



the peranakan

ISSUE 3 • 2012



NYONYA MOLEK

Our young nyonyas are no wallflowers!

A POLISHED PERANAKAN EDUCATION
SCGS' true modern-day nyonyas

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RIPE FOR THE PICKING
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Editor's Note: In the previous Issue 2, 2012, of *The Peranakan*, the article "Recording for Posterity", a couple of rows were inadvertently crossed. We reproduce below the correct version.

1906	Khoo Kay Hian	邱繼顯	Tongmenghui member; founder of Kay Hian & Co (earliest Chinese-owned brokerage in Singapore).
1919	See Tiong Wah	薛中华	Municipal Commissioner; Justice of the Peace (J.P.); Comprador of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation; Former President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce; Former President of the Hokkien Huay Kuan.

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COMING SOON!

SENJAKALA (Sunset)

Starring G.T. Lye

Get ready for a sensational performance as the iconic Peranakan Theatre doyen returns to the stage this December.

**6 - 9 December, 2012
Venue to be confirmed**

Watch this space, check our website at peranakan.org.sg or contact The Peranakan Association, Singapore, for updates!

NURTURING NYONYAS

Nyonya Quek Kool Lian, a former teacher and student of Singapore Chinese Girls' School, counts the ways in this Peranakan institution

In my 30 years of teaching at the Singapore Chinese Girls' School (SCGS), I always looked forward to meeting new Secondary One students, some of whom were completely new to our school. During History lessons, I would ask: "Which is the only Peranakan girls' school in Singapore?" And the resounding response would be – "SCGS!"

When SCGS was established in 1899, educational opportunities were pathetic for girls. It was founded by a coterie of enlightened Straits Chinese babas who were troubled by the 1895 defeat of China at the hands of Japan. The full account can be found in *Pieces of Jade and Gold: an Anecdotal History of the Singapore Chinese Girls'*



School, a book launched to mark SCGS' 100th anniversary in 1999.

Dr Lim Boon Keng, one of the school's founders, wrote in the Straits Chinese Magazine of 1899:

A classroom of little nyonyas in their baju panjang in the early 1900s.

Celebrating National Day at SCGS when it was at Emerald Hill Road circa late 1960s. It was a parade of uniforms through the ages. Leading the parade in baju panjang was the oldest ex-pupil of the school with Mrs Nunes, a teacher in the primary school.

in the Library, where glass-topped tables display kebayas and accessories. A selection of books on Peranakan culture is readily available for borrowing.

Walk past the general office and turn left, and you will encounter the Peranakan spice garden with a nutmeg tree. There are also *belimbing* trees, *pandan*, *laksa* leaves and *halia* (ginger) plants and flowers, and *bunga telang* (blue cowpea flowers) for staining *kueh*.

Saunter a little way up the corridor by the koi pond, and the aroma of cooking and baking permeates the air.

Home Economics teacher,

Mrs Florence Phuah, can often be found there teaching our students the art of baking pineapple tarts, making *ikan tumis*, *garam asam* and many other mouthwatering Peranakan dishes.

Every year, our Secondary One students go on an excursion to Malacca. This trip is usually undertaken by the English Department. The girls are treated to Peranakan cuisine, taught how to cook selected dishes, try their hand at beading slippers, don kebayas, as well as learn to play *cherki* and *joget*. They also visit the museum there and study the architecture and old-world kitchen. Incidentally, the Department's much-loved text is Stella Kon's *Emily of Emerald Hill*. When it was ably performed by Ivan Heng, the whole level of students was taken to the theatre.

Every year, students also take on Peranakan-themed project work, which affords them the opportunity to engage with the culture and become familiar with the skills a bona fide *nyonya* should have. One example is an adaptation of the Cinderella fairy tale, where *Nyonya Cinderella* had to sew kebayas, bead slippers, make *kueh* and pound *rempah* to satisfy the demands of her wicked stepmother and sisters.

On Racial Harmony day, one can see many adorable little *nyonys* running around the school in their colourful sarong kebayas. The official SCGS Choir uniform is a cream-coloured kebaya and green sarong. Our dance troupe also regularly dons Peranakan-inspired garb for their performances. The Humanities Department runs the Young Docents Programme, which teaches students how to guide people through the Peranakan Museum.

“Suffice it to say that no great progress can be made by any people if one half - the greater half it may be - is perpetually kept in a state of ignorance and degradation....Keep your women in a low, ignorant and servile state, and in time you become a low, ignorant and servile people.”

This sentiment was echoed by another founder of the school, Sir Song Ong Siang, in the same magazine in 1907: “There is no more absolutely ignorant, prejudiced and superstitious class of people in the world than the Straits-born

Chinese women...mothers remain a stumbling block to their children.”

One of the school's main objectives is to develop women of relevance with *Kim-Gek* (jade and gold) qualities. We were told as students: “You are precious like gold and each unique like a piece of jade for no two pieces of jade is alike.”

How does SCGS sustain and impart its Peranakan heritage? First, many cleaners sweep and clean the toilets and grounds through the day – like *bibiks*, we are fastidious on matters of cleanliness!

The motif of the floor tiles recalls those of the European tiles adorning the old Emerald Hill houses. That was where SCGS was situated for many years, and where most of her first batch of students lived. At the Heritage Corner is a *nyonya* mannequin and display of beaded shoes, *kerosang* and crockery. This theme continues

Modern-day SCGS students reading in the secondary school library in the midst of Peranakan decor. Note the coffee table in the centre contains a pink kebaya and accessories.

“There is no more absolutely ignorant, prejudiced and superstitious class of people in the world than the Straits-born Chinese women...mothers remain a stumbling block to their children.”

- Sir Song Ong Siang, a founding father of SCGS, 1907

The SCGS choir, which has won gold with honors for Singapore Youth Festival competitions, dressed in their official choir uniform, the kebaya, singing under choir mistress Mrs Angela Goh.

