



the

peranakan

ISSUE 4 • 2010



CULTURAL SPLENDOUR

Celebrating 110 Years of The Peranakan Association Singapore

MERRY MELODIES
Straits-born style

When Bibiks
Pulverised Nuts

CURRY
be Devilled

Happily Wed
Many Times Over

BEAU OF THE BALL
Felix Chia

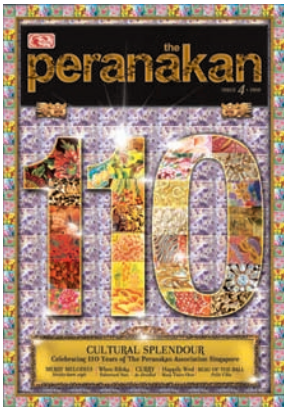
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BURNING BRIGHTER THAN EVER

Nona nona	Young women
Zaman sekarang	Of this generation
Tak boleh di tegoh	Cannot be told what to do
Tak boleh di larang	Cannot be told what not to do



The traditional sarong kebaya has become a hip addition to the wardrobes of many young nyonyas.

So sang my Ah Kong Tongkat (maternal grandfather with the walking stick) as he shuffled out of the house for his daily walk after lunch. That was when I was a little girl in the early 60s, growing up in a rubber plantation off Island Club Road. Ah Kong was always happy to visit us in Singapore to spend a few months with a different set of grandchildren and for a change of scenery from the routine of home in Bukit Baru, Malacca. I would fondly look on as he wandered in the garden singing, his jaunty planter's hat shielding him from the afternoon sun.

Half a century later, this popular Malay ditty remains as relevant as ever. The world may have changed but some things do not. The generation gap has closed for me; I have grown up, searched and now take pride in my Peranakan identity where previously I thought it stuffy and old-fashioned. I can sing the same tune of my 20-something daughter now. Gladly for me, she and her brother are crossing the generational gap and are taking an interest to find their roots.

Encouragingly, more young people of her generation are going along the same path. Acceptance and pride in the culture are growing. While the challenge remains to attract more young members to participate actively in the Association, I think the spirit of the culture burns brighter than ever. In the following pages, a survey of events in recent years points to the fact that the Peranakan culture has forged a stronger impression among our youths than in past decades. And energy. And creativity.

Just look at the young Peranakans who are joining

and giving their all at major events such as the Youth Olympic Games, Formula One and at the first overseas exhibition of Peranakan culture in Paris. We have also uncovered artistic talent: see Christopher Lim's charming illustration of the Penang bibik's favourite pastime of music and song.

Congratulations to Gunong Sayang on their centennial and the success of their latest artistic production, Pagar Makan Padi. At the same time, we mourn the passing of Felix Chia, without whom Peranakan theatre would not be what it is today.

Our website is getting even more savvy; preview the new look that is coming out in the next few months. Previous articles have often generated more and interesting insights and recollections. In recognition, we have happily created a new category called Responses. In this issue, read about the proper way of calling your uncle and aunty in Kinship Convention and how *tauyu* was made in the old days, in *Tauyu Tales*.

Happy 110th anniversary to *The Peranakan Association Singapore*. Our ancestors would be proud of us.

Linda

LETTERS

Every issue of *The Peranakan* covers a wide range of topics and is getting better. The January 2010 issue of *The Peranakan* is really awesome and picturesque. Its editor and team are worthy of praise. Congratulations.

Wilson Tan
Singapore

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In the previous issue the tribute to Bibik Josephine Tan, titled *Remembering Josephine*, inadvertently mentioned Peter Wee as her first son and Joseph, her second. This is incorrect. Joseph Wee is her first son and Peter, her second.

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110 IN 2010

Baba Emeric Lau recalls The Peranakan Association Singapore's (TPAS) last 10 years



“It’s our 110th anniversary – what can we feature?”

“Something about the history of TPAS?”
“We did that for our 100th anniversary – see here: peranakan.sg/magazine/TheWayWeWere (Jul-Sep 2000).”

“Indeed. Kus semangat! The article looks like a gallery of dead people!” (Imitating the infamous line from *The Sixth Sense*) “I see dead people...”

Apologies. We certainly mean no disrespect towards our esteemed predecessors. But there you have it – TPAS has had a long and distinguished history with some equally long-lived and distinguished personalities to whom we owe a great debt for shaping the Singapore of today, including MM Lee Kuan Yew who was a TPAS committee member in 1950!

The editorial team brainstormed for some time, and then decided to take stock. We thought it would also be interesting to hand the pen over to a few individuals – fortunately, all alive and well – who would be able to share personal perspectives on some of TPAS’ past committee members. Do enjoy the recollections of David Ong, Stella Kon, Vicky Yap and Anamah Tan.

It is 10 years into the 21st century, and more

than ever, our culture has seen a most dramatic revival of sorts on all fronts. Up to the end of the 1990s, the furtherance and preservation of Baba culture appeared to rest squarely on the shoulders of a few heritage organisations including the State Chinese Penang Association and the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka in Malaysia, and the Gunong Sayang Association and TPAS in Singapore. Books on collecting, including seminal tomes on specific areas of Peranakan culture like Ho Wing Meng’s *Straits Chinese Porcelain* in 1983 and *Straits Chinese Silver* in 1984, nurtured a growing interest. The annual Baba conventions, Gunong Sayang productions and TPAS’s anniversary dinner and dances enjoyed steadily increasing attendance levels.

Then, around the early 2000s, awareness in the culture reached an exponential point. Publications on aspects of the culture, including history, architecture, furniture, jewellery and family genealogies, appeared in quick succession. In Singapore, the newly-restored Asian Civilisations Museum at Empress Place devoted a section of its exhibits to Peranakan culture. Peranakan-themed businesses – restaurants, boutique hotels, decorating and homeware – started flourishing. TPAS’ full-scale musical, *Bibiks Behind Bars*, played to full houses at the Kallang Theatre in 2002.



Straits Chinese British Association First Committee, 1900 (Singapore).

The Peranakan Association Main Committee (1973)
 Seated from left: Soh Chee Soon, Yeo Hock Thye (Vice President), Dr Anamah Tan, T.W. Ong (President), Teo Seng Bee (Vice President), Kuek Tiong Toong, Ahmad bin Haji Taff. Standing from left: Quahe Hup Swee, John C.C. Wong (Asst Hon. Secretary), Anthony B.H. Teo (Hon. Secretary), Lim Teck Hui, Tan Tiang Quee, Seah Eng Chuan, B.H. Snow, Lee Kip Lin, Sum Lai Woh
 (photograph courtesy of Lee Kip Lin)



with the opening of the Peranakan Museum and NUS' Baba House stoked interest to a fever pitch from 2008. Since then, the Sun Festival, Singapore Heritage Festival, Singapore Food Festival, and more recently, practically any happening of note at all including the F1 night races and the Youth Olympic Games have all incorporated the Peranakans in some way as part of their

By 2005, special Peranakan events were being organised in shopping malls. TPAS led the charge by organising the first Peranakan Festival that same year at Millenia Walk. It was a nine-day event that featured 60 food and craft stalls and 'live' performances, including a wedding procession.

Grassroots organisations such as People's Association, various community groups and educational institutions of all levels started recognising the Peranakan culture. Shows such as *Soundwaves* (2006) called upon The Peranakan Voices (TPV) to perform. It's not a stretch to say that the TPV haven't had much of a chance to get out of their *kebayas* ever since! Community centres started holding workshops on aspects of the culture such as beadwork, while schools now celebrate the Peranakan as part of Racial Harmony Day (an irony as we are not an ethnic group!)

Mediacorp's *Little Nyonya* drama serial, coupled

showcasing local culture. TPAS is proud to report that in all these events, its members including many young babas and nyonys in their 20s and 30s have willingly come forward to represent the culture.

We reached a crowning moment of sorts this year with TPAS staging a wedding procession for the opening of the *Baba Bling* exhibition in Paris, presented via Singapore's Ministry of Information, Culture and the Arts as part of the *Singapour Festivals*. TPAS is also moving towards extending its involvement at a local level, especially with the Joo Chiat Community Club.

As readers of *The Peranakan* can see in recent issues, we are spreading our wings and going international, even as we sink our roots ever deeper in our homeland. Peranakans should now take pride that our Heritage, with a capital H, has become an acknowledged and respected community unto itself. Here's to the next 110! ❄️

Left: Association President Dr George Tay and members of his committee, 1993.
 Seated from left: Judy Low, David Ong, Dr George Tay, Lee Kip Lee, Sng Geok Huay. Standing from left: Michael Tan, Dr Irene Lim, Lee Liang Hye, Boey Yut Mei, Richard Toh, Helen Tan.



Right: The Peranakan Association main committee, 2001.
 Seated from left: Bebe Seet, Lim Geok Huay, Lee Kip Lee, Maureen Lim, Anne Chiang. Standing from left: Richard Tan, Peter Wee, Irene Ooi, Thomas Tan, Peter Lee, Isaac Chan (absent: Alan Koh).



CHRONOLOGY OF TPAS PRESIDENTS, 1900-2010

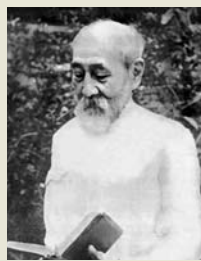
Prepared by Baba Peter Lee

The chronology of Association Presidents is still not certain but references from the Straits Times and other publications have to date endorsed this provisional list.

- 1900-1904 Tan Jiak Kim
- 1905-1907 Lim Boon Keng
- 1908-1912 (For further research)
- 1913-1916 Koh San Hin
- 1917 Lee Choon Guan
- 1918-1919 (For further research)
- 1920 Lim Boon Keng
- 1921-1923 Song Ong Siang
- 1924 S.Q. Wong
- 1925-1926 Wee Swee Teow
- 1927 (For further research)
- 1928 Song Ong Siang
- 1929 Wee Swee Teow
- 1930-1931 Lim Han Hoe
- 1932 Song Ong Siang
- 1933 Tay Lian Teck
- 1934-1941 Tay Lian Teck
- 1942-1945 No appointment during the Japanese Occupation
- 1946 Yap Pheng Gek
- 1947 Tan Chin Tuan
- 1948 Yap Pheng Gek
- 1949-1992 T. W. Ong
- 1993-1995 George Tay
- 1996-2009 Lee Kip Lee
- 2010 Peter Wee



1900-1904
Tan Jiak Kim



1904-1907, 1920
Lim Boon Keng



1913-1916
Koh San Hin



1917
Lee Choon Guan



1921-1923, 1928, 1932
Song Ong Siang



1924
S.Q. Wong



1925-1926, 1929
Wee Swee Teow



1930-1931
Lim Han Hoe



1933
Tay Lian Teck



1946, 1948
Yap Pheng Gek



1947
Tan Chin Tuan



1949-1992
T. W. Ong



1993-1995
George Tay



1996-2009
Lee Kip Lee



2010
Peter Wee

RECOLLECTIONS

LEGACY OF LEADERS

Remembering association leaders of the past



Right: T.W. Ong,
President of the
Association from
1949-1992.
Photography by
Wah Lee.

I first met Mr T.W. Ong sometime during the 1970s, when I joined The Peranakan Association. My initial impressions of him were that he was an extremely firm, serious-minded and even difficult person.

However, as I got to know him better, I found him to be always a gentleman in his thoughts, words and actions, despite the fact that he could be pretty intransigent when he had made a decision on anything. Nonetheless, we became good friends and what bonded us was probably the few stengahs of whiskey and friendly banter with our other good friends, the late Dr George Tay and Mr Lee Kip Lee, both of whom went on to become Presidents of the Association. In retrospect, I think it was really nice that we could always

find the time for a few doses – of our favourite "cough mixture" together.

In retrospect, I believe that the Association of today owes its good standing to T.W.'s leadership and his pushing for membership growth and recruitment of newer "leaders".

We promoted the fact that membership would not be confined to Peranakans only, but also be open to the larger community who had an interest in things Peranakan and who also wished to preserve and promote the culture.

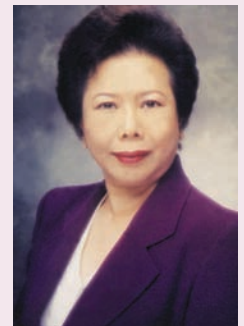
Unfortunately, however, my proposal to change the name of the Association to "The Peranakan Heritage Society" to reflect our mission statement and intention of purpose, did not enjoy T.W.'s support, despite many attempts to persuade him.
– David Ong



There is a lot for the Association to be proud of – the unique cuisine, fashion, exquisite jewellery, arts and crafts, language and literature mark the renaissance of a cultural blend – it is truly amazing and the guardian of all this has been The Peranakan Association.

I am proud and happy to have served as the Honorary Secretary for many years during the Presidency of the late Mr T W Ong in the 70s and 80s. I remember so well the celebration of the 75th Anniversary which was a grand affair. I was also present at the 100th Anniversary. And today we celebrate our 110th Anniversary.

We used to worry about our ageing membership and I am so proud now that we have many young vibrant members as well as the more mature but nonetheless young-at-heart ones to keep up the spirit of the organisation alive and well. What a glorious history and what a great and bountiful future to look forward to.
– Dr Anamah Tan



It did not surprise me to learn that my great grandfather, Tan Chay Yan, had been a pioneering committee member of The Peranakan Association then the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA).

His involvement in the Association would have been an expression of his strong sense of service towards helping others. His contribution to the growth of the rubber industry in Malaya and his philanthropic practices are well documented.

