision makes it easier for me to spot weaknesses in the books we publish."

"For instance, dull colours don't register at all so my books are always brightly coloured."

"I chose to publish children's books because I feel that children are our means of..."

*TURN TO PAGE 8

Malaysia is poised to become the education hub of Asia with the expedition of a move by the University of London to set up an off-shore college here.

Such a college will be the first on local soil and will effectively open the floodgates for other foreign universities to do likewise. It will also be the first constituent college of the university to be based in Asia.

Not only will this reduce the large number of local students attending universities overseas, but it is

does not allow foreign education institutions to set up off-shore campuses or colleges in the country.

The 'University of London' project was given a boost recently when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his British counterpart John Major discussed the topic during the latter's visit here.

Senior officials from the British High Commission and British

Council confirmed the progress of the project and were largely optimistic of its eventual realisation.

They said the university, the largest in Britain, has initial plans to set up a constituent college in Malaysia with a limited range of courses.

This, they added, will then be gradually augmented with additional courses. The federal University of London is widely recognised as

KohWai's prepared for the inevitable

● FROM PAGE ONE

achieving Vision 2020. "I wanted children to enjoy seeing what I used to see, to capture the brilliant colours of the environment around them and to make them proud of their Malaysian heritage."

"My partner believed in my vision and today, we have published 45 titles under the

Gururimau logo for children under 12.

"Our pre-school books come in English and Bahasa Malaysia. Both versions have hit the local and international market."

"We are also coming up with beautifully illustrated books on popular Malaysian folk tales so that the children here and abroad

can become acquainted with Malaysian folklore," he said.

The Gururimau books, he says, are unique because they contain photographs instead of illustrations as teaching aids.

Kohwai, knows that his days of preparing the storyline, concept and sketches for his company Adlaunch

(Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, are slowly running out even as his tunnel vision gets dimmer and dimmer.

But he is preparing himself for that inevitable moment. He is studying braille and hopes to someday develop a more improved variety of reading and writing materials for the blind... especially the children.



A winning combination

Kohwai Tam and P. L. Young have a life history as colourful as the Gururimau children's books they publish. Like any good story, it has a moral to it and in their case, it's a lesson in friendship and loyalty, as Nor Azlina Ismail finds out.

THE ONLY THING THESE TWO publishers have in common, apart from being the same gender, is the fact that they are parents. Otherwise they are as unlike as day and night.

For one thing, visually impaired Kohwai Tam is rough and bearlike with a booming voice laced with wicked humour that threatens to crack your sides every time he takes a poke at your funny bone.

His antithesis P.L. Young on the other hand, is a smaller-built cool cat who looks ultra-smart with a tie but is equally amusing with his own blend of jokes.

Both are thirtysomething, "but still very young at heart," insists Tam, accompanied by a burst of guffaws from Young who kindly reminded him of his crow's feet.

"That's the beauty about working with children," adds Tam, creative director of the Gururimau early childhood learning series. "Their energy and youthful outlook on life tends to rub off on you, which comes in pretty useful in planning for future materials for them."

Coupled with their varied backgrounds and technical know-how in advertising, the result is a comprehensive range of quality preschool, photographic and illustrated picture books including wall charts, reading and activity books.

Their venture into publishing was not quite by design since they were trained in advertising.

"I was in and out of the hospital all the time then when I began losing my sight as a result of a road accident and cataract problem.

"One day, my seven-year-old daughter who visited me pressed her alphabet book very close to my face for me to see her handiwork. I was surprised to see how unattractive the book was," says Tam.

Incidentally too, his only source of entertainment, the radio, continually stressed on Vision 2020 and the need to fulfil the educational requirements to meet the challenges in the future.

"The two things just clicked somehow, my daughter's book and the country's vision," he adds. So, he embarked on extensive research and

development of children's literature and in 1992, the two partners made their first debut at the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair at Putra World Trade Centre.

"No doubt the impact we made was hardly earth-shattering, but with the few books that we had on display, we were on our way," adds Young.

But like all fairytales that come built in with a happy ending, their once-upon-a-time beginnings are also coloured by misfortune and pitfalls.

Particularly for Tam who learnt a bitter lesson about loyalty when he was forced to leave his employment to get out of an uncompromising situation. His former employer had reservations about his ability due to his deteriorating eye-sight.

But true enough, perseverance paid off and Tam was to find a rarer gift of true friendship in Young, who constantly drummed into him that disability is only in the mind.

Together, they started off a two-man-team called Adlaunch concentrating on account servicing and later went full-steam into publishing children books under the Gururimau series.

"Many a time, I asked him why he stuck with me when he had better prospect elsewhere. But he never listens to his elders, you see," says 39-year-old Tam with a tinge of humour.

"I supposed we were made for each other," reasons Young, father of a one-year-old son.

And moreover, "he adds with sly smile, "I've always been better at drawing than him, although I must admit, he does have some wild ideas."