A secondary one pupil trying her hand at doing kasot manek.

This year, at the Excel Fest organised by the Ministry of Education, one of our teachers set up a gorgeous stall with the façade of a colonial Peranakan house. And on 14 July, to raise funds for a performing Arts Centre, the school held a Peranakan Night.

By the time an SCGS girl has passed through the portals of the school, she is ready to face the world with the qualities of a *kim-gek*. As my daughter, Melinda proudly declares: “All SCGS girls *can cook!*” *

“One of SCGS’ main objectives is to develop women of relevance with *Kim-Gek* (jade and gold) qualities. We were told as students: “You are precious like gold and each unique like a piece of jade for no two pieces of jade is alike.”

A Home Economics lesson in the school kitchen, learning to bake pineapple tarts.

BOYS IN A GIRLS’ SCHOOL

Baba Kip Lee recounts his primary school days in SCGS

Singapore Chinese Girls’ School (SCGS), at one point in its history, had boys in its primary classes!

Back in the 1920s, SCGS admitted children who lived in the neighbourhood of Emerald Hill.

“We were just a handful of boys,” remembers Baba Lee Kip Lee, honorary Life President of the Peranakan Association and author of *Amber Sands*, once used as a standard text in Singapore schools. “I can only remember my brother Kip Lin being there, and cousin George Tan and Felix Chia. There were a few other boys. We were the last batch in SCGS”.

He writes in his book: “We boys were outnumbered by girls, dressed in what appears to be *amah*’s uniforms – white Chinese blouse and black trousers.” The uniform was later changed to white tops and blue trousers because the girls’ mothers complained that their little darlings looked like *amahs*.

“But we boys did not have to wear any uniform,” says Kip Lee with some relish. “We were there only for a few years and then had no choice but we moved to Anglo-Chinese School on Coleman Street because SCGS decided it should be a school only for girls.”

In his book *Amber Sands*, Kip Lee recalls having an Englishwoman as principal, assisted by a staff of local teachers many of whom were Eurasians.

“Among them my favourite was Mrs Molly Nunes who bestowed much of her kindness and attention on me. I had fond memories of her, but, unfortunately, we never kept in touch with each other after I left the school in 1929. However my form teacher was a Mrs Oh who lived at No. 1 Emerald Hill.” *

Fresh from SCGS, Lee Kip Lee is pictured here (extreme left) at the Anglo-Chinese School at Coleman Street in about 1929, with his classmates (from left) Lim Bian Yan, Tan Kway Huat, Chee Keng Long and George Tan Wee Seng, all dressed as courtly maidens for a school play.

CHILDHOOD GAMES AND HOBBIES

Baba Colin Chee turns nostalgic upon thumbing through the late Baba Andrew Tan's book

“Even though life in the early days was full of deprivation, children always managed to find ways to amuse themselves. They improvised so many games and engaged in a wide variety of hobbies that today’s children would find baffling.”

So writes Andrew Tan in his book *Papa as a Little Boy Named Ah Khoon*, describing life as a child in the war and early post-war years in Singapore. How true and apt! My own children are now fully grown. And I can only recall relating to them the excitement and thrill of these outdoor and physical hobbies and games.

Rearing Siamese fighting fish was a favourite pastime of mine too. I remember walking 3km almost every weekend to a friend’s farmhouse in the old Dairy Farm to watch his ceramic dragon jar full of fighting fish under the overhanging branches of a huge *jambu ayer* tree. Being a real country bumpkin I never got to see the other side of fish fighting that Andrew writes about:

“I saw a pair fighting in a large glass jar at a coffee shop at Lorong 25, Geylang Road. They were quietly watched by a group of more than 20 men as the fish battled ferociously.”

Recalling quite accurately his own experience that many in his generation have fond memories of: “Many of the kampong children kept fighting fish. The most popular type was the local hybrid called *ikan belaga* which had a dark red body and fins with a sprinkling of green scales. Much smaller in size and lacking the hardness of the Siamese fighting fish, they could be found breeding in shallow ponds and streams in the farms and rubber estates.”

Another interesting hobby was spider fighting. As Andrew says: “It was so popular that it became quite common for school children to play truant in order to catch spiders.”

The spiders that we used were the small dark green ones with visible silvery stripes, and sometimes all black, said to be the most formidable of all. And if these came with blood red mandibles, they were going to be champions.

Andrew recalls accurately: “They generally dwelled in bushes and made nests from two leaves bound together with web silk. With a white square face, eight long black legs and two mandibles, a large male spider could measure up to 1cm from the head to the tip of the abdomen.

“The hunt for wrestling spiders was never an easy task as they could be very elusive. They were very sensitive to sounds and vibrations and would jump out of their nest and disappear into the foliage below at the first alarm. Besides facing snakes, centipedes, wasps, the hot sun and stifling humidity in the bushes, there was the incessant attack by swarms of hungry mosquitoes.”

I recall venturing as a boy of 12 into old kampongs that had natural streams of gently flowing clear water from Bukit Gombak. My friends and I would try to catch rainbow fish with home-made nets of torn cotton singlets, or condensed milk cans, or just our cupped hands. We would also hunt fresh water eels which would hide beneath granite boulders in the streams and even in slim cracks in our poorly maintained estate *longkangs*.

The entrepreneurial Geylang denizen, Andrew, recalls: “We would normally catch just three eels. On the way home, my friends and I would deliberately walk in front of a crowded coffee shop. There would always be a buyer who wanted the eels for herbal soup and would pay \$1 for our catch. With the \$1 we made we had our pick of snacks, cakes and drinks. It would take my two companions and me two to three days to spend that \$1!”

Over in Hillview, I would bring my catch home to be cleaned and cooked into a delicious soup!