As a nyonya, I am proud that he and many other Babas championed education for women. He passed away when he was just 46 years old and I have no doubt that he would have achieved much more had he lived longer.
– Vicky Yap



Tay Chay Yan.



Tan Boo Liat was the owner of the historic mansion Golden Bell on Pender Rd, and a descendant of Tan Tock Seng. His daughter was Polly Tan. (She became the role model for Emily of Emerald Hill.) Seow Poh Leng was also a very active member of SCBA and a founder of Singapore Chinese Girls' school. He married Polly Tan. Their daughter was Seow Guat Kheng.

Lim Boon Keng was a founder of SCBA. His grandson Lim Kok Ann married Polly's daughter Guat Kheng; they were my father and mother.

So I am descended from three committee members of the SCBA through my father and mother!

– Stella Kon



PERSATUAN PERANAKAN CINA MELAKA – 110 YEARS AND GOING STRONG

The Peranakan Association Singapore's (TPAS) sister association in Malacca also turns 110 this year, and we are proud to celebrate our interlinked histories and longevity. TPAS congratulates the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM) and warmly welcomes our further strengthening of ties in the years to come

The Straits Chinese British Association Singapore (now TPAS) was formed on 17 August 1900 against a backdrop of public debate over politics and nationalism. Three persons, Mr Gan Goh Bee and Mr Cheah Chen Eok from Penang, and Mr Tan Chay Yan from Malacca were invited to a meeting in Singapore and persuaded to form branches in their respective states. Collectively, the SCBAs would represent the Baba community's stand on various political matters, especially concerning loyalty to China and the British Crown.

The SCBA Malacca was formed on 25 September 1900. Its inaugural meeting was held at the premises of the Malacca Lawn Tennis Association with some 200 people present. Mr Lee Keng Liat was elected as its first president. To date, there have been a total of 12 presidents.

During World War Two, most of SCBA Malacca's records were lost, and its clubhouse remained shut.

The association's most significant act in its early years was to purchase plots of land at Kubu for constructing a building for the Malacca Chinese Volunteer Coy. The lease expired in 1951 and the SCBA then rented it to the Malacca Chinese Recreation Club until the premises were disposed of in 1983.

SCBA Malacca's third president was the illustrious Tun Tan Cheng Lock, who was one of the architects of *Merdeka*. He held the position from 1929-1934. The Baba community had lost much political influence by the 1930s and assimilation with the greater Chinese community had begun. Tun Tan Cheng Lock and his son, Tun Tan Siew Sin, who later became Malaya's



The present PPCM premises at Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

Minister of Finance, were much respected as leaders of the Chinese community.

In 1981, SCBA Malacca changed its name to Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM). A few years later, it acquired new premises at 149 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock. The building was restored and officially opened as a clubhouse on 1 December 1989 by the Governor of Malacca, His Excellency Tun Datuk Seri Utama Syed Ahmad Al-Haj bin Syed Mahmud Shahabudin. Many VIPs attended the event including Mr T W Ong, then President of TPAS.

The new millennium has seen the expansion of the clubhouse and its facilities, including the purchase of 151 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock in 1996, and a backyard extension in 2002 to create more space for social outreach activities.

Between 1997 and today, the PPCM worked on establishing closer ties with its sister associations in Singapore, Penang, Phuket and Kuala Lumpur, through events such as the annual Baba Convention.

More recently, the One Malaysia concept as espoused by the Malaysian government has found great resonance amongst Malaysian Peranakans, especially with Peranakan culture being a harmonious integration of so many local cultures. ❖

Procession for the opening of the Clubhouse at Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock.



**Text has been adapted from 'Share the Legacy of the Past...For the Future' by Michael Chin in Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka's publication to mark their 110th anniversary.*

THE WAY FORWARD

Baba Colin Chee sits down with Honorary Life President Baba Lee Kip Lee and President Baba Peter Wee to reflect on past achievements and the path ahead for The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS)

Baba Lee Kip Lee, Honorary Life President



“Upgrading the newsletter was one of my initiatives, as I saw that it could be a vital tool to keep the community together, and to record our past as well as hopes for the future.”

Uncle Kip, you have been with the TPAS for over 20 years of which you spent 14 years as President, until early this year. What were your three major challenges looking back?

The first was to get younger people involved in the association. Before I became a committee member, young Peranakans kept away, assuming it to be a club for old people. Prompted by the then-President of Singapore, the late Wee Kim Wee when I was Association Vice President, we managed to rope in younger volunteers. I am proud to see that we now have

committee members in their 20s and 30s. The second challenge was to keep members interested. Upgrading the newsletter was one of my initiatives, as I saw that it could be a vital tool to keep the community together, and to record our past as well as hopes for the future. We also held regular dinner talks, which proved popular. The third challenge was to make ourselves more visible as a community as well as a heritage group. Committee members worked hard to turn the annual dinners into social events graced by our heads of state and leaders of various circles. We also collaborated on several heritage projects, working with museums, the National Archives, hosting the Baba Convention, launching a dictionary, producing and publishing plays.

The Association membership has grown from about 600 in 1996 to almost 2,000 today. What do you think accounted for this growth, especially the spurt in the recent years?

In the old days Geok, our Hon. Secretary, and I would go through the membership list and call members to persuade them to attend events. They

really appreciated this personal touch, which resulted in better turnouts at our dinner talks, and allowed members to interact, as we had and still have no clubhouse. When these members saw younger committee members creating livelier and more interesting events, and with active recruiting by everyone, our numbers snowballed. We helped many members to reestablish pride in their heritage and made them more personally involved. We also warmly welcomed non-Peranakans and non-Singaporeans to join. There is still room for our numbers to grow.

What are the key pillars of the Association that members and the main committee should always keep in mind and consciously nurture to ensure the Association's future growth and sustainability?

Keep the association young. Also, the committee must connect with members and increase opportunities for members to interact. We must also maintain links with other Peranakan groups, including the Melaka Chitty.

How can members help to keep our Peranakan culture alive?

By supporting events organised by the Association and making the effort to meet other members, and to see how they can step forward to volunteer their expertise in realising the Association's mission.

Under your watch, regional Peranakan associations have emerged and come increasingly together. What are the key benefits of this networking?

At the moment there is contact but not enough interaction. Each association has its strength. I think we have a lot to learn from each other and to encourage ways to preserve and promote our heritage and history. ✱

Baba Peter Wee, President- The Peranakan Association Singapore

“ Our vision now is for an association that will encompass and engage a passion for Peranakan culture, in the range of its activities. ”

What is your and the main committee’s vision for the Association?

The committee would like to see the Association brought closer to its grassroots members and to be more accessible to the Peranakan community as a whole, especially to our young Peranakans. This is key to re-energising the association. Uncle Kip has been very successful in keeping the fire alive and stoking continued interest in our culture and community. Our vision now is for an association that will encompass and engage the whole Peranakan community, and also those who have a passion for Peranakan culture, in the range of its activities.

What measures are you adopting and planning to achieve this vision?

We have already started the process. Under Uncle Kip’s watch the association chose Joo Chiat Community Club as the venue for the closing of The Peranakan Festival 2009. Following that, we organised a very successful Malam Peranakan at Joo Chiat CC in mid-2010. We are strengthening our collaboration with the People’s Association through the Joo Chiat CC and with the support of its chairman Mr Tan Yew Beng and its advisor, Member of Parliament Mr Chan Soo Sen.

We are hoping to reciprocate the Joo Chiat community’s co-operation. Joo Chiat, together with Katong, Telok Kurau and Siglap are still a living Peranakan heritage, in as much as they are Eurasian, even Malay, in influence. The Association’s Dinner and Dance this year will also be more affordable so that many more of our members and their families can enjoy this annual gathering. We have our very excellent quarterly magazine and website. In addition, the Association is supporting the work of young members like Edmond Wong who is trying to promote the idea of a Peranakan Town which will encompass the Joo Chiat neighbourhood. And we are fortunate to have other young members like businessman Tony Tan who continues to highlight the neighbourhood’s Peranakan heritage in his street tours.

What are the main challenges?

The first is funding, especially for a non-profit association such as ours. We are indebted and grateful to our long-time and loyal supporters such as the Lee Foundation. The challenge is still to get as much government and corporate funding support as we can

for the activities we hope to plan for not just our members and community but also for Singaporeans in general. Our Peranakan culture is for all to enjoy in our multi-cultural society.

The second is getting more passionate and concerned volunteers to help organise and coordinate the association’s plans and activities. People outside the community are already actively getting to know our culture better because of their passion and fascination with it and helping out. If we can get more mature Peranakans in their 30s and 40s to assist and participate in our programmes, this would be very helpful too.

Can you share some of your plans to nurture our Peranakan culture in Joo Chiat and Katong?

There is great interest in our craft such as beadwork, sarong kebayas, furniture, ceramics, jewellery, music and joget, and food. We could have classes and demos on all these aspects and make them available to the public as well, aside from our community and members.

A key strategy in keeping the culture and Association alive is to attract young babas and nyonias into the association and to participate in its activities. What are your thoughts?

This has been the most challenging issue that the association has been wrestling with. How do we get our young interested? The TV series *Little Nyonya* helped to boost our identity and, in a way, the community’s self respect. Suddenly everyone wants to be a nyonya or baba. This in itself is not bad. Pride in one’s identity is good but we need also to understand what Peranakans stand for. If we can get more of our young interested in what the association does this would be marvellous. Unfortunately, as families get smaller and boast dual income, the young get less and less exposure to our culture and to their grandparents who may have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be a Peranakan. Hopefully, the Association through its activities and programmes can be a surrogate influence for our young before they become altogether estranged from their heritage.✽





PINANG PERANAKAN MANSION



THE PINANG PERANAKAN MANSION TAKES YOU BACK TO THE TIME OF THE BABAS AND NYONYAS, SET IN THE HOME OF ONE OF PENANG'S HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES, KAPITAN CINA CHUNG KENG KWEE.

Depicting the typical home of a rich Baba of more than a century ago, the opulent lifestyle of these locally acculturated Chinese is recreated in the Pinang Peranakan Mansion to offer a glimpse of their many customs and traditions. More than just a Baba-Nyonya museum, this century-old stately mansion of eclectic design and architecture incorporates Chinese carved-wood panels with English floor tiles and Scottish iron-works. Built at the end of the 19th century by one of

local history's famous personalities, the 'Hai Kee Chan' or Sea Remembrance Store had once served as the residence and office of Kapitan Cina Chung Keng Kwee.

At the Pinang Peranakan Mansion, the legacies of the Peranakans are not only commemorated but the restoration of this building complex also heralds the preservation of Penang's unique architectural history.

VISITING HOURS
Daily from 9.30 am to 5 pm
(Open on all public holidays unless notified by the management)

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Adults : RM10.00
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Conducted tours are only available with prior arrangements for a group of 10 persons and above. All rates are subject to change without notice. Discounts are available to school bookings and other large groups. Contact us for prior bookings and more information to enjoy these special rates.
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LOCATION MAP



KINSHIP CONVENTION

Baba Tan Kuning explores further the significance of status in kinship terms, a subject highlighted in our issue 2, 2010

In Confucian philosophy, the principle of rectification of names stipulates that all government officials in civil service and the military must be appropriately ranked and their titles made known to the public. A designation brings with it power and responsibilities.

A family is a micro unit in the larger context of a nation. In an extended family the patriarch corresponds to the emperor of the nation while the sons are like the ministers. Each family member must be given a kinship status which defines his role and responsibilities in society and in ceremonial rites. Being a patriarchal society the paternal relatives are the active players while the maternal relatives remain in the background as bystanders and critical observers. Hence kinship terminology must be correctly applied so as to clearly differentiate the duties

of paternal relatives from those of maternal ones.

Kinship convention is strictly observed as a rule of filial piety which carries social and ethical implications. Small children are taught to respect their elders by addressing everyone correctly. Any wrong term calling is considered rude and disrespectful and which invites criticism like *tak tau adat* (lacking in social etiquette) and *kurang ajar* (lack of teaching), remarks which cast aspersions on the parents.

In the article "Aspects of Respect" by Lau Chwee Kim and Aileen Lau Guek Lin in issue2, 2010 (p.4) a chart on Kinship Terminology was comprehensively drawn up. It used to be closely followed. At the same time, alternative kinship terms with a mix of Chinese and Baba Malay words were also used. Let's look at the following table:

Collective terms of reference

EXTENDED FAMILY

Ancestors	<i>Nenek moyang or Kongma</i>
Great great grandparents	<i>Kong Cho Cho, Cho Cho</i>
Great grandparents	<i>Kong Cho, Cho or Moyang</i>
Grandparents	<i>Ng Kong, Ma</i>
Paternal grandparents	<i>Lai Kong, Lai Ma</i>
Maternal grandparents	<i>Gua Kong, Gua Ma</i>
Parents	<i>Mak Bapak</i>
Siblings	<i>Adek Beradek</i>
Male siblings	<i>Adek Beradek Jantan</i>
Female siblings	<i>Adek Beradek Prompuan</i>
Nuclear family	
The nuclear family	<i>Anak Beranak</i>
Children	<i>Anak Buah</i>
Children and grandchildren	
Descendants:	<i>Anak Chuchu</i>
	<i>Anak Chuchu Chichit/</i>
	<i>Anak Chuchu Turun Menurun</i>
Great grandchildren	<i>Chichit</i>
In-laws	
In-laws	<i>Mertua Taya, Ipar Beripar</i>
Parents-in-law	<i>Mertua/Enkua, Neo</i>
Sisters-in-law	<i>Ng Chim, Ng Soh</i>
Brothers-in-law	<i>Ng Chek, Ng Pek</i>
Husbands of sisters	<i>Tang Mui</i>

Relatives

Relatives	<i>Sudara</i>
Close relatives	<i>Sudara Dekat</i>
	<i>Includes paternal and maternal uncles and aunts and their children (the cousins).</i>
Distant relatives	<i>Sudara Jaoh</i>
	<i>Includes persons related through several generations of cousins and through marriages.</i>

PARENTS

Parents are not always addressed as *Mak* (mother) or *Bapak* (father). One *pantang* (ritual prohibition) is the belief that some children who address their parents as *Mak* or *Bapak* would suffer ill health and die young. They address their parents as uncle and aunt to avoid any tragic events within the family. Healthy children are generally exempted from this *pantang*.