While Tam conceptualises his ideas for projects, from the exact colours and the size, Young visualises it on paper before passing it over to their artists to be fine-tuned.

Today, Adlaunch has come a long way from its early struggle for existence. With over 200 titles which are periodically upgraded, they strive to provide what they call the "first world books at third world prices".

The books under the Gururimau series for instance, synonymous for their strong primary colours, quality and super realistic photographic effects are sold for as little as RM 1.



Laminated wall charts are also some of their products.

"We believe in high volume turnover and low profit margin to enable more children to enjoy books at reasonable prices," Tam elaborates on their strategy.

As for the international market, the recent Book Fair in Frankfurt where they showcased 53 of their titles which are translated into 5 languages, looks promising, says Young.

And judging from their enthusiasm, their "happily ever after" should not be far off before they open another chapter in "the playhouse of discovery" which they envision for the future.



NEW STRAITS TIMES
BOOKS

譚國輝談成功之路



Colours in my mind

A visually-impaired man's determination to share his dreams and vision that the world is full of colours, hope and joy

Kohwai Tam, the founder and president of Kohwai & Young Publications (M) Sdn Bhd credits the steady growth and successes of his company to his valuable life experiences as well as the friends and colleagues he has met during his travels overseas. A frequent traveller since 1994, Kohwai together with his co-founder and partner, Young Poh Loon, has participated in many major international book fairs. The different cultures Kohwai has been exposed to and the friends he has met have inspired him to publish books with an international appeal.

But Kohwai Tam is not your regular sort of businessman: he is visually-impaired.

A road accident in 1980 resulted in the loss of his left eye, and then gradually his right eye deteriorated, despite several attempts to save the eye with surgery, both locally and abroad. For most, this would be a formidable obstacle to achieving one's goals. Kohwai, however, has managed to manoeuvre around his disability and overcome his limitations.

In the early years of his publishing business, Kohwai had to formulate story-lines and concepts, edit pictures, do extensive reading for research, and oversee book printing and production –

all of which require a lot of eye work. He worked out a system by which he visualized a concept in his mind. He had trained his mind to function like a layout screen of *Pagemaker*.

‘Anything is possible as long as you have the will power to make it happen. After all, you are in this world for only 60 to 80 years. You should try to achieve the highest level of anything you do while you can.’ – Kohwai Tam

Kohwai's venture into publishing was not quite by design. One day in the hospital, his son pestered him to read his kindergarten books. To Kohwai's amazement, he discovered that his left eye had recovered 4 per cent vision and he could read at a 2-inch distance. This inspired him to become a publisher of children's books. The visual distance of two inches saw him through many years until total blindness set in.

Bright colours and large print – the hallmark of all Kohwai & Young publications came about when Kohwai's failing eyesight made him more aware of the nuances of colours,



Working with limited vision until total blindness set in

book designs and typefaces. Since then, his philosophy has always been that the most successful children's books are those that appeal first to the child's eye and then to the mind. His international partners, who have published his books in over 24 languages, seem to share this view.

With more than 30 years of experience in advertising, marketing and publishing, Kohwai has successfully led his company to become one of the market leaders in the children's publishing industry. Today he is still very actively involved in the running of the company that he founded almost 20 years ago.

With creative innovations as well as commitment to service, Kohwai & Young Publications places great emphasis on ensuring that its products meet international standards of excellence, with universal content and appeal.

It is Kohwai's commitment to be constantly searching for talented new writers and illustrators to produce even better books to bring joy, happiness and 'colours' to the minds of children the world over.



Kohwai's first exhibition at the Frankfurt International Book Fair, 1994



As an exhibitor at the London Book Fair in Earl Court



With Young, a regular exhibitor at the Bologna Children's Book Fair since 1995



Kohwai's love for young children motivates him to produce better books



Fulfilling a lifelong dream – scaling the Great Wall of China



Awarded the 2010 APEC Excellent Child Contributor award



Kohwai Tam

The Indomitable Duo by Magali Tardivel-Lacombe

We are featured in Frankfurt Book Fair's blog!

The indomitable duo by Magali Tardivel-Lacombe / 2010

Meeting with Kohwai & Young, founders and directors of the publishing house bearing their name, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

You have heard of Asterix and Obelix, right? Laurel and Hardy? How about Kohwai & Young? Believe me, they also deserve their moment of fame as another indomitable pair!

As soon as we crossed the threshold of their publishing house, before even catching a glimpse of our two subjects, we easily inferred that they were a couple of characters. The receptionist politely informed us that we had to remove our footwear and put on one of the pairs of flip-flops stored in some lockers nearby. By a stroke of luck, Jeremy and I immediately found our exact size. Then we waited in front of a large pool rippling with some lovely fat carps. Kohwai later told us that raising fish is his favourite pastime, so he just had to have some at his office as well!