Kite flying and fighting was another sport that yielded unending hours of thrills and exhaustion. Usually about mid-year when the skies were blue with a relentless sun and the winds were strong, my friends and I would start to prepare glass strings for the sport, and to bend fine bamboo sticks into the skeletons of home-made kites. The afternoon and evening skies would then fill with the wild flutter of small agile kites that would dart to and fro.

Andrew describes these battles in the sky very well: “Both grown-ups and youths pitted their skills in the open field behind our home, just like pilots of fighter planes in a dogfight. My first uncle could bring his kite to a sudden dive at a terrific speed so that his razor sharp line could slice through the taut line of the opponent’s kite before the latter could manoeuvre his kite out of the way.”

Games like rounders, *hantam bola*, horses and riders, marbles, tops, shooting duku skins or rolled paper with rubber bands, five stones, and hopscotch were also very popular with children then. They didn’t cost huge sums of money which was lacking; just a real zest for life, sheer enthusiasm, eternal friendships and an infectious ingenuity. *

Horses & Riders:
A “battle” scene with “riders” mounted on the back of their mates who were “horses”. They grappled with each other in the attempt to throw their opponents to the ground.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

Baba Tan Kuning uncovers the significance of Chinese nomenclature

LIM

林
BOON
CHONG

“What is in a name? A rose smells just as sweet by any other name.”

- *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare

LEE

In Chinese patriarchal society, a name holds enormous significance beyond simply identifying a person. For a start, the man's surname bears a key historical connection to his ancestors. He has the primary responsibility to sire a male offspring to continue the family surname over the generations.

A Chinese name typically has three characters. The first character is the surname that denotes his clan, for example, Ang, Chee, Chan, Goh, Lim and Tan. It is the legacy of his forefathers borne out of filial piety. The second and third characters are his family name and personal name respectively, or vice versa.

Family name

The family name is usually the second character and is the common generational denominator in an extended family of male siblings and paternal cousins. It defines his social position in this extended family. For example, if the family name is Chwee (water), the brothers may be named Chwee Kim, Chwee Soon and Chwee Peng. Paternal cousins are recognised by similarly having a Chwee as part of their name.

In the old days a patriarch would conjure up an auspicious phrase containing four or even eight words for the family names of future generations. The sons in each generation would have to take one of the words in the order of the phrase for a family name. A Hokkien friend of mine who belongs to the Eng Choon clan of Malacca said that his grandfather conjured up an eight-word phrase for the family tree and dictated that his descendants must follow the order. The words in Hokkien are:

Boon Chong (A scholar)
Kong Kok (well known in the whole nation)
Shi Lei (for his poems and modesty)
Tuan Ka (from generation to generation)

The old patriarch wished, as implied in the phrase, that his descendants would live up to the ideal of a Confucian scholar-gentleman (*Junzi* in Mandarin) who is well versed in Confucian teachings, able to write poems in fine Chinese calligraphy and be of modest character. My friend, being in the third generation, has Kok as his family name. So do his siblings and paternal cousins.

Family names in the Lee family of Malacca
My maternal grandfather was Lee Keng Liat. His

brother was Lee Keng Kiat. In the patriarchal order, Keng was their family name. The male children bore the family name of Chim (Hokkien for deep) – the male siblings were named Chim Giang, Chim Kang, Chim Hay and their cousins Chim Huk and Chim Tuan. The female siblings had the family name Siok (love) - Siok Tian, Siok Hoe and Siok Puey while the paternal cousins were Siok Kin, Siok Kuan and so forth.

Individual names

Generally, the third character is the personal name. It is determined by the nature of his character or *naseb* (destiny) as foretold by a fortune teller. In Peranakan society of old, parents or grandparents would make an effort to *tengok pekji*, literally ‘to look at the eight characters’, with a fortune teller to find out the *naseb* of a new born. The belief is that a suitable name would boost his fortune for life and provide an auspicious life path. An inappropriate name could turn a prince to a pauper and adversely affect his health, leading eventually to premature death.

Essential data for the fortune teller consists of the time, date, month and year of a child's birth, which would indicate two of the five basic elements that make up a man's character or fate. These are earth (*toh* or *tueh*), water (*chwee*), fire (*hay* or *hui*), metal/gold (*kim*) and wood (*bok*). Each of the times will indicate the element that is most abundant or most lacking in the newborn. These are the eight characters (*pekji*) that literally help the fortune teller assess and decide on a good name for the child.

The name should relate to the element that is lacking and not the element that is abundant in his fate. For example, a child whose character has a dominant water element cannot be named Chwee as it would be excessive and adversely affect his fortune. A name related to earth would better match his ‘watery’ character as the combination provides a ‘fertile plain’ for the seed to grow luxuriantly, in this instance, to be blessed with good fortune.

A newborn who lacks the element of water may be given the name Chwee or a related word like ocean or river. Water is also in harmony with gold (*Kim*). In *fengshui* (geomancy) the belief is that gold, which can be mined in the river, is the metal that produces water. Chwee Kim is a well balanced name in itself. At

this point the fortune teller will be told of the child's gender because in Chinese language certain words are meant for one gender and not the other. Some words can be shared by both genders. For example, Geok (jade), a symbol of purity, and Kim (gold), a precious metal.

Yin and Yang

This concept of balancing the elements in a name follows the principle of Yin and Yang in Taoist philosophy. The whole universe and the fate of a person must be well balanced between the forces of Yin (female) and Yang (male) in nature. Yang represents strength or power while Yin is weakness or submissiveness. Any form of imbalance between the two will cause chaos and instability.

Parent's expectations

Before looking at the *pekji* some parents may have certain expectations of their children's character. Having retained the surname and the family name, he may want his children's names to focus either on moral accomplishments, scholarly attainments, good health or wealth.