Father

Pak
Ba
Ba
Thia

Mother

Mak
Nya
Nyanya
Mak

Parents' siblings

Father's elder brother	<i>Pek/Pek Pek</i>
Wife of father's elder brother	<i>Mak Um/Oh Um</i>
Father's younger brother	<i>Chek Chek /Oh Chek</i>
	<i>Ng Tioⁿ /Ah Tioⁿ</i>
Wife of father's younger brother	<i>Mak</i>
	<i>Chim/Ng Chim/Chim</i>
	<i>Ko/Ko Ko</i>

The terms may not be strictly adhered to. Sometimes the father may be called *Chek* (father's younger brother) and the mother *Ko* (father's sister) or the father may be called *Tioⁿ* (husband of father's sister or husband of mother's sister) and the mother *Mak* (mother). I know of one case when the father was addressed as *Chek* and the mother *Ah Soh* (sister-in-law).

RESPONSES

Collective terms of reference

UNCLES AND AUNTS

Sometimes Baba Malay words are used to show sibling seniority, for example, *besair* instead of *tua* for the eldest.

Uncles and aunts

Eldest paternal uncle	<i>Tua Pek/Ng Pek Besair</i>	Their spouses <i>Tua Um/Um Ng Pek Besair</i>
Eldest paternal aunt	<i>Tua Ko/Ko Besair</i>	<i>Ng Tioⁿ Koh Besar</i>
Eldest maternal uncle	<i>Tua Ku/Ng Ku Besair</i>	<i>Tua kim/Ng Kim Ng Ku Besair</i>
Eldest maternal aunt	<i>Tua Ee/Ee Besair</i>	<i>Entioⁿ Ee Besair</i>
Eldest uncle and aunt		
Eldest brother	<i>Tua Hiaⁿ/Hiaⁿ Besair</i>	<i>Hiaⁿ</i>
Eldest sister	<i>Tua So/Ng So Besair</i>	

Middle uncle and aunt

Uncles

2nd paternal uncle (older than your father)	<i>Ji Pek/Ng Pek Tengah</i>	Their Spouses <i>Ji Um/Um Tengah</i>
(younger than your father)	<i>Ji Chek/Chek Tengah/ Chek Nga</i>	<i>Ng Chim Chek Nga</i>
2nd maternal uncle	<i>Ji Ku/Ng Ku Tengah/ Ng Ku Nga</i>	<i>Ng Kim Ng Ku Tengah</i>

Aunts

2nd paternal aunt	<i>Ji Ko/Ko Tengah</i>	Their Spouses <i>Ji Tioⁿ/Ng Tioⁿ Ko Tengah</i>
2nd maternal aunt	<i>Ji Ee/Ee Tengah</i>	<i>Ji Tioⁿ/Ng Tio^{no} Ee Tengah</i>

Siblings

Elder Brother	<i>Ji Hiaⁿ /Hiaⁿ Tengah</i>	<i>Ji So/Ng So Tengah</i>
Elder Sister	<i>Ji Chi/Tachi Tengah</i>	<i>Chau Tachi Tengah</i>

Youngest uncle and aunt

The youngest is termed *kechik* (small) or *chik*, to denote the last child among the siblings.

Uncles

Paternal uncle	<i>Ng Chek Chik</i>	Their Spouses <i>Enchim Chekchik</i>
Maternal uncle	<i>Ng Ku Chik</i>	<i>Enchim Ku Chik</i>

Aunts

Paternal aunt	<i>Ko Chik</i>	Their Spouses <i>Ng Tioⁿ Ko Chik</i>
Maternal aunts	<i>Ee Chik</i>	<i>Ng Tioⁿ Ee Chik</i>

CLOSE AND DISTANT RELATIVES

Close relatives include uncles and aunts who are siblings of one's parents. The seniority of the siblings is defined. Distant relatives include cousins and second cousins of parents and any one who can claim a relation. They are addressed by convention than the personal name. For example, parents' cousins could be addressed as *Enchik* Leng Kiat, *Engku* John, *Ee* Choo Neo and *Koh* Mary.

Parents' friends

Parents' friends are equally respected by the children.

Men

Ng Chek (uncle)

Women

Bibik (aunt)

Wak Wak (female from the grandparents' generation)

PEERS OF THE SAME GENERATION

Women are generally more particular about the naming convention. The newly acquainted would ask about each other's age to determine seniority, for instance *Ta Chi* (elder sister) or *Adek* (younger).

IN THE MARKET

Going to the market also has its norms.

Elder Man	<i>Ah Pek</i>
Elder Woman	<i>Ah Um</i>
Younger man	<i>Ah Chek, Ah Hiaⁿ</i>
Younger woman	<i>Ah So (Ah Chim is never used)</i>

CANTONESE MAIDS

Out of courtesy, Cantonese maids are referred to as *Ah Sum* which is equivalent to *Ah Chim* (the paternal uncle's wife in Hokkien).

KINSHIP IN CONVERSATION

In a conversation, no relative is to be mentioned or referred to by name. Everyone is addressed by their kinship status by the younger of the two speakers. When an uncle inquires about a woman from her daughter-in-law he would have to say, "*Neo ada baik?*" or "*Neo lu ada baik?*" (How is your mother-in-law?). The proper response would be "*Yah, Neo ada baik!*" or "*Neo saya ada baik*" (Yes, my mother-in-law is very well).

When a niece inquires from her second uncle about his wife, she would say, "*Ji Chek, Ji Chim ada baik?*" He would reply, "*Ji Chim ada baik!*"

TODAY

In most Peranakan families today kinship terminology is not much practised. Siblings of parents are addressed as uncles and aunts followed by personal names. One hears of Uncle Patrick, Uncle John, Aunt Peggy and Aunt Josephine instead of *Ji Chek* or *Sah Chim* and so forth, for reasons of modernity or convenience. The paternal and maternal relationships are lost. All the same, parents' friends are called uncles and aunts.

Perhaps they can start again, the proper way. *

TAUYU TALES

More on the Black Gold from Issue 3, 2010 as Baba William Gwee recalls the era of the pre-supermart *tauyu*

I grew up in a family where we pronounced *tauyu* as *tauk yu*, an item much featured in our daily meals. I was brought up to flavour my rice with *tauk yu itam* (dark sauce) and to enjoy it as a dip (*piring tauk yu*) at every rice meal.

In the days before the supermarket brands of *tauyu*, there were three avenues of supply in the eastern part of Singapore where I lived: The neighbourhood grocer (*keday Ah Chek*), the itinerant *tauyu* peddler (*Cheena tauk yu*) and the factory itself (*tempat bikin tauk yu*). The sauce from all three sources had no brand names.

My family rarely obtained our *tauyu* from *keday Ah Chek*. Perhaps the quality fell short of mother's requirement and the price was not competitive.

The itinerant peddler moved around on a tricycle loaded with glass bottles of *tauyu* of mainly two varieties, the *tauyu itam* (dark soya sauce) and the *chio^u cheng* (light soya sauce) in a variety of grades and prices. The buyer would hand over his own glass bottle (usually the tomato ketchup bottle) for the peddler to fill. As the peddler came round infrequently, I would have to cycle to the factory 10 minutes away if my mother ran out of *tauyu*.

From the 1940s to the early 1950s a *tauyu* factory was located in a single storey bungalow with a spacious garden along Telok Kurau Road near the Joo Chiat Place junction. All over the garden were numerous

black wide-mouthed earthen jars topped with an aluminium cover and containing the dark and light soya sauces in different stages of fermentation.

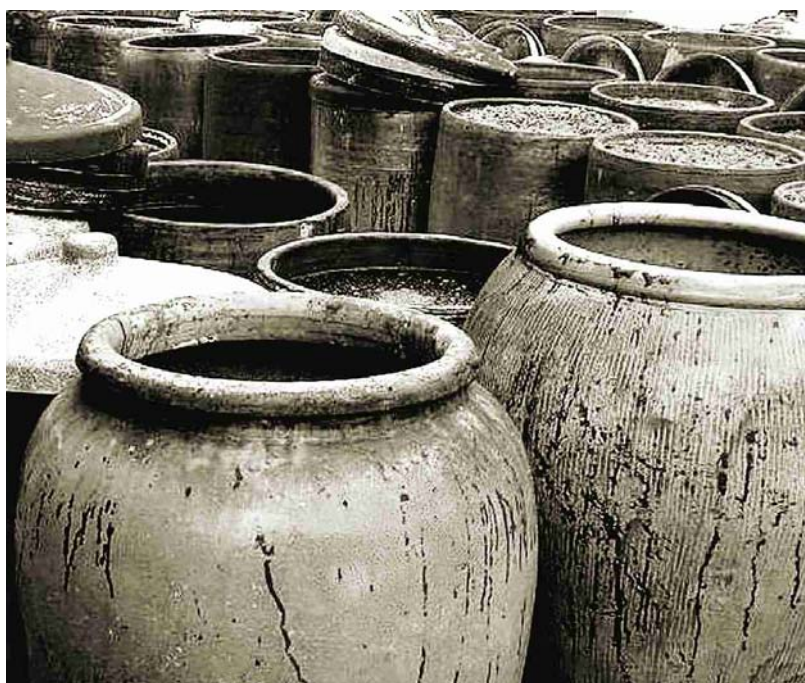
The proprietor would ladle out the *tauyu* and pour it through an aluminium funnel into my bottle. Mother chose the second grade sauce because the first grade was too expensive for her even if the factory *tauyu* was the most economical of the three supply options.

Buyers could witness the shortcoming of the manufacturing process in the days before quality control. I well remember one occasion when, after having refilled my container, the proprietor peered into the jar, calmly dipped his fingers in, pulled out a dead lizard, threw it on the ground, replaced the cover and nonchalantly walked away puffing away at his cigarette.

My wife shares an almost similar if not more frightful experience when as a young girl, she had gone to a soya sauce factory along Jalan Eunos to buy *tauyu*. After the purchase, the proprietor fished out a dead rat from the jar. Seeing her startled, he gave her a weak smile before walking away.

Obviously such incidents were not uncommon in those days. But we survived and were none the worse from such remarkable and memorable experiences. Perhaps we were of a tougher mettle then. *

As the peddler came round infrequently, I would have to cycle to the factory 10 minutes away if my mother ran out of *tauyu*.



MERRY MELODIES

Baba Christopher Lim recalls a favourite pastime of Penang Peranakans

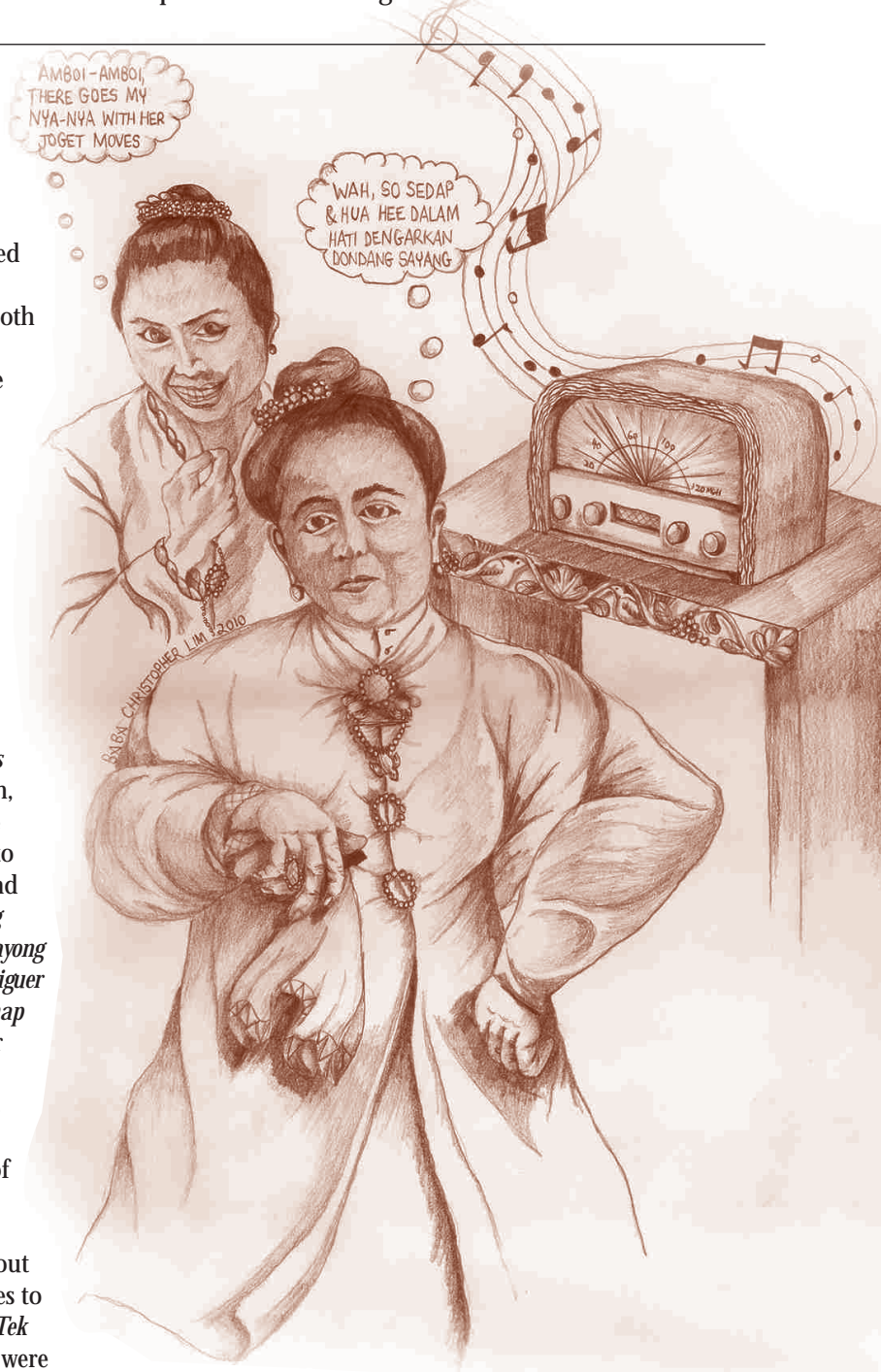
Thinking about the pastimes of the Peranakans of Penang brings back memories of my carefree childhood days.