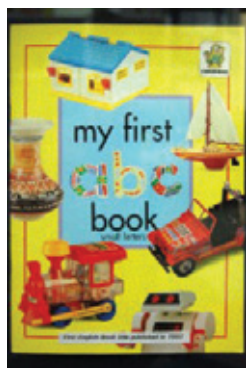
Young was the first one to welcome us, in the company's mini bar. We finally entered the large, brightly-lit meeting room where Kohwai sat like a king at the head of the table.

As his thick, black sunglasses immediately suggested, he is blind. We hardly need specify that the traffic accident which cost him his sight at age 24 changed his life. At the time, he was working in an advertising firm, and he had to leave his job. "Then one day, I had an idea. My children, who were then aged 2 and 3, showed me a terrible black and white alphabet book. I could still just make out the pictures. The book really was awful! Yet, it has been published by the biggest Malaysian publisher. So I thought to myself, if that's the case, I wouldn't mind being the smallest Malaysian publisher. That was how it all began. And deep down inside, I wanted to show my children that they didn't have just a blind father, but an injured father, whose disability didn't keep him from still being competent, and even brilliant!" Young, his colleague and friend from the earliest years, followed him into the adventure — dare we say "with his eyes closed"?



Today, the two sidekicks are over fifty, and have a catalogue of over 400 titles to their name. Their flagship idea is to design illustrated, western-style books at Malaysian prices. On the face of it, that means making the books available to the most underprivileged children. But digging deeper, the goals indeed to eventually reach western markets. The vast majority of books are in English to facilitate exporting and sale of copyright, especially at international book fairs. What's more, the seven authors who work for the publishing house are North American, and all work by correspondence. Not only are several of the titles published by Kohwai & Young an adaptation of the classics of western literature, such as the Fables of La Fontaine, Andersen, Grimm or

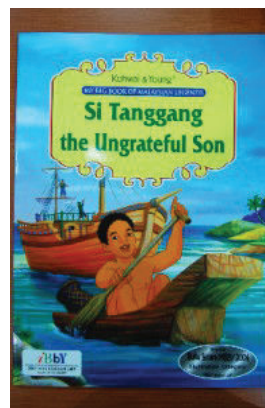
Perrault, but their illustrations are decidedly international. Kohwai states, "I still have 4% of my sight in my left eye, so I can work on the books by almost touching them to my face. I can only see bright colours, so that fits my job perfectly since children love those types of colours, kind of like how women only like cash!" He lets out a hearty laugh.



"You understand," adds Young, "if you want to concentrate on the international market, you must make books that everyone can accept, and which children will spontaneously love. That's why we adopted a semi-realist style, like Walt Disney. Our illustrators are trained in that technique, and that is what constitutes our strong point in comparison with other Asian publishers whose illustrations are left more to chance and avoid realism, for example in how they draw castle architecture." With this method, which they pursue thoroughly by bringing back best-selling books from their travels and using them as references, Kohwai & Young can boast of being one of the leading Asian publishers exporting their children's books to Europe.



Translated into more than 24 languages in over 30 countries, their bestsellers (around 80 titles) have sold over 500,000 copies. First prize would have to go to their large atlas of the world, which has sold over 2 million copies. "This book is a good example of how we work. It costs only 10 ringgits here [about EUR 2.50], but sells for USD20 in the United States, not only because it is printed on better quality paper, but also because its price is adapted to the American market. It's a killer product for us."



Despite these international activities, the two buddies do not forget their own country. In addition to children's books on learning English, they also publish Malaysian legends in English and Malay. Although two books of the local legends series, 'The Princess of Mount Ophir' and 'Si Tanggang The Ungrateful Son' won the 2008 prize for illustration at the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), neither of the two publishers is particularly proud of the fact. "For us," Young states, "if a book wins a prize, that means its popularity will quickly die down. What is rewarded is inventiveness, and originality. That means the book will only attract a small

number of readers, and that we will have to stop printing it only a few months later since, in reality, no one is buying it." The Malay catalogue therefore mainly lists Western classics and educational books, such as the brightly-coloured ABC book we previously mentioned Kohwai dreaming of. "The leading Malaysian publisher kept its market position, but now I am second, just behind them, so I'm happy with that," he chuckles.



Kohwai & Young use all possible and imaginable channels to make their books available throughout Malaysia: bookshops, of course, but also supermarket chains, nurseries and public libraries, and even door-to-door sales which work quite well. The books are also used as a premium by the milk and chocolate companies in their promotional packages.

In the end, even though we get the impression that these two businessmen are not really passionate about literature, I nevertheless ask them my trademark question about which book they would take to a desert island. They burst out laughing, and it is finally Kohwai who answers by saying without batting an eyelid: "On a desert island, I wouldn't have any time to read. I would be too busy looking for Eve!"

Kohwai and Young also have a blog!