The personal name may be Teck (virtue), Beng (intelligence), Eng (good health or elegance) or Hock (good fortune or blessing). For girls, names of precious metals and precious stones are preferred. In some cases, the father may think of a phrase of four words to express his expectation of his four children of the same sex, male or female. My maternal great grandfather wished for four daughters whose names would bear the phrase *Tian Choo Poh Puey*, a legendary sacred pearl believed to bestow the owner the honour and power of being a universal monarch to rule the whole universe. Siok (love) being the family name for the girls, his eldest daughter was named Siok Tian and her younger sister should be Siok Choo. But Choo and Poh did not match the *pekji* of the second daughter and she was named Siok Hoe. The third daughter took the name of the last character, Puey. Her paternal cousins were Siok Kin, Siok Kuan, Siok Lin so forth.

There was a man who wished he had four sons with names from the four-word phrase of *Boon* (civil) *Boo* (military) *Chuan Chye* (complete), to describe the complete civil and military forces present in the imperial court. The patriarch was fortunate to have four sons named Cheng Boon, Cheng Boo, Cheng Chuan and Cheng Chye, while their paternal cousins were given the names Cheng Lok, Cheng Kee and Cheng Ti.

The special and precious name Neo (lady)

In the old days, Peranakan parents liked to name their daughters Neo (lady). It is common to find names like Poh (precious) Neo, Bee (beauty) Neo, Gek or Geok (Jade) Neo, Huat (prosperous) Neo, Choo (pearl) Neo and Guek (moon) Neo. In the Lee

clan of my maternal ancestry, Neo was added as the fourth part of a girl's name, like Lee Siok Tian Neo and Lee Siok Hoe Neo. This was also a relatively common practice.

Nicknames

In Chinese and Peranakan societies family friends may know one another for years by their nicknames but not their Chinese names as registered in the birth certificates. Only in schools and offices are people known by their proper names. I found that many of my aunts, uncles and cousins, born in Malacca in the early 20th century, had English names after members of the British royal families. I had aunts named Anne or Annie, Catherine, Mary and cousins named Edward, Charles/Charlie, George, Henry and William. One uncle was named Rothchild, often called Rochai by his mother and all his relatives. His son was Byron.

Baba and Nyonya as nicknames

In Peranakan families nicknames like Baba and Nyonya are reserved for the first born. The girls may have some deviation like Nya Besair and Nya Nya. Due to Dutch influence in old Malacca, Non or Nona (lady) was also meant for the first born baby girl. Generally, Tengah (middle) is for the second child or someone in the middle (male or female). Kechik (Small) and Bachik (short for Baba Kechik) or Chik Ba are for the youngest sons. Nyachik or Chichit is for the youngest daughter or one of the younger siblings. Bongsu, literally youngest, is for the youngest child of either sex. It is believed that calling him or her Bongsu, usually the seventh or eighth child, would put a stop to more pregnancies. Sometimes Nya is added to the Chinese name to form a girl's nickname. For example, Nya Suan and Nya Khun for Suan Eng and Khun Eng. Ah is a qualifier in Hokkien for personal names, to refer to "that fellow". Nicknames like Ah Choo and Ah Gek for Choo Neo and Gek Neo, or Ah Chye and Ah Hock for Boon Chye and Boon Hock are common.

Names of countries, towns and streets

Names of countries were used as nicknames for girls. I knew of someone whose nickname was Jepun (Japan). My paternal aunt was China (China) and a distant relative Melayu (Malay). Names of towns and places were also used. I had an aunt in Malacca named Tengkeru and an aunt Mawai because she was adopted in the year when the town of Mawai in the state of Johor was built. In Singapore, Geylang and Katong were popular nicknames for girls.

Physical appearance and complexion

A baby is often given a nickname according to his or her physical appearance or complexion. A round-faced baby is called Bulat (round), one with a darker

or fairer complexion is called either Hitam (black) or Puteh (fair or white) respectively. These can be used for either gender. Jambol (a tuft of hair on the forehead) is a girl's name. Jantok (protruding forehead) and Badong (rabbit ear) are nicknames for either sex.

Using the husband's name

In a small social group there would be more than one person with similar nicknames. The convention was to attach her husband's name to it. For example, there would be Tengah Boon Chye and Tengah Cheng Kim to differentiate between two Tengahs among *cherki* players.

Unattractive nicknames

Unattractive nicknames were given to children in the belief that they would escape the attention of evil spirits. I had distant relatives who were nicknamed Pungot (rescued as an abandoned child), her sister Burok (ugly) while her brother was Busok (smelly). Some children were also given animal names like Ah Kow (dog), Kow *Kia^h* (puppy) and Ah Tu (a pig) or Tu *Kia^h* (pigling) so that evil spirits would regard them as insignificant creatures. My maternal grandfather, the only son in his family, was precious like a prince or a king. Instead of calling him Raja (king) his parents named him after a fruit, Pisang Raja, the best hybrid of all bananas, to deceive the evil spirits.

Nicknames given to adults

Adults may be given nicknames representing a handicap or newly acquired lifestyle. People have been called Enchik Tempang (limping uncle) or Bibik Bongkok (hunch backed aunt). Sometimes the area of residence is used. Uncles and aunts may be called Enchik Katong, Engku Geylang or Koh Pasir Panjang. Sometimes things that the elderly use can inspire nicknames like Enchik Tongkat (uncle with walking stick) or Bibik Payong (aunt with umbrella).

Hairstyle nicknames

By the 1930s when the *sanggol* (chignon) became outdated, old ladies who sported it were nicknamed Bibik Sanggol Nyonya. Around the 1930s or later when they permed their hair, Bibik Bobbed Hair cropped up.