That was when the earlier generations of babas and nyonys led a passionate fun-loving life in their unique Straits-born style, imbibing both western and local forms of entertainment. Grand western style parties at their seaside bungalows complete with a live orchestra were the order of the day. So too was listening to the music of Rudy Valee and the Platters on the gramophone while resting on the *baleh-baleh* (reclining chair). When television made its debut in Penang, they enjoyed programmes like the Black and White Minstrel Show.

They were equally enamoured with composing poems and *pantons* and *sikus* (short proverbs) in English, Malay and Hokkien. Some of these would be set to print and adapted to the styles of *Dondang Sayang Asli* and *Keronchong*. Classic songs like *Trang Boelan*, *Bengawan Solo*, *Pulau Bali*, *Dayong Sampan* and *Stamboel Satoe* were *de rigueur* on auspicious occasions such as *Chap Goh Meh* (the 15th day of the Lunar New Year).

Chap Goh Meh in the early years recalled bullock carts with banners like *Bintang Soeray* carrying a bevy of baba and nyonya singers from Dondang Sayang clubs like the Nightingale Melodians, all decked out for a glorious night of visiting homes to entertain with songs like *Trek Tek-Tek* and *Olay-Olay Bandong*. These carts were succeeded by decorated buses in a tradition that carries on till today. For home entertainment, songbooks were very popular. Songbooks such as *Silam Baru*, *Panton Dondang Sayang* (which came in different volumes) and *Penghiboran Hati* were printed from 1911 right up to the 1930s.

In the households, nyonys and bibiks would spout ditties and *pantons* especially when chores had to be done. My sisters and I grew up hearing my English-educated maternal grandmother, Nyonya Kim Swee,



singing tunes like *Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, *Strangers in the Night* and *Only You* when she was relaxing or swept by nostalgia. I also remember her *sikus* (short proverbs) and *panton budi* (poetic advice) to educate us on things such as the correct way to pound *rempah* or upright behaviour.

As babies and during childhood, we were *dodoi* (buoyed to sleep) with songs like *Ikan Kekek*, *Burong Kakak Tua*, *Rasa Sayang*, *Chan Mali Chan*, *Enchek-Enchek*

Semut, Achee–Achee Buka Pintu, Lenggang Kangkong and played games like *Lalali la Tampong* which required singing.

During pre-war Penang days, successful babas ran thriving business empires and enjoyed access to loads of cash and women. Like my paternal grandfather, Baba Lim Choon Kheng and his pals, they had their own entertainment clubs for leisure and relaxation.

They would employ bands and orchestras to play Chinese, English and Malay songs like *Dayung Sampan, Saputangan, Sarinande, Bunga Tanjung, Timang Burung, Inang Cina, Nyonya Pakey Bunga, I Love You Truly.., Rose, Rose I Love You* and *Ye Lai Xiang*.

Sometimes, there would be balls to commemorate grand occasions like the King's Coronation. As the music played, these gentlemen would dance the night away. More often than not, their partners would be attractive dancing girls and potential concubines who did quick work with the *joget, ronggeng* and *rambong*.

Venues for merry-making included the Chusan Hotel in Tanjong Tokong, Shanghai Hotel formerly in Gurney Drive, Metropole Hotel in Northam Road,

City Lights in Farquhar Street and Springtide Hotel. In the afternoons, Springtide Hotel, among others, also provided a decent locale to organise birthday parties and other events in Tanjong Bungah. Younger babas and their male friends congregated at these venues to jam in their own band or commission

I can still hear in my mind my grandparents talking and enjoying the music of the 30s to the 50s.

popular bands. Among these young men was Baba Lim Kean Chuan, an English teacher from Alor Setar who used to lead an orchestra in the former Holland House in Northam Road.

Peranakans were also avid supporters of afternoon tea dances, where one paid an entrance fee with

a partner or could hire a dancing partner for dances like the *ronggeng*. Other forms of entertainment were the *Boria* and the Southern Siamese ritualistic-stage performance called *Menora*. I remember my grandmother saying that we had a grand uncle (Ah Yau Chek) who was very much mesmerised by the *Menora*, and that many babas would freely shower jewellery and valuables onto the stage when a certain character made his or her appearance.

Life in the Pearl of the Orient then among the Peranakan was far from staid. ✽

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WHEN BIBIKS PULVERISED NUTS

Baba Ee Sin Soo looks at the humble baby mortar and pestle

lectric blenders or grinders have mostly taken over the place of mortars (*lesong*) and pestles (*anak lesong*) in Peranakan kitchens today. But in the old days, the granite mortar (bowl) and pestle were absolutely essential in the kitchen to crush, pound, grind or pulverise chillies, garlic, shallots, herbs and spices into the various pastes (*rempah*) used in many famed Peranakan dishes.

The bibiks used the baby-sized mortar and pestle to pulverise the areca nut, which was then mixed with other ingredients and wrapped in a betel leaf or *daon sireh* for a good chew that left one with red-stained teeth. The baby mortar can be as small as a mere 4cm high and 5cm in diameter. The pestle, made of metal or granite, starts from about 6.5cm long.

I like to imagine that the granite used for the baby mortar and pestle was hewn from the finest stone. The mortar is fashioned from a single block of premium dense granite. This ensures its hardness as an excellent grinding surface to crush the areca nut. The durable granite is not brittle and does not stain easily. Smooth and non-porous, the granite does not retain odours, and is easy to clean and maintain.

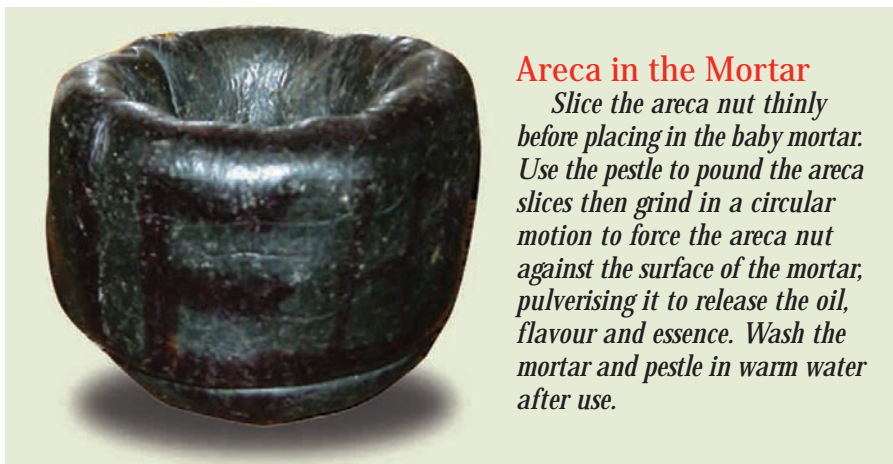


I assume these baby mortars were seasoned prior to use, lest the bibiks discover grit in their *sireh* mixture!

An Understated Icon

The baby mortar is not a striking work of art. It looks stubby compared to the other more aesthetic items in Peranakan material culture. Yet, it is so completely essential to the bibik. Weighing from about 200 grams, it is quite stable, just perfect for crushing

the areca nut without fear of chip or crack. Simply awesome! I have to credit the bibiks for making the unassuming baby mortar and pestle an icon. I inherited one set from my paternal great-grandmother and I am constantly tickled by how understated it is. For now it is left unused, sitting quietly in a corner. ✨



Areca in the Mortar

Slice the areca nut thinly before placing in the baby mortar. Use the pestle to pound the areca slices then grind in a circular motion to force the areca nut against the surface of the mortar, pulverising it to release the oil, flavour and essence. Wash the mortar and pestle in warm water after use.

CHAP JI KI AND MY MOTHER: VARIATIONS ON AN OBSESSION

In part 2, Baba William Gwee Thian Hock recounts the spellbinding possibilities with the 12 slender cards and the humble cigarette tin

Mother said a variation of the *Chap-ji-ki*, the *Chap-ji-ki panjang* (the long 12-numbers lottery) was popular with punters in her young days. A punter could either go to an illegal gambling den or arrange for a house call if enough punters made the operator's visit worthwhile. This form of lottery also involved 12 numbers. Each punter was given a set of 12 slender Chinese playing cards, bearing numbers from 1 to 12.

The operator, or banker as he was popularly designated, placed his cards in a bag. The banker would retrieve from the bag one card which he placed into a matchbox. Punters would then bet on the number of the hidden card by placing one or more of their own cards face down on the table to match it. Bets were placed on each of the face-down card(s). A similar dividend of 10 to 1 was paid as in *Chap-ji-ki*. However, unlike *Chap-ji-ki* where the successful punter had five percent of the winnings deducted as commission for the runner, the successful runner in *Chap-ji-ki panjang* collected the full winnings.

While *chap-ji-ki* had two daily draws, *Chap-ji-ki panjang* had many draws depending on the duration of the lottery. Some nyonias termed this form of gambling as *Main Tok-Tok*, (play the *Tok-Tok*) referring to the rapping of the operator's assistant's knuckles on the table to stop further bets for that round because he was ready to reveal the hidden card number. The assistant was present mainly to scoop up the bets that had lost.

Mother's penchant for gambling, fortunately on a modest scale, was inspired by great grandmother whom she loved dearly. She once related to me with pride how great grandmother and her peers from the elite of Baba society were caught red handed playing *cherki* which was frowned upon by the authorities. The offending ladies suffered the indignity of being hauled to Court. While her friends were remorseful and frightened before the British magistrate, great grandmother was a pillar of strength and stood her ground.

She addressed the Bench through an interpreter, admitting that the ladies had indeed been gambling but only for the mere fun of it (*main suka-suka*). She challenged the magistrate to suggest a harmless alternative recreation for their twilight years if *cherki* was disallowed. At a loss, the magistrate reprimanded the police officers for wasting everybody's time and sent the bunch of elders errant ladies home. Great

grandmother gained a certain notoriety after that and lifelong admiration from a granddaughter, my mother. It was most unexpected of a shy and submissive nyonya to show such courage before a white magistrate of the colonial elite.

Indulging in *Chap-ji-ki* on a modest scale may give the false impression of a harmless pursuit. What could be the harm of bets as low as 20 to 30 cents on pairs of numbers? Winning \$20 to \$30 may not enrich the gambler neither will the loss of 20 to 30 cents impoverish anyone.

However, there is more than meets the eye. Nyonya *Chap-ji-ki* punters believed each number possessed an accompanying *semangat* (spirit). So, when betting on, say numbers X and Y, the spirits of these two numbers were never left out of consideration. The original bet on a pair of numbers would increase to include more numbers, eg (X + its spirit number) and (Y + its spirit number), X and (Y + its spirit number), (X + its spirit number) and Y, (X + its spirit number) and (Y + its spirit number).

NUMERALS AND SYMBOLS IN CHAP-JI-KI

Normal numerals:	1	2	3	4	5
Chinese numerals:	一	二	三	四	五
<i>Chap-ji-ki</i> symbols:	•	••	•••	••••	•••••
Normal numerals:	6	7	8	9	10
Chinese numerals:	六	七	八	九	十
<i>Chap-ji-ki</i> symbols:	••••	•••••	••••••	•••••••	☉
Normal numerals:	11	12			
Chinese numerals:	十一	十二			
<i>Chap-ji-ki</i> symbols:	☺	☒			

Nyonias also believed that each number possessed a black and red companion number. Eventually, the original pair of numbers developed into a complicated matrix of numbers to bet on, with a corresponding spiral in the money betted from 20 to 30 cents to many dollars. Fortunately, mother was able to control herself and not fall into the abyss unlike some of her weak willed peers.

Cigarette tins

When mother could not find numbers to bet on, she resorted to standbys known to *Chap-ji-ki* punters. Always ready was her trusty cigarette tin in which she placed 12 rolled up pieces of paper numbered from 1 to 12. On her children's birthdays, they would be

invited to pick two numbers, shaking the tin to mix the rolled up paper well first. Another favourite standby was after my younger brother or I had a haircut. The moment I reached home, I had to stand still as she poured all the 12 rolled-up slips on my head. I had to gently shake until all but one roll stayed on top. This process was repeated to obtain the second number.

Chapji-ki gamblers had more methods to obtain numbers, some bizarre. One unusual method involved uncooked rice and an unlit joss stick. The grains would be poured into an empty cigarette tin almost to the brim. The nyonya would poke the base of the joss stick into the rice at a steady pace. After perhaps five to 20 minutes the joss stick would be stuck in the rice to the extent the tin could be lifted from the table. The belief was a spiritual entity had arrived to occupy the tin. The nyonya would then shake her trusty tin of 12 rolled-up numbers vigorously in front of the spirit-occupied tin of rice until only one roll remained inside, and repeat the shaking to get a second auspicious number. Strangely, the joss stick could effortlessly be removed from the tin of rice after that. Nyonya punters who struck a win would attribute their success to the intervention of a benevolent spirit. From my experience they may be just half correct.

One evening when I was eight years old, I heard

low groans coming from where our household Monkey God altar was. Rushing there, I found one of our family members, not mother clenching an unlit joss stick stuck to a tin of rice grains. She had a blank look on her face. Only the whites of her eyes were showing and she was moaning eerily. I gently shook her shoulders and repeatedly called out to her but got no response.

More than two hours later, after she had woken up from her trance-like state with the help of a spirit medium father had hastily summoned, she revealed what had happened. She had been jabbing the joss stick in and out of the rice for about 15 minutes when she suddenly saw a one-eyed horned entity rushing at her. She did not remember anything after that. The medium explained that she had unwittingly invited a passing malevolent spirit to possess her. Only after some hard persuasion did the spirit agree to leave her.

Mother eventually gave up *Chapji-ki*. She never said why but I have a nagging suspicion that the spiritual incident played a significant role. She had wisely concluded that gambling in any form is not, has never been nor will ever be an innocent and harmless pastime. *

Reference: 'A Nonya Mosaic' by Gwee Thian Hock (Times Books International) 1985. With thanks to Mrs Lim Teow Hoe for the tete-a-tete.



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CHRISTMAS, PERANAKAN STYLE

Nyonya Noreen Chan has a craving for the Devil at year's end

In Singapore, Christmas is celebrated by practically everyone! It is quite unavoidable – every November, Deepavali decorations would have barely been taken down before Yuletide ones appear in every shopping mall!

This practice has been going on for decades (although Christmas does seem to come earlier every year!). Even the more traditional Peranakan families who have not converted to Christianity or Catholicism would find some way to mark the occasion. It is quite typical of our east-meets-west lifestyle, and my family is no exception.

The children excitedly open their presents on Christmas morning



Noreen's grandmother celebrates Christmas at home.

Every year, the artificial Christmas tree would be retrieved from the storeroom, dusted off and installed in the living room. The decorations would be carefully unwrapped and hung on its skinny “branches”; shiny gilt and silver balls, pipe cleaner Santas in various poses, tinsel streamers, and finally the Christmas lights would be draped and lit.

On Christmas morning, after we had excitedly unwrapped our presents, we would dress up and accompany my father to visit the hospitals where he worked, and partake in a traditional Christmas breakfast party. The nuns at Mount Alvernia Hospital used to make their own mince pies, and we would get the chance to eat “exotic” (at least to me, and this was the 1970's) fare like roast turkey with stuffing and cranberry sauce, and brussels sprouts (which I always thought would be better stir fried with oyster sauce).

There is no “traditional” dish that Peranakan families prepare at Christmas; every family has its own practice. These days, more and more people are

following Western – American or English, rather than Continental European – custom by having roast turkey, or goose, or even “turducken” (a boned duck stuffed inside a boned turkey).

The Eurasians, on the other hand, have often celebrated Christmas with a feast of their specialties, notably Feng – a pork curry that commonly includes organs like lung, liver or tongue – and Curry Devil. And since the Peranakans borrow frequently from other cultures, Curry Devil (or Devil Curry) has also entered our repertoire.

Curry Devil, or Curry Debal, was said to have been developed as a way to use up leftover food from the Yuletide feasting. Hence excess roast chicken, ham or sausage could be added to this stew, to be enjoyed on Boxing Day and after. Nowadays, these meats are more often specially bought for the dish.

I looked up published recipes by Florence Tan, Charmaine Solomon and doyenne of *Cristang* cuisine Celine Marbeck, and there were differences, but minor ones – whether you add or omit ginger or lemongrass, are a personal preference. There are as many varieties of Curry Devil as there are families cooking it; the same can be said of *ayam buah keluak*. Whenever there is a discussion as to which version is the best, take my advice, agree to disagree.

One thing is for certain though – there is no curry powder in Curry Devil! The *rempah* or spice mix is made from pounded or ground ingredients like chillis, *belachan* (salted prawn paste), turmeric, galangal and candlenuts, as well as prepared mustard and vinegar. The meat is usually chicken, with other cooked meats according to your taste. We like Chinese-style roast pork in ours.

My grandmother's recipe for Curry Devil comes from Malacca. It is different from the Singapore version in that it omits cabbage, and uses cucumber chunks. The dish can be made a day in advance – in fact it is better this way, to allow the flavours to develop – and the cucumber can be added shortly before serving.✽

CURRY DEVIL

2 chickens (about 1.2kg each) cut into pieces. Marinate with light soya sauce and pepper. Fry lightly and set aside (this step is optional).

Rempah (spice mixture)

10 garlic
26 shallots
1 sq inch (2.5cm) *belachan*
7 *buah keras* (candlenuts)
30-40 dried chillis, discard the seeds
3 inch (8 cm) *lengkuas* (galangal) peeled
2 inch (5 cm) *kunyit* (turmeric)
2-2 1/2 inch ginger
4 tbsp *ketumbar* (ground coriander seeds)
1 1/2 cucumber, discard the seeds and cut into chunks
3 potatoes cut up
1 big onion cut into wedges
1 strip roast pork cut into large pieces
2 tsp powdered mustard (we use Coleman's)

2 tbsp white vinegar
1 1/2 tsp light soya sauce

Garnishes

Finely sliced shallots (fried)
Sliced garlic (fried)
Strips of red chilli
Strips of fresh ginger

Heat oil in *kuali* or pot. Fry the *rempah* and ground coriander until fragrant, add the chicken and mix well. Add enough water to cover, put in the roast pork, and simmer. After about 15 minutes add the potatoes and continue cooking. When almost done, add the large onion pieces. Finally add the mustard, vinegar and soya sauce to taste.

Before serving, stir in the cucumber pieces, and garnish with fried shallots and garlic, then add chilli and ginger strips.



FOUR ON FOUR: SOYA BEAN SAUCE

Baba Emeric Lau spends an evening getting saucy



The food tasting panel (from left): Helen Lim of Rumah Kim Choo, Anthony Heng of Katong Catering, gourmand and passionate cook Elizabeth Lee and Bebe Seet of Rumah Bebe.

This is the second in a series of four reports on a food-tasting session organised by *The Peranakan*.

We gathered four noted gourmets – Mr Anthony Heng and Nyonyas Bebe Seet, Elizabeth Lee and Helen Lim – and also trawled the supermarket aisles for various food items commonly used in Peranakan cooking. The aim was to sample these condiments in as objective a fashion as possible to uncover their merits.

The products were tasted blind; our tasters then graded each one according to a set of criteria, and were also asked to include additional comments as they fancied. The tasters were not privy to one another's evaluations until after the tasting session. In between each sampling, white bread, water and ground coffee was used to cleanse the palate and nasal passages.

Four products were selected: dark soya sauce (*tauyu*), soya bean sauce (*tauchio*), sweet sauce (*tichio*) and rice vermicelli (*bee hoon*). In this issue, we disclose the results of the soya bean sauce (*tauchio*) tasting.



- 1 Kacang Soya Tertapai (Choon Thye Sauce Factory)
2. Singlong Preserved Coarse Soya Beans
3. Tou Cheong (Tong Foong Sauce Factory)

Sauce 1 elicited the most extreme responses – our panellists loved some of its qualities, but found it quite lacking in others. They all agreed that it lacked flavour. Bebe Seet



found it to be above average in terms of consistency and smoothness.

Sauce 2 was praised for its colour (Bebe Seet) and appealing fragrance (Anthony Heng). It was also found to be of an appropriate level of saltiness. Both Helen Lim and Elizabeth Lee stated that it would be good for dipping, especially as an accompaniment to Teochew



porridge, though Lee said it might be a tad too salty to use in cooking.

Our panel found Sauce 3 ideal for cooking as its fragrance was not overpowering. Helen Lim listed nyonya *chap chye*, *kueh pie tee* and *babi pongteh* as three of the dishes she would like to use it in, while Elizabeth Lee agreed that this sauce was good for Peranakan cooking in general. ❄



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THE PHOENIX GETS A NEW NEST ON THE WEB

Baba Edmond Wong previews our Association's new premises in cyberspace

Look out for a better, faster and more user-friendly website by the year's end!

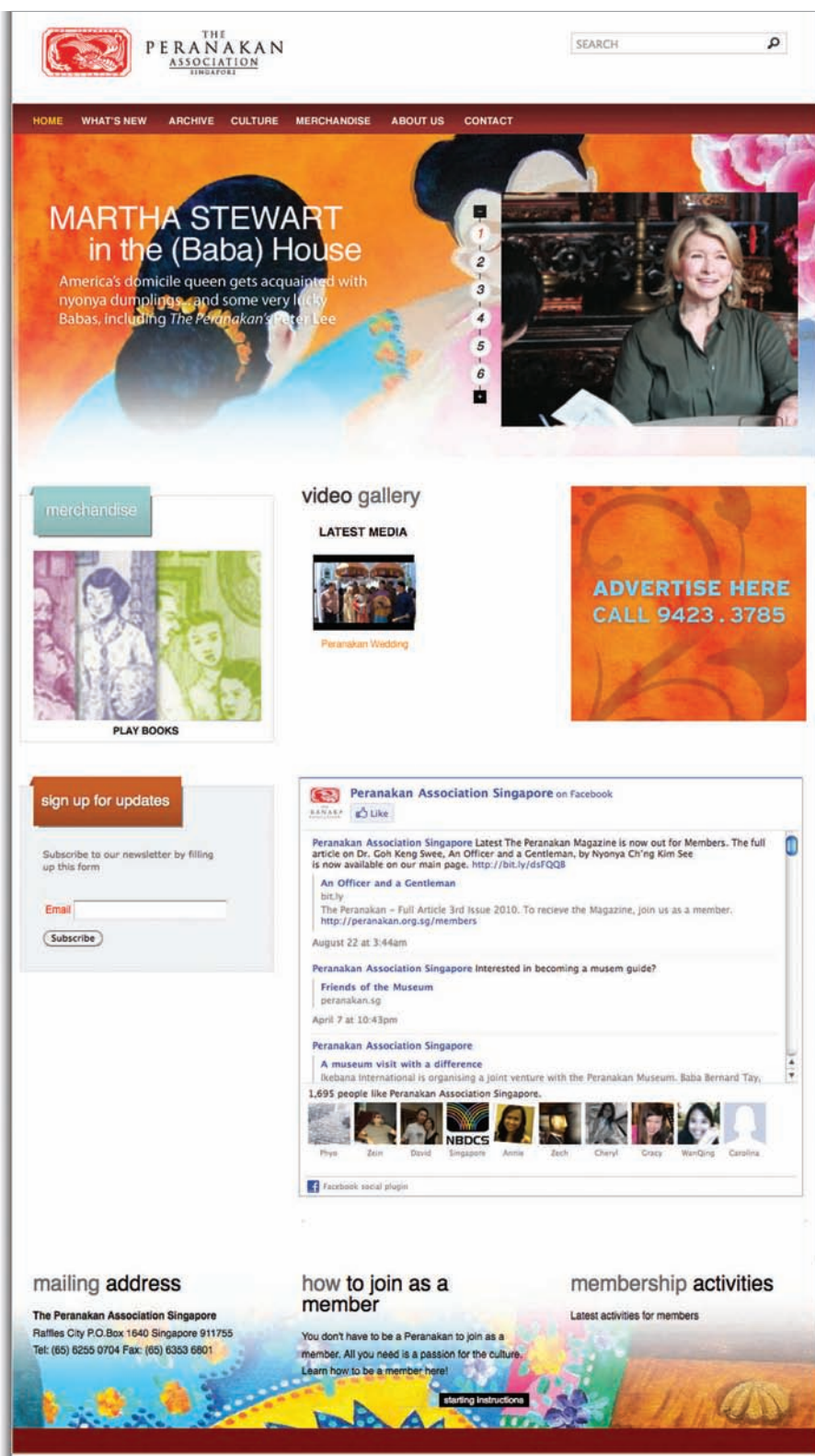
Over the past couple of years, public interest in Peranakan culture has risen significantly. Sustaining this interest will be crucial. A key outreach mechanism will be in the realm of cyberspace, through The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) website.

The website is being upgraded to incorporate new media functionalities such as broadcasting of video recordings including interviews, performances, cooking and much more. A series of carefully structured online articles will be streamed to enhance the reading experience and stimulate online interest amongst the general public.

Previous issues of *The Peranakan* magazine will be archived online to enable accessibility through the internet without having to download large files. Articles can be easily converted to e-files in formats such as PDF.

A more efficient search function will enable quick search of information, from your favourite recipe to historical features or events of importance.

Constructive feedback or suggestions to enhance our website capabilities are always welcomed. Please do not hesitate to send your ideas to peranakantown@peranakan.org.sg.