Nicknames from religious personalities

Nowadays, giving children nicknames with Peranakan words is not common. Instead, English names from the Bible or American films are popular. Among members of a small group of knowledgeable and practising Peranakan Buddhists in the Theravada group, Pali names of the Buddha's disciples and lay followers are heard. Among them are Rahula (son and disciple of the Buddha), Nanda (his cousin and disciple), Sujata (a millionaire lay devotee) and Jeta (a prince devotee), to name a few.

The girls have names like Khema (peace,) Puspa (flower) or Yasodara (wife of prince Siddhartha).

Nicknames and kinship terms

According to Peranakan custom, the elders must be addressed with respect. Nicknames are used only among friends and people of the same age group. A couple of examples are Si Katek (Shorty) and Si Tinggi (Tall). Parents' friends may be addressed as Enchik Tinggi or Bibik Katek. The parents' siblings must be addressed appropriately with kinship terms like Ji Pek (paternal second uncle), Sah Chek (third paternal uncle), Tua Ee (first maternal Uncle) or Ji Koh (second paternal aunt). However, parents' cousins, distant relatives and parents' friends can be addressed by their nicknames preceded by an appropriate kinship terms. For example, a woman is addressed as Koh Non by the children of her male cousins and Ee Non by children of her female cousins and distant relatives. A man is addressed as Enchik Bachik by the children of his male cousins or Engku Bachik by children of his female cousins. Today, it is heartening that the value of respect for the elders is still largely upheld within the Peranakan community. *

Reference: 1,000 Character Classic by Evelyn Lip.

YOUNG SPEAK

Baba Colin Chee interviews four young nyonias for their perspectives of what it is like to be Peranakan. At a time when many bemoan the passing of an era, there is hope yet as young Peranakans appear to want to wear their culture as a badge of honour and heritage. It also means harnessing modern-day technology like social media and TV to reach out to the community's young.

Claire Tan. 8 years old. CHIJ Katong Convent. Mad about Ariel the Mermaid, dressing up, reading and travelling around the world with her parents.

Teo Shu Hui. 16 years old. Raffles Girls' School. Loves playing the electric guitar, jogging, reading and scrapbooking.

Ynez Lau. 17 years old. Catholic Junior College. Loves learning about other cultures, reading, drawing and eating Peranakan food.

Samantha (Sam) Tan. 12 years old. CHIJ Katong Primary. Loves reading, dancing, playing the piano, golfing, watching movies and art and craft.

Are you born to a Peranakan family?

Claire: I am a 10th generation nyonya on my father's side. His family is from Malacca.

Sam: Yes, I am from the 4th generation.

Shu Hui: I am one quarter Peranakan. My grandmother is pure Peranakan and can trace her roots back many generations to Malacca.

Ynez: Yes. I am half Peranakan from my dad's side.

Just how aware are you of your Peranakan heritage?

Claire: Yes, I knew I was a Peranakan since I was one!

Sam: I live with my great-grandmother. She has imparted the Peranakan culture and heritage to my family, especially to my sister and I. My family and I are still observing our culture such as kneeling and greeting our elders during Chinese New Year, putting on our sarong kebayas on special occasions, cooking and eating our Peranakan food, as well as observing our taboos and customs. And we speak our patois every day!

Shu Hui: I am not as aware as I should be. However, I am getting more interested in knowing more about my heritage.

Ynez: Well, I've been aware of my heritage since primary school, when I started getting curious as to why my family did things slightly differently to my friend's. Whenever the

opportunity arises, I've asked my father to explain the differences between Peranakans and other cultures.

Was there anyone or anything (e.g. television programmes, school, performing groups) that made you aware of, or endeared you to your culture? When did this happen, how old were you then ?

Claire: Yes, it was when Auntie Bebe Seet made me my first sarong and kebaya. She also got me to be her child model. I took part in her Peranakan fairs, participated in the Singapore Food Festival and made pineapple tarts and *nasi ulam* on stage as part of a demonstration.

Sam: When I was five years old, I performed on stage as the Little Nyonya opening the show of "Mari Go Round". I spoke in our patois and thrilled the crowd. I sing and dance to Peranakan songs on road shows. I also perform during Chingay Parades, wearing my kebaya. At age seven, I was on Bring Your Toothbrush by Mediacorp. My role was a Peranakan girl who exchanged culture with a Japanese girl. In school, during Racial Harmony Day, I am asked to dress up in my sarong kebaya and baju panjang and put up my hair in a *sanggol* and do a fashion parade. I also performed at the Peranakan Convention in Malacca in 2008. In 2009, my family and I performed at National Day Parade. All of these performances have made me appreciate and love my culture even more. When I perform, I do my very best to show off my culture.

Shu Hui: The Channel 8 series *The Little Nonya* (2008-2009) was very interesting and informative, spurring me to want to learn more about my Peranakan heritage. I was 13 years old then. A trip to Malacca a few years back and lunches at good Peranakan restaurants with my grandmother also showed me different aspects of the Peranakan culture.

Ynez: I treasure my culture because it's part of what bonds my family and friends together, especially since Peranakans are dying out as most of what I've learnt about my culture is what I've gleaned from interactions from my Peranakan family and friends.

Are you proud of being a Peranakan?

Claire: Of course! I am the only Peranakan in my class. It makes me feel special. But I don't eat *sambal belachan* because it is too spicy. I just started on skinny pizza with a topping of chicken marinated with curry powder, and I love it. It's my favourite pizza. I also love *chap chye*.

Sam: I am absolutely proud to be a Peranakan!

Shu Hui: Honestly, I never really thought much about this. However, with increasing awareness of my heritage, I am beginning to be proud that I am partly Peranakan.

Ynez: Yes, of course.

Do you wear your Peranakan identity as a badge of honour? How do you go about doing it?

Claire: Yes. Whenever there's a chance I will dress up as a little nyonya.