A mock-up of the new home page



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LITTLE NYONYAS

Desmond Sim takes up his artist's palette on Children's Day

Desmond Sim paints colourful acrylics of his gang of little nyonyas and babas in scenes of a carefree childhood forgotten. Delight in the flurry of expressions that all proud Mamas and Papas want to see in their kids: cherub-cheeked, happy and well-fed. Desmond takes a different stance this time with close-cropped round faces and googly-eyed looks in his latest series. Some are seen dressing up the cat, or crying with duck poop on their heads!

Desmond's works can be seen at Utterly Art, 229A South Bridge Road (2nd Level) Singapore 058778. Call Keng Hock for appointments at tel: 6226 2605 or 94872006.

*E-mail: utterlyart@pacific.net.sg**



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NOT IN THE LEAST BIT UNRELIABLE

Baba Emeric Lau reviews Gunong Sayang's centennial production, *Pagar Makan Padi* (Unreliable)



The grand finale with the Bibik Singers, the Dendang Irama Band and the cast of the play.

Pagar Makan Padi is a Malay proverb that translates literally as “fence eating paddy”. It refers to a situation where a person entrusted with protecting something has instead destroyed it. I found it to be a rather disturbing title, and prepared myself for a show with darker

themes than Gunong Sayang's (GSA) offerings of the last few years.

In fact, I was bursting with curiosity – this was to be Baba Frederick Soh's first venture as a playwright, the first time GSA was staging a play at the Drama Centre, and, to top it all, its 100th

Gunong Sayang Association Productions

1985	<i>Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih</i> (Let Bygones be Bygones)	2000	<i>Chueh It Chap Goh</i> (Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining)
1986	<i>Lepas Jembatan Buang Tongkat</i> (The Ingrates), <i>Menyesal</i> (Regrets)	2001	<i>Hujan Balek Ke Langit</i> (The Impossible)
1987	<i>Zaman Sekarang</i> (Times Have Changed)	2002	<i>Anak Udang Anak Tenggiri</i> (Blood is Thicker Than Water)
1989	<i>Biji Mata Mak</i> (Apple of His Mother's Eye)	2003	<i>Kipas Chendana</i> (Sandalwood Fan)
1990	<i>Tak Sangkah</i> (The Unexpected)	2004	<i>Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih</i> (Let Bygones be Bygones)
1991	<i>Sudah Di Janji</i> (Fated)	2005	<i>Belom Mati Belom Tau</i> (The Unpredictable)
1992	<i>Naseb</i> (Fate)	2007	<i>Mama Rosa</i> (Grandma Rosa)
1993	<i>Salah Sangkah</i> (Misunderstood)	2008	<i>Makchim</i> (The Stepmother)
1995	<i>Manis Manis Pahit</i> (Bitter Sweet Memories)	2009	<i>Ayer Pasang Ayer Surut</i> (Ebbs and Flow)
1996	<i>Kalu Jodoh Tak Mana Lari</i> (Destiny of Love)	2010	<i>Pagar Makan Padi</i> (Unreliable)
1997	<i>Bulan Purnama</i> (An Auspicious Full Moon)		
1999	<i>Janji Perot</i> (Pre-Birth Pact)		



anniversary production! With theatre veteran Tony Quek in the director's seat, the play definitely looked promising. Would there be a marked departure from the light-hearted dramas synonymous with GSA?

Happily, this play checked all the right boxes. For one thing, it was set in the present day – just to see this done was an immense relief: why should Peranakan dramas always be set in times past? Setting it in the present subtly showed that Peranakans are confident their culture is alive and well today. The audience was also tickled when a familiar refrain from a Lady Gaga pop song was used as the ring tone of a character's mobile phone.

Nonetheless, the living room set, which remained unchanged throughout, comprised the usual selection of choice antiques. Both characterisation and plot also stuck closely to the traditions of Wayang Peranakan. An elderly matriarch, Bibik Alice Oei, frets over her family line and decides to adopt a baby, Tommy, when her son, Roy, and his wife, Nelly, remain childless despite many years of marriage. Soon after, Roy and Nelly have a son, Robert, and a daughter, Daisy. Nelly does not regard Tommy as a part of the family, while Robert abuses his adopted brother. The situation in the house deteriorates when it appears that Tommy has stolen some money from Bibik Alice. Revelations occur when the culprit is revealed and Tommy discovers the identity of his mother.

GSA staples Ming, Jessie Cheang and Mabel Lee in their respective roles as Tachi Mary Oei, and the servants, Ah Kim and Ah Mui, provided

fantastic comic relief. Cheang was particularly charming as an Amah who spouted Baba Malay with a lisp and Cantonese accent. Together with the rest of the energetic cast, the show just about bounced along. Great pacing, with all the scenes uninterrupted by musical interludes or extra turns, ensured that the narrative was easily followed.

Still, *The Bibik Singers* proved indispensable in lifting the mood for the finale where Bibik Oei celebrates her birthday. Babas Cedric Tan and Aaron Loo of Malacca made a guest appearance and the entire audience joined the cast in singing

Left: Ah Mui doing the sanggol for matriarch Alice Oei.

Right: Director Tony Quek (seated right) with members of the cast.



A scene from Kaseh Ibu Tiri (Stepmother's Love), 1958, from the program booklet. It is interesting to note that the living room set from the classic production comprises modern furniture.

a selection of our favourite songs. Resident band, Dendang Irama, provided the 'live' music. Indeed, the rousing joget and sing-along was a grand celebration that marked how far both the GSA and Peranakan culture at large have come. GSA President, Baba Victor Goh, traces the golden years and revival of Wayang Peranakan in the show's programme booklet, along with several archive-worthy photos from past productions. The genre reached its zenith in the 1950s and 60s, and since the revival of the 1980s, GSA has mounted 23 productions – a truly remarkable artistic contribution to Singapore theatre that all Peranakans can be proud of! ❄️

IF THESE WALLS COULD SPEAK ...

Baba David Neo embarks on a journey of diasporic Chinese residences

Ronald G Knapp, a Professor Emeritus who wrote *Chinese Houses: the Architectural Heritage of a Nation* (2006) and *Chinese Bridges: Living Architecture from China's Past* (2008), takes us on a fascinating journey exploring the eclectic architecture of Chinese houses across Southeast Asia in his latest book. It is erudite and gorgeous, with its sumptuous depiction, description and history of grand (diasporic) Chinese residences.

The book is divided into two parts: the first discusses the migration patterns of Chinese in Southeast Asia, their architectural styles and influences, and provides the background to Chinese settlements in Malacca, Singapore, Penang, Medan-Deli, Phuket, Selangor, Batavia/Jakarta, Semarang,

Thonburi, Bangkok, Songkhla, Vietnam and the Philippines. It concludes with houses in China built by overseas Chinese after the 1900s.

The second part walks us through as many as 40 grand residences (some in sad dereliction), providing whatever

available history of the houses and families – and as we know, most illustrious Peranakan family histories are colourful and intriguing! Among these, familiar to many Singaporean Peranakans are the shophouses of Heeren Street and the Chee Mansion in Malacca, the shophouses and terrace houses in Singapore and the recently restored Baba House museum.

But what I found more interesting was the unfamiliar – the Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese and Filipino “Peranakan” past, styles and variations.

For instance the *sangleys* (of pure Chinese ancestry) in the Philippines and the Indische-style residence, which is a hybrid of Javanese, Dutch and Chinese influences, sometimes called *landhuis* (villa or country house). Significant examples are the Siek family home that has been fully restored and transformed into a Buddhist retreat, Prasada Mandala Dharma (in Parakan, Indonesia); and the Tjioe family residence that has become St Maria de Fatima Catholic Church (in Jakarta, Indonesia).

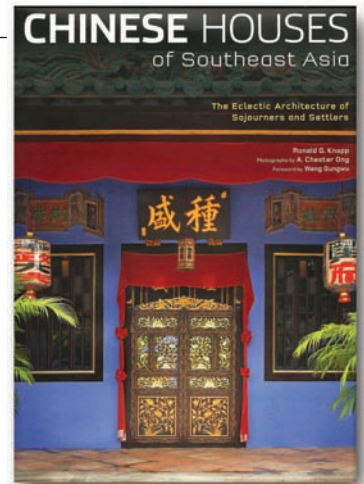
They all testify to the eclecticism and cosmopolitanism of Southeast Asia. The curious St Maria de Fatima Catholic Church with its Chinese screen doors, red beams and pillars, and *qilins* guarding its entrance resembles a Chinese temple rather than a church.

However, even though more than half of the houses featured and discussed are outside the former Straits Settlements, I found information on the Chinese in Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines (and even Indonesia) lacking. I am also curious about Chinese Peranakan houses in Rangoon as it is another city that apparently has housed a significant pocket of the Chinese population. This uneven representation is very much dictated by the intensive research that has been conducted in the Straits Settlements in the last few decades.

One of the highlights of this book is the conclusion, witnessing the excess and indulgence of the grand residences and manors in China built by overseas Chinese. The book comes full circle showing how overseas Chinese resolutely dream of amassing wealth and not returning to their homeland shabbily (these were more the *Cina totoks* than Peranakans who are more rooted in Southeast Asia). This section shows “a glorious homecoming in splendid clothes”, *yijin huanxiang/yijin ronggui*, in terms of ostentatious Chinese homes in Fujian and Guangdong. These homes embodied the ultimate Chinese desire of living comfortably in the company of the extended family and having “five generations under one roof” (the idea of *ho mia*).

The book is a good read and has deepened my understanding of our sojourner and settler forebears – the Peranakan and diasporic Chinese experience.*

Chinese Houses of Southeast Asia: The Eclectic Architecture of Sojourners and Settlers by Ronald G Knapp. Published by Tuttle Publishing in 2010.



The Qiu family, who amassed their wealth in Batavia, built an ostentatious and eclectic Lian Fang Lou or “Hall of Amalgamated Fragrances” in Meixian, Guangdong. Combining Classical Revival styles of Baroque and Rococo, it has 52 rooms, 14 reception halls, eight skywells and an eco-friendly “green roof” or roof garden covered with grass that absorbs solar radiation and keeps the rooms cool, quite uncharacteristic of a Chinese residence.

TAKING PARIS WITH PANACHE

Baba Emeric Lau gets happily wed in the City of Romance – five times over!

This was an opportunity like no other. For Peranakans, the traditional wedding procession with seronee, lanterns, umbrellas, *chaiki* and bridal couple, *sangkek-um*, *pak-chindek* plus family members in tow is a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle, mounted to trumpet a new union and display their families' finery.

There is no other image more emblematic of the 12-day wedding than the procession. For contemporary lovebirds, nothing says “you’re the ONE” more than taking off together for a holiday in Paris, the City of Romance.

How about combining the two? A Peranakan wedding procession in Paris – what a dream! And it certainly was no less than a dream come true for me to have the honour of playing the groom in a wedding procession staged at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, smack beside the Eiffel Tower.

It all came about through a desire to further strengthen relations between Singapore and France. The two countries decided to mount the *Singapour Festivarts* in Paris to showcase Singapore culture to the French. Several government bodies, led by the Singapore Ministry of Information, Culture and the Arts, requested that The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) organise an entertainment item to add drama to the various opening events for the Musée du Quai Branly's *Baba Bling* exhibition,



Posing with Prof. Tommy Koh.

Baba Bling poster in French.



EVENTS

which was to be mounted over there, along with selected star pieces from Singapore's Peranakan Museum.

Needless to say, we were completely enthralled from the outset; Peranakan culture was going truly international. We can say for certain that this is the first time the culture has been shown off on such a scale outside Southeast Asia. Moreover, our stage would be Paris – a city widely recognised as the Cultural Capital of the World!

Preparations began in early 2010 via the remarkable liaising and organising skills of Nyonya Bebe Seet. Happily, it all proved more than worthwhile.

The Straits Times Life! coverage, 7 Oct 2010.

Our chaiki bearers had to watch out for low ceilings!



The 23 representatives from TPAS, which included doyen G T Lye in the role of *sangkek um*, flew direct to Paris on 30 September. For the next five days, we lived in a whirlwind wonderland of rehearsals, performances and taking in the sights, sounds and (but of course) fine cuisine that the city



readily yielded. For me, this experience will remain unforgettable.

Sadly, Mdm Kwa Geok Choo, the mother of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, passed away, necessitating his abrupt return to Singapore while on tour in Europe. The PM would otherwise have been guest-of-honour at the official opening of the exhibition. Minister for MICA, Lui Tuck Yew, stepped in, while the French were represented by Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand. Other familiar figures in attendance included Professor Tommy Koh and our very own Baba Dick Lee.

The wedding procession, tea ceremony and Singapore medley sung by The Peranakan Voices (TPV) were greeted with enthusiastic applause. Many guests openly expressed admiration for the high level of detailing on the Peranakan costumes and artefacts. Such was the delight expressed that even the oldest amongst us forgot all about the sore feet and aching jaws from standing and smiling for the countless cameras pointed our way.

We enacted the wedding procession and tea ceremony a total of five times for various audiences – friends and supporters of the museum, the French and

international media at the official opening and a VIP dinner reception.

Other activities included cooking demonstrations by Violet Oon and Bebe's beading sessions.

For myself, this trip also proved a perfect chance to bond with other TPAS members.



I managed to learn much from the older members, and forge stronger friendships with those from my generation. Helping one another out backstage, trooping out late after the evening performance to look for a promising makan place to try out, cracking jokes and laughing till our sides ached – these treasured moments are really the intangible elements that will anchor and buoy our culture not just across the globe, but across time. We make it ours, and with panache. ❀



Left: The enthusiastic French media were literally in our faces!

Right: The Peranakan Voices at the Baba Bling exhibition.

The exhibition, including the million-bead tablecloth, is readied ahead of opening day.



The creative French team made large inflatable versions of our porcelainware. Visitors strolling in the museum grounds took much delight in chancing upon them.



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FROM KAGOSHIMA TO PARIS

Baba Bling's Paris opening rounds off a rousing year for Main Wayang, reports Baba Richard Tan

The year 2010 has been another wonderful year for the Main Wayang Company (MWC), reaching out to international audiences and travelling to exciting corners of the globe to promote our Peranakan culture and heritage.

The icing on the cake was Paris, where we performed the wedding pageant and *joget* from 23 - 27 October at the Baba Bling exhibition at the Quai Branly Museum. As part of the rites and rituals, museum guests were invited to become 'parents of the bride' during the tea ceremony or try out some fancy *joget* footwork. Our Parisian friends were happily dancing away and taking 'family' photos with our wedding entourage.

At home, our distinct traditional attire (*baju panjang*, *sarong kebaya* and *baju lokchuan*) has become very popular and notably, relevant to the younger generation. This is evident from the 100 or more teens and young adult volunteers from our youth group who count them as 'must-haves' in their wardrobe of hip and fashionable items.

After the Youth Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, many of them are continuing with their new found Peranakan passion. They have joined our Facebook group totalling to date, some 900 members and still growing!

More overseas invitations brought MWC to the ASEAN-Japan Handicraft Fair in Kagoshima (15 - 21 September). With the endorsement of Singapore Tourism Board, we presented a thematic Peranakan



The Main Wayang wedding pageant at the Baba Bling opening in Paris.

'show & tell' programme. Nyonya Rita Tan charmed the Japanese with her "flowery" demonstrations of *bunga rampay* (potpourri), *bunga chot* (floral hair accessories), *bunga sulam* (kebaya embroidery) and *bunga manek* (beadwork). Nyonya Nadia Kang, Baba Alvin Oon and Baba Richard Tan performed lively Peranakan songs culminating in an interactive *joget*. Our mini 'Baba wedding' with rich costumes and wedding rituals enthralled the local audience. We even won a faithful following of fascinated fans who kept returning the next few days to join in our merry making!

Earlier on 11 September, MWC was invited by the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM) to perform at their 110th Grand Anniversary gala dinner. For the 38-strong contingent that travelled to our favourite Peranakan town Malacca, it was sheer *makan* and a jolly time! *



Left: Jiving to the beat of the joget with Parisian youngsters.



Right: Rousing the crowd at Kagoshima.

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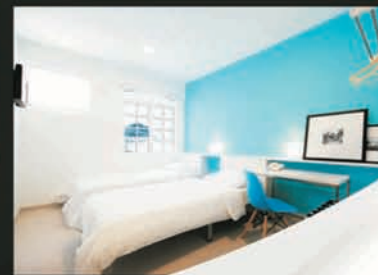
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NYONYA IN VOGUE

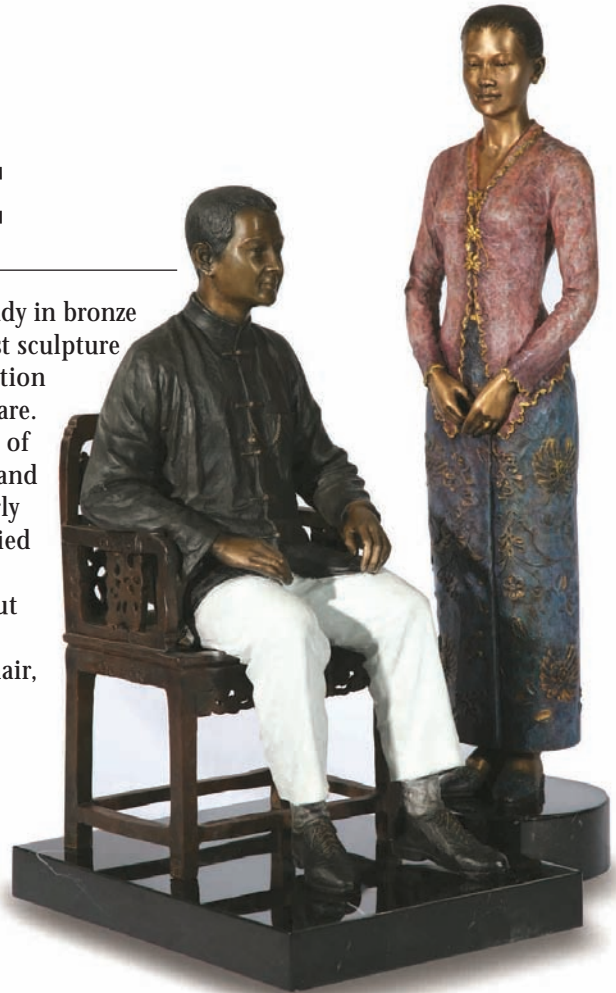
Poised, calm and with a dignified grace. This Peranakan lady in bronze was the focus of local artist Lim Leong Seng whose latest sculpture series attracted much attention to his recent solo exhibition called *Reminiscing Forward*, at The Chapel at Sculpture Square.

The exhibition, his seventh, showcased nostalgia in a host of sculptures representing aspects of Singapore's rich historical and cultural heritage. The scenes re-enacted the livelihoods of early immigrants, in particular the various tradesmen who once plied along the busy Kallang River.

Significantly, all eight works in Lim's nyonya series sold out with more asking. The nyonya sculpture is matched by Lim's well-executed rendition of the baba seated on a blackwood chair, which also garnered its share of interest. Lim will be looking into more projects that involve Peranakan cultures.

While equally adept at painting in oils, Lim, 60, began sculpturing in 1980 and is well known for his works on Singapore's heritage. Among his bronzes on Singapore street life is the *Chinese Procession & Indian Settlers* at Telok Ayer Green, commissioned by the Singapore Tourism Board.

The exhibition, organised by Galerie Sogan & Art, ran from 2 – 25 October. ✽



Sculptor Lim Leong Seng immortalises the nyonya and baba in bronze.



ISLE OF GOLD

Sumatra: *Isle of Gold*, the first international touring show on Sumatran culture at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), had striking similarities with the Peranakan heritage of Singapore and the rest of South-east Asia.

Chinese settlers had been going to Sumatra over the centuries, resulting in sizeable Chinese communities by the 19th century, working as artisans, businessmen, administrators and tax collectors, among other professions. The inter-marriages between the Chinese and locals helped to spread their traditions, seen through the cross-adoption of both Chinese and local designs and techniques in textiles, clothing, jewellery and other materials on display. For example, the *rebana*, a type of local hand-drum, incorporates traditional Chinese symbols such as the Chinese phoenix and *qilin* motifs.

"This cross-cultural exhibition is especially significant for Singapore. Sumatra was a point of arrival for new ideas and beliefs, which gives the island a significant place within Southeast Asia's history," said Dr Alan Chong, Director of the ACM.

The exhibition, featuring over 300 objects, ran from 30 July to 7 November 2010. ✽

A Sumatran wedding ensemble on show at the ACM had striking similarities with the Singapore Peranakan style.

EVENTS

BEADS GALORE IN MIRI

Nyonya Cheah Hwei-fe'n shares her expertise at the first Borneo beads conference

Miri, on Sarawak's north eastern coast, sits within the heartland of the Malaysian state's bead-using communities and close to the Niah Caves, a prehistoric burial site at which ancient beads have been found. It was thus a meaningful choice for the venue of the inaugural Borneo International Beads Conference (BIBCo) held on 9-10 October 2010. I was invited to present on the history of nyonya beadwork and Bebe Seet generously found time in her hectic schedule to demonstrate nyonya beading.

Organised by Sarawak's Craithub, the conference brought together bead-makers, beadworkers, collectors, researchers and curators from the United States, India, Kuwait, Australia and Southeast Asia. The programme offered something for everyone. Beading demonstrations generated interest and some exhibitors at the bead bazaar quickly sold out their beadwork. Ten informative presentations spread over two days

Kelabit dancers at the Gala dinner. Guests were decked in their best beaded headgear, heirloom items which are highly valued. Photo by H Cheah.



underlined the diversity and dynamism of bead cultures in Southeast Asia. Topics ranged from archaeological beads, historical beadwork in Southeast Asia, and the personal stories behind individual heirloom beads to the modern manufacture of millefiori beads in Java and their use in contemporary jewellery. One of the highlights for me was to see the antique beads and exquisite beadwork that several speakers brought to accompany their talks.

At the finale, Madam Usha Krishnan, head of the World Crafts Council launched BIBCo's bead and beadwork competition. So, creative bibiks, nyonyas and babas, join in the challenge with your most exquisite and vibrant nyonya beadwork! ✽

OVER THE MOON IN MELBOURNE

Nyonya Ivy Lee-Chan Gek Kim learns to make lanterns at the Moon Cake Festival

Children were the focus of the Mooncake Festival this year when a capacity crowd of 75 people comprising members of The Peranakan Association Australia, Inc (Melbourne) and their guests gathered at the Box Hill Lions' Club Hall on 18 September.

The happy lantern-makers.



The children took delight in making lanterns and listening to tales of the Mooncake Festival. Clara Chan gathered the children around her and, accompanied by beautiful illustrations on powerpoint slides prepared by her daughter Stephanie, she enthralled the children with her animated renditions of the legend of Chang'er.

Guest instructor Margaret from the Chinese Museum in Little Bourke Street took the young (as well as the young-at-heart) through the steps to make colourful lanterns for the occasion.

Lunch was a scrumptious spread of chicken satay, *nasi kuning*, *chicken curry*, *ang ku kueh*, *kueh gangang* and, of course, mooncakes. The children got their way with chicken nuggets and fishballs.

In another exciting development, Association President, Alfred Chi has been invited to help start the Peranakan Association in Sydney. Current activities in the Melbourne association include choir and dance sessions as well as a monthly *kasot manek manek* class. ✽

OH YEAH, OH YEAH, OH YEAH, HEY!

Nyonya Gwen Ong jogets with the young Olympians



The Peranakan Voices (TPV) breezed through a hectic week from 14 - 21 August. That was when the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) coincided with the Singapore Heritage Festival. Our choir sang on 14 August at the atrium of Centerpoint Shopping Centre and on 20 August at Suntec City. The enthusiastic crowds at both venues included tourists who gamely clapped along and tapped their toes to familiar tunes.

The TPV proudly held the torch for Peranakan heritage and culture in lively renditions of popular tunes which were probably heard for the first time by the sporting contingents at the YOG@Singapore Heritage Festival. The performance was recorded by Chinese broadcasting station CCTV and would have been beamed to a vast audience in China soon after.*

The Peranakan Voices welcomes new members to sign on. Please email pv@peranakan.org.sg for more information. Would you like The Peranakan Voices to perform at your event or function? Please email alvin@busads.com.sg.



The Peranakan Voices enthralled audiences at HeritageFest.

Kebayas and the YOG mascots on parade.

Being Peranakans and members of The Peranakan Association Singapore, Ivy Soh and I were proud to promote our culture by demonstrating beadwork at the Singapore Heritage Festival on Saturday, 21 August, at the Singapore Management University premises.

It was division of labour as Ivy (left) showed the art of our beadwork while I (second from left) explained the finer details of our craft. Ivy displayed 30 pieces from her personal collection. *



BEAU OF THE BALL

San Francisco-based Nyonya Daphne Chia-Wang pays tribute to her brother Baba Felix Chia Thian Hoe while Masters student Brandon Lim is mesmerised by Felix Chia's iconic works in Peranakan theatre

MY KO CHAIR by Nyonya Daphne Chia-Wang

I was born the sixth child in the next cycle of the Year of the Rabbit after Felix. He was therefore my Ko Besar (eldest brother) or *Ko Chair* as I have always known him.

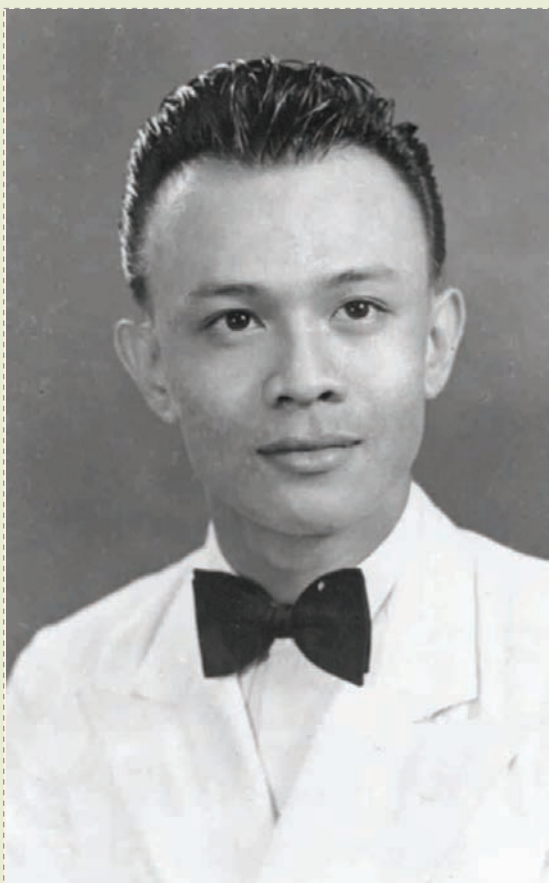
Despite the big gap of 12 years between us in age, we were always able to communicate in patois or in English which was virtually our mother tongue as all of us went to English medium schools in those colonial times.

My *Ko Chair* as we would say in Peranakan, was "handsome *sekali*", or as some might even describe him especially in his tuxedo as God's gift to women! He was the beau of the ball at the parties he and our cousins of his age group would sometimes organise at their house which had two connecting doors to ours.