Sam: Yes I do. Racial Harmony Day is one example. In church, I am in the Peranakan Choir. I love the *Sambot Taun Baru* mass at Holy Family. I attend most Peranakan Association functions. I also enjoy Peranakan plays and love eating Peranakan food.

Shu Hui: I do not have any distinctive Peranakan possessions, like clothes or jewelry.

Ynez: Well, I don't flaunt the fact that I am a Peranakan, but I gladly admit the fact when questioned, and embrace it as part of my identity.

Do you speak Peranakan patois with anyone? At home? In school? Among your peers?

Claire: No, because my father does not speak the patois with me and I have no chance to practise it in school. I can sing some traditional songs like *Di Tanjong Katong*, *Chan Mali Chan*, *Burong Kakak Tua*, *Lenggang Kangkung* and *Rasa Sayang*.

Sam: Yes, I speak the patois at home with my family.

Shu Hui: No, but I have heard my grandmother speaking it with my great-grandma.

Ynez: No, not really. Since we are registered as Chinese, I'm taught Chinese in schools as my mother tongue - which is hard enough without learning a third!

Are your friends Peranakan too?

Claire: Not at all!

Sam: Yes, some of them are.

Shu Hui: Yes, I do have some friends who are partly Peranakan, but they too are not very aware of their heritage.

Ynez: Some of them! It is a happy coincidence that we share a common culture that we can discuss.

What do you think can be done to encourage young Peranakans to come together or to share your common heritage?

Claire: Tell them to meet me in the canteen so I can tell them about the old days - stories my Kong Kong told me. I have learnt about the different kinds of old money and how he used to go to the market to buy groceries for his mother.

Sam: I think conducting courses on how to speak our Peranakan patois would allow our unique language survive another generation. When we can interact in this language, more young Peranakans will feel encouraged to come forward and share our common heritage.

Shu Hui: Activities targeted at younger people, for example games and sporting related activities, could

be considered. However, these should not only be exclusively for young Peranakans but also their non-Peranakan peers.

Ynez: I think workshops and talks would be pretty good - things about how Peranakan culture came about, our roots and how we developed from a conglomeration of the Malay and Chinese cultures. I think it's also quite interesting to find out how the Peranakan culture was adapted and how it fits in our globalised world. Saving the quirks of the Peranakan patois is also important as language has a role in every culture.

Do you think they would want to?

Claire: Yess!

Sam: I am sure they would. By making these lessons and courses interesting and attractive, our young Peranakans would also become interested to know more of our culture. I also believe strong family support is essential.

Shu Hui: If the activities are interesting and suitable for a youngster's budget, then I think some of them would be interested.

Ynez: Unfortunately, in order to interest the

younger generation the culture has to be related to the modern world. Many other cultures have died out due to the fact that their inheritors have felt that it was old-fashioned and superfluous. With the right approach, say through using networking sites and publicity stunts, the Peranakan culture could probably interest the youth.

Are you aware of any Peranakan Facebook or Twitter sites for young Peranakans?

Claire: I am underaged, so Mummy restricts my online access.

Sam: Yes, I am aware of them, but haven't had the time to participate as I am very busy with my schoolwork and preparing for the PSLE.

Shu Hui: No, I am not.

Ynez: If there are any sites other than the one for the Peranakan Museum, I do not know of them. However, I think it would be interesting to follow sites relating to the Peranakan culture. Since the Internet is worldwide, we may even be able to garner the interest of those outside Singapore! *

SIMPLY STELLA

Baba Emeric Lau interviews Stella Kon on her most beloved creation, Emily Of Emerald Hill

If I heard correctly, much of the play was written while you were overseas. What prompted you to write Emily?

I began writing Emily when I was living in Ipoh, as I had for almost 15 years. From Ipoh, I had twice entered the Singapore National Playwriting Competition and won the first prize each time. But the plays were not produced, perhaps because of the large cast required. I was looking to enter the same competition for the third time. My close friend in Ipoh was Ong Su-Ming, sister-in-law of Mr Lee Kip Lin. She suggested that I write a one-woman play. She also suggested that I write about her grandmother, and I said that I have a very interesting grandmother of my own! That was how I came to write the play. I completed it in Richmond, London, as by then I had moved to UK to be a 'study mama' and look after my sons who started school there.

Many have discerned Feminist themes in the play. Emily is WOMAN writ large - she is a hapless girl, tenacious and conniving daughter-in-law, dominating mother, powerful matriarch and finally, a redeemed, frail old lady. But was all of this actually a consideration when you created the character?

I came of age in the time of the feminist revolution, so was aware of women's issues. Yes, I saw Emily as a woman who has to do what women have always had to do to assert themselves in a patriarchal society.

What does Emily encapsulate - for you?
A person who first needs to survive (original fallen condition), then has to learn to be a complete and loving human soul (redemption).

While it is still early days, have you received any feedback on the current exhibition, and would you care to share your thoughts on it?

The most exciting feedback was when I gathered five cousins who grew up in the old house, Oberon, in Emerald Hill Road. They stood in front of the exhibit representing Emerald Hill - reminiscing old times, showing old photos on the iPad, pointing out tiny little details on accuracy... such a nostalgic moment!

The play was written in the 1980s, and remains highly potent today. Where do you see Emily going in the next 25 years? What are your hopes for the play?

I am amazed that it is still seen as relevant. I think it will need imaginative producing, so that audiences who have no connection or recollection with the way of life it portrays to relate to it. Perhaps it should be presented as the story of a woman who just happens to be a nyonya, but that is not her central identity.

What projects are you currently pursuing? Are there any particular points of interest you would like to share with our readers?

I have just completed the monumental task of turning Emily into a musical! It was presented as the highlight of Musical Theatre Live's gala dinner on 29 July 2012. (For more details, see www.facebook.com/notes/emilythemusical.)

What, in your definition, makes a Peranakan? What is the culture's essence?

The essence of the culture of the Peranakans was their willingness to put down their roots in the country of their birth - and to be open and eager to assimilate elements from every culture. The word Peranakan was seldom used in the hey-day of the Straits Chinese Nyonyas and Babas. The word means "those born in the country", as opposed to new migrants. Therefore I feel that every Singaporean with a pink IC, who has himself (or her family members) done national service, who sits in a food centre ordering food from three ethnic cuisines at once, and chatting in Singlish with its mixture of four lingos - the person who is open to influences from the various cultures - that person is the true heir of the Peranakans. *

FROM PAGE TO STAGE TO SHOWCASE

Baba Emeric Lau encounters multiple Emilys

On 31 May, a crowd comprising culture buffs, friends and theatre personalities gathered in the lobby of the Peranakan Museum to witness the opening of *Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage*. Officiated by MP Irene Ng, everyone was treated to a pleasant surprise when a selection of the actors who had played Emily descended the stairs and posed with playwright Stella Kon. All, including Kon, were dressed in gorgeous *sarong kebaya*.

MP Ng set a cheerful mood for the evening when she teased her university mate, Ivan Heng, "If you think Ivan looks beautiful as Emily, you should have seen him (when we were both students at NUS and he) dressed as Marilyn Monroe!" The other actors present were Pearly Chua, Jalyn Han and Neo Swee Lin.

The strains of jazz standards from the 'live' band Locomotions set everyone at ease, and chatter continued unabated as visitors either tucked into the delicious nyonya buffet spread, or took their time to view the new exhibition. Of course, many decided that a photo with the actors would make a perfect souvenir!

Ivan Heng reflected, "I've always maintained that when a culture is put into a museum, the implication is that it is 'dead'; the lid has been shut on a box. So this exhibition is interesting in that

it obviously doesn't mean we won't perform *Emily* again, but it shows off how far the character has come – and how much she is beloved by Singapore."

The museum team has combined the stage set for *Emily* with Kon's own memories of Oberon, the actual house on Emerald Hill where she spent her childhood, to create a gallery installation that evokes a Straits Chinese sitting room of the 1950s. Remarkably, a cupboard from the Oberon sitting room was found and loaned to the museum just for the exhibition.

Other sections feature memorabilia from the various productions of *Emily*, including televised cast interviews and the actual costumes worn by the actors. There are also panels that trace the evolution of *Wayang Peranakan* and the rise of English language theatre in Singapore – all very apt, considering the play's prime importance in local theatre.*

Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage is on show at the Peranakan Museum till 17 February 2013. Prevailing admission rates apply. For more information, please go to www.peranakanmuseum.sg.

Stella Kon (centre) and four Emilys ham it up for the cameras.

Costumes worn by Emily.

HOUSE ON TOUR!

Rachel Choo, a docent at NUS Baba House, shares her training experience

The NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road is a great way to get a glimpse of the lifestyle of a wealthy Peranakan family in early 20th century Singapore. The restored residential terrace house was once the abode of patriarch Wee Bin and his family.

Last year, it enlarged the ranks of its volunteer guides with a docent training programme from August to October. The syllabus included, among other subjects, lectures by experts in Peranakan history and culture, of which one highlight was a talk by The Peranakan Association Singapore's (TPAS) President, Mr Peter Wee, on traditional altar practices. There were also discussions, plenty of informative readings, the writing of personal tour scripts and practice tours.

Amongst the enthusiastic trainees were 11 members of TPAS. Shia Ai Lee, who is also a member of The Peranakan Voices choir, shares her experience:

"I joined because I am very interested and passionate about Baba culture and history. . . it's like going back to school and I am sure it is good for my 'grey matter'. The topics ranged from 'Who are the Peranakans' to the origins of the Baba House project. The training on being

vocally savvy and developing expressiveness provided tips on improving my speech and will also be useful for my choir singing."

Having undergone training the new docents have been burnishing their skills on public tours and welcoming visitors from all over. *

Free heritage tours of NUS Baba House are available on Mondays at 2pm, Tuesdays 6.30pm, Thursdays 10am and Saturdays 11am by prior appointment. Visitors are requested to make an appointment in advance by calling (65) 6227 5731 or emailing babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Right: Baba Peter Lee, honorary curator of NUS Baba House, sharing the heritage house project background with trainees.

Below left: Baba Peter Wee conducting a session on traditional altar practices.

Below right: Trainees and trainers at the docent graduation lunch, December 2011.

THESE WALLS CAN NOW SPEAK

Gong Pan Pan on #157- An Intimate Audio Encounter at NUS Baba House, a part of the NUS Arts Festival 2012

157- *An Intimate Audio Encounter* is an NUS Centre for the Arts (CFA) project which allows visitors to experience the NUS Baba House through storytelling. Developed by Singapore-based performance company Spell#7, CFA and NUS Baba House, student-writers were given the opportunity to work with professionals to conceptualise and develop the works.

Nine original scripts from the writers were enacted by voice actors, and the recordings formed nine different stories in this audio tour project. Visitors were led by different characters 'residing' within the various audio stories, interacting with the artifacts and engaging with topics related to a Peranakan household. A wide range of topics were explored in the nine stories from both the Baba and Nyonya perspectives such as their attitudes towards arranged marriages, Western influences and modernisation, conflicting religious beliefs across generations, their memories and traditions, and their hopes and fears growing up in a traditional Peranakan family.

Kaylene Tan, co-founder of spell#7, conceptualised an audio-tour that allows visitors to experience the house differently through accounts and stories told from diverse perspectives, occurring in various time-periods. What followed was an open-call to all NUS students to be part of the creative and developmental process. Selected students went through a two-day workshop at the Baba House, familiarising themselves with the house, the art of writing, the unique nature of audio work, and the various aspects of representing and reinterpreting history and culture.

Since authenticity and accuracy were the cornerstones of the project, the student-writers were supported by student-researchers who assisted to fact-check the stories against the prevalent cultural-economic conditions in which they are set. The in-depth research and careful verification

of historical records by these student-researchers served to legitimise the imaginary stories with realistic depictions of the Peranakan ways of life across the ages in Singapore. Tan worked with Foo Su Ling, curator at NUS Museum, to ensure that the stories together, despite being fiction, are able to effect a more holistic understanding of the Straits Chinese culture, and that each character brings along a different perspective of looking at and experiencing the Peranakan life within the Baba House.

Rohaizad Suaidi, was appointed as the dramaturg to guide the students towards a more engaging writing style appropriate to the form of a theatrical-audio piece. Darren Ng, acclaimed sound

artist, was crucial in the final delivery of the pieces used in the tour as he created nine different soundscapes that enabled visitors to immerse themselves in an alternate time-persona dimension within the historical building.

To add a final touch to the experience, Tan paired each of

the nine stories up with another one, and visitors could hear two of these nine stories during the tour. Visitors either got a contrasting second story, thus challenging their prior understanding of the Peranakan culture, or a complementary one which reinforced the prominence of certain issues and themes within the culture.

Responses for the audio-tour were overwhelming, as foreigners and locals alike were intrigued by the House and the household stories of the Peranakans. As one of the writers, Aswani Aswath reflected, "whether it be a *dondang sayang* or a *panton*, the intricacies of the Peranakan culture never failed to awe me. We did not merely create stories but swept out old, hidden mysteries worth re-visiting in alternative lenses. Projects like these help us find a little more about ourselves". Project #157 has indeed, as Tan described, "made the house come alive" from its creation to its execution, and "(the house) was smiling". *

Engrossed in the stories taking place in the reception hall of NUS Baba House.

Participants starting their mp3 players at the beginning of the tour.

FROM COUTURE TO *KAIN*

Nyonya Linda Chee takes delight in Baba Benny Ong's textile tribute to Peranakan culture

Indeed, he's *Baba Benny Ong*.

Few may know that the top Singapore-born couturier, who has dressed royalty and designed high fashion from London to New York and Paris, is Peranakan. "We were all brought up in the culture. My paternal grandmother is a Peranakan from Indonesia. In a way, my father is the essence of the Peranakan dandy," he chuckles.

"Growing up with this most colourful influence, I am naturally interested in my heritage. It is a boon for me as a fashion designer and textile artist to discover the potential of how to create Peranakan art and make it exciting and relevant in our ever-changing contemporary society."

Fortunately for Singapore, Benny returned from London in the early 1990s and based himself here where he could develop other pursuits such as textile weaving. Through his eyes, the term *kain* (textile) is given a refreshing new twist as he 'paints' in a graphic style the things so iconic to our culture – the *sarong kebaya*, *kamcheng* (water vessel), teacups, spoons, belts and *kasot manek* (beaded slippers), among others.

Sometimes playful, at times quirky and always in rich, strong colours, Benny's Peranakan art bring a smile and evoke thoughts of the elegant background that they are derived from – his years of dressing the cream of high society in the most fabulous gowns, some of which are in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and Singapore's National Museum.

The 15-piece Peranakan-themed series was hand woven by

Bowls (Blue & green)

2010–11, 135 x 78 cm

Hand-dyed silk, organza, tapestry and supplementary weaving.

The tower of 16 bowls is reflected by its auspicious looking counterpart, giving the sense of recurring mirror images. A witty take on the Peranakan (and Asian) concept of multiplying blessings.

traditional textile weavers in Laos, a collective of less-privileged women that he supports and trains. Complicated weaving techniques and a myriad of colours were used in his works, many times to the consternation of the village weavers as Benny stretched them beyond their norm.

Benny is excited about the artistic opportunities in Peranakan culture. "There will be many. I believe it is a living culture and one which Singapore can embrace fully to make it very special to Singapore." The key, he says, lies in being contemporary. "In other words, how we take the essence of our culture and relate it to modern living." Benny believes that art is one of the best ways to do it.

"When the opportunity presents to design a contemporary fashion collection, it will be wow!!" he declares. Do we take this as a hint of what's coming? *

"It is a boon for me as a fashion designer and textile artist to discover the potential of how to create Peranakan art and make it exciting and relevant in our ever-changing contemporary society."

*Left: Peranakan Cinderella
2010-11, 135 x 78 cm
Hand-dyed silk, supplementary weaving, tapestry and organza. Anonymous, stylish in neon sarong kebaya, the nubile nyonya sits waiting the return of a slipper. The kerosang (brooch) motif is wrought in woven silk, as the rest of this work*

*Right: Slippers (For Him)
2010-11
135 x 78 cm
hand-dyed silk, organza, tapestry & supplementary weaving.
In the past, every Peranakan bride-to-be hand-stitched a pair of kasot manek (beaded slippers) for her man as a present on their wedding day. The rows of unbeaded slipper tops set against the one that is finished raise questions of marriage and singleness, and personal choices.*

GROOMING OUR ANAK-ANAK WAYANG

Baba Richard Tan looks towards the young

It has been eight years since the Main Wayang Company started in 2004. The vision and direction to further groom and develop cultural awareness amongst our young is slowly but surely showing promising results. Through continuing cultural workshops, we have a healthy following of children from the ages of six years and up.

Through this concerted effort, we have evolved a kids' cultural platform, where children are free to learn and express themselves as Peranakans of today. Aside from the routine of drama, vocal and dance training and rehearsals, we also engage the youth in 'hands-on' handicraft workshops (*Bunga rampey, kasot manek*, etc.) and even conduct 'Speak Baba Patois' classes. It is our fun and easy

approach - an educational