Felix Chia in a tuxedo. His sister Daphne considered him "Handsome skali", c. 1950s.

Too young to be in the party, all I could do was to watch them dance the night away! *Ko Chair* would pick his belle of the ball, sweep her off her feet and waltz away with her to the strains of *The Blue Danube* from a 78 rpm *His Master's Voice* record played on a well cranked up HMV gramophone. When it came to the tango, he would glide with the dexterity of a professional ballroom dancer from one end of the dance floor to the other in tandem with an equally competent partner. It left me riveted!

Thus was I exposed to the beauty of ballroom dancing which I grew to love and still do up to this day thanks to my *Ko Chair*. If fairy tales were made up of Prince Charming dancers, Felix was certainly one of them in post-war Singapore of the late Forties



FELIX CHIA THIAN HOE (1927 – 2010)

Felix Chia Thian Hoe was the first of eight children born to Chia How Ghee and Lee Joo Gim in the Year of the Rabbit in 1927 in Emerald Hill, a bastion of Peranakan culture in the then-British colonial Singapore. He was a grandson of Chia Hood Sang, a younger brother of Chia Hood Theam, comprador of the Mercantile Bank. Through his mother's side he is a descendant of Chee Yam Chuan, from one of the oldest Peranakan Chinese clans in Malacca.

Like a great number of Babas, Felix spent his childhood years in Emerald Hill, a known Peranakan enclave in the early 20th century. Felix had his primary school education in the Singapore Chinese Girls' School (SCGS, then called the *Sekolah Boon Keng* after its founder Lim Boon Keng), where he was part of the last batch of boys admitted into the primary school classes in 1933. He would later move on to study at Anglo-Chinese School (ACS).

Felix was 83 at the time of his passing on 12 July 2010. He is survived by his wife Leong How Fong and his three children, Dorothy, Melvyn and Allen.— Brandon Lim

into the Fifties when this kid sister of his was inspired to put on her dancing shoes to waltz and rumba.

The revival of interest in Peranakan culture and heritage that Felix catalysed in the early Eighties is synonymous with the very first play ever written in our Peranakan patois by him in post war Singapore. This was the famed *Pileh Menantu* (Choosing a Daughter-in-Law) play which won the applause of one and all in official and social circles in Singapore as well as in the wider Peranakan community in the region.

“Those were the days my friends, we thought they’d never end...” but end they must as they have for Felix Chia. What will not end is his legacy of reviving a great cultural heritage. He did it not from a university campus but the campus of his creative mind. This was out of his strong desire to revive interest in the culture of his inheritance which might be near extinction but for *Pileh Menantu*, *The Baba*, *Ala Sayang!* and the many other books he wrote.



Felix Chia with his wife Leong How Fong, and friends. c. 1950s.

WAYANG MAGIC

By Brandon Lim

To many non-Peranakans such as myself, Felix’s name will always be synonymous with the integral role he played in promoting the revival of Peranakan culture in the mid-1980s. It was Felix who wrote iconic books of Peranakan history such as *The Babas* (1980), *Ala Sayang!* (1983), *Reminiscences* (1984), and *The Babas Revisited* (1993) – works that piqued the interest of the general Singapore public.

Ever the passionate and talented writer, he also put his writing skills to good use by writing several Wayang Peranakan scripts like *Pileh Menantu* (1984), *Laki Tua Bini Muda* (1985), *Tua Poh Sio Poh* (1991) and *Mari Kita Main Wayang* (1994). The staging of *Pileh Menantu* met with so much success that many often acknowledge the play as the single event that kick-started the trend of Peranakan revivalism back in 1984. Regardless of whom I spoke to about the 1980s *Wayang Peranakan*, Felix’s name has always been at the tip of everyone’s tongue – a testament to his



impact on Peranakan theatre.

It is more than his achievements, however, that we should remember Felix by. In the course of writing this obituary, I had the wonderful opportunity of speaking to many people who knew Felix personally. I asked them to share some of their thoughts about Felix, not as an

Felix Chia (left) with Dr & Mrs Wee Kim Wee and the cast of *Mari Kita Main Wayang*, 1994.

IN MEMORIAM

Felix Chia (centre) with the female cast members of Pileh Menantu, including Mrs Mah Beng Guan (Wee Lek Neo) who played the role of the matriarch Mama Jambol (third from right), 1984.



established playwright or author, but as a person ... and these are the accolades:

Richard Tan, director of Main Wayang: "I remember [Felix] as a man with a booming, loud and clear voice who spoke wonderful Baba patois. He often came by my grandma's home in Joo Chiat Road to play mahjong and drink with my grandma."

William Gwee, writer and Peranakan authority: "I met Felix when he launched *The Babas* in 1980. He must have felt very proud to have been the first one to have written about [the Peranakan community]. Despite his success, however, he was always gallant enough to admit he didn't necessarily know everything about the Babas."

Alvin Tan director of The Necessary Stage: "[Felix] was ahead of his time ... and was a joy and

inspiration to collaborate with. He did not let the community's outlook towards certain matters limit his experimental zeal. He was a bold, creative and imaginative theatre maker; a maverick of his time."

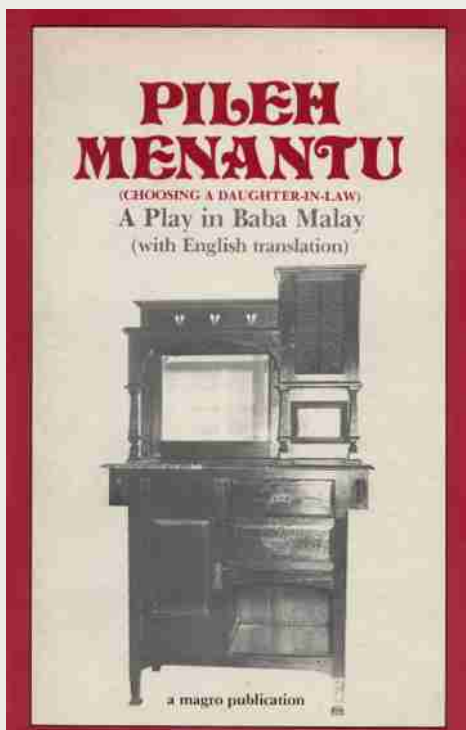
Cecilia Ong, art consultant and director of Pileh Menantu: "Felix had a good, quiet way of observing what was taking place during the rehearsals. He never intruded on the

decisions I made and was always supportive of the artistic direction I took. As a director [of *Pileh Menantu*] that's the most important thing you can ask for in a scriptwriter."

We fondly remember Baba Felix Chia as a vibrant, energetic and dedicated individual who brought these qualities to not only his beloved Wayang Peranakan, but also to the lives of the many people he lived and worked with. He will be dearly missed. ✽

Brandon is a Masters student at NUS writing about the 1980s Wayang Peranakan. A non-Peranakan despite having been a 'Joo Chiat boy' for the past 21 years, he owes a debt of gratitude to Felix Chia's books and plays for exposing him to the beauty of Peranakan culture – something he never quite fully appreciated at his doorstep all these years.

Right: A scene from Pileh Menantu, the groundbreaking play that started it all. Mrs Mah Beng Guan in the leading role as matriarch, is seated.



WE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS

1. Ms Wilmur Ang Lee Hoon
2. Ms Seiko Chan Seiko
3. Mdm Gladys Ong Li Ching
4. Mr Seow Teck Chye
5. Mr Robert Tan Eng Kuang
6. Mrs Hedy Tan
7. Mr Ronney Tan Koon Siang
8. Mr Rudy Yohanes /
Yauw Tju Kuang
9. Mrs Regina Tan Kheng Sim
10. Mr Timothy Seow
11. Mr Lionel Chee Beng Liat
12. Ms Joan Khaw
13. Ms Janet Wee Chui Neo

OBITUARY

Our deepest condolences to the families of our members who have passed on:

1. Mr Chia Cheong Fook
2. Mr Felix Chia
3. Mrs Helen Josephine de Souza

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE 110TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER & DANCE

For this year's D&D, the focus returns to the ones who matter the most: YOU, our valued members. Our anniversary is an occasion to get together and celebrate Peranakan culture - we hope that even more members can join us with the reduced cost of seats.

Members enjoy a special, subsidised price of \$38 per seat. Non-members are most welcome at a still-affordable rate of \$58. Separate tickets will be issued for members and non-members – please bring your tickets to the dinner for verification.

Seats are very limited. Only 40 tables are available. Book your seats early! Contact Geok at 6255-0704.

Date: Thursday, 2 December 2010

Time: 7.30 pm to 11.00 pm

Venue: Singapore Chinese Chamber of
Commerce Auditorium

47 Hill Street, Singapore 179365

Price: Member \$38.00

Guest - \$58.00

Food: Peranakan Buffet

Entertainment: 'Live' band & joget

Programme: Games and lucky draws

Dress code: Peranakan attire



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THE PERANAKAN GUIDE • SINGAPORE

MUSEUMS



Peranakan Museum. See the world's first national Peranakan Museum with the most comprehensive and finest collection of Peranakan artefacts. Be delighted by the vibrant and colourful culture of the Babas and Nyonyas. Singapore's newest boutique museum examines the centres of Peranakan culture in Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and traces its links to as far as Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

Peranakan Museum, 39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941.

website: www.peranakanmuseum.sg

Email: nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg

Tel: +65 6332 2982.

National Museum of Singapore. The museum's Singapore History Gallery pays tribute to the contributions of the pioneering Peranakans. On view are some outstanding artefacts, including the oil portrait of Lim Boon Keng, old photographs, jewellery and sreh sets, as well as the magnificent carved wood hearse of Tan Jiak Kim, which is considered one of the 11 Treasures of the National Museum. *National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road, Tel: 63323659, Opening Hours: 10am to 6pm Daily (Singapore History Gallery), 10am to 9pm Daily (Singapore Living Galleries), Admission \$10 (adults), \$5 (senior citizens above 60), \$5 (students, Nsmen), Free admission to the Singapore Living Galleries from 6pm to 9pm. http://nationalmuseum.sg.*



Baba House.

This heritage house at 157 Neil Road opened on 4 September 2008. Go back in time to 1928 and experience what a grand Peranakan terraced house would have been like. Owned by the Wee family (whose ancestor

Wee Bin was a mid-19th century shipping magnate) since 1910, the house was sold in 2005 to the National University of Singapore and is now run by NUS Museum. Funds for the purchase and restoration were donated by Agnes Tan, in memory of her father Tun Tan Cheng Lock. *Baba House 157 Neil Road, Singapore.*

Tel: 62275731. Visits are by guided tours. Please call the house for details.

http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba/index.html

Asian Civilisations Museum. The first museum in the region to display a wide range of artefacts from across Asia, the ACM not surprisingly has some important Peranakan treasures. The Mary and Philbert Chin Gallery has some lavish examples of gold jewellery, sreh boxes and other paraphernalia, some encrusted with diamonds, and fine batik textiles from the north coast of Java, all made for the Peranakan market.

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555,

Tel: 63322982, Opening Hours: 9am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 1pm to 7pm (Mondays), Admission \$8 (adults), \$4 (senior citizens and students). http://www.acm.org.sg

LANDMARKS

Blair Plain. A typical Peranakan residential area around Spottiswoode Park, Blair Road and Neil Road which is worth a stroll. Visit Guan Antiques nearby at Kampong Bahru Road, a treasure trove of Peranakan heirlooms.

http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/design_studio/ddsb/blair/study/Blair.html.

Emerald Hill Road. Another interesting residential district showcasing the best of eclectic Peranakan domestic architecture, just off Orchard Road.



Katong and Joo Chiat. Perhaps the nerve centre of Peranakan life in Singapore. In its heyday it was the site of nearby grand seaside villas and elaborate Peranakan terraced houses. The latter can still be seen in a walk along Koon Seng Road. Also visit Peranakan shops such as Katong Antique House (208 East Coast Road) and Rumah Bebe (113 East Coast Road) as well as the great variety of

Peranakan restaurants in the neighbourhood. *http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html. http://www.myjoochiat.com.*

Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street.

One of the first Peranakan enclaves, now occupied by restaurants and offices. Many Peranakans from Malacca moved to this area as soon as the East India Company began to lease out land for sale.



Thian Hock Keng. The oldest Hokkien temple in Singapore was founded in 1821 although the present structure, built without nails, was completed only in 1841. The temple is dedicated to Mazu, the Daoist goddess of the sea and protector of all seamen. Many of the temple's patrons were Peranakan pioneers, such as Tan Tock Seng, who donated \$30,000 for renovations. He also founded the hospital named after him. The Hokkien Huay Kuan, a community organisation for Hokkien people in Singapore was housed at the temple and also helmed by Peranakan pioneers. *Thian Hock Keng, 158 Telok Ayer Street, Tel: 64234616.*

Tan Si Chong Su. Built in 1878, Tan Si Chong Su is the ancestral temple of the Tan clan, and was founded by prominent Baba philanthropists Tan Kim Ching, son of Tan Tock Seng, and Tan Beng Swee, the son of Tan Kim Seng. The first president of the temple, Tan Kim Tian, was a well-known Baba shipping tycoon. The temple consists



of shrines for the ancestral tablets of Tan clansmen, as well as altars to the clan deities. The elaborate stone and wood carvings as well as the swooping ceramic roof finials makes this one of the most elaborate Chinese temples in Singapore, quaintly located amid the gleaming towers of the financial district. *Tan Si Chong Su, 15 Magazine Road.*



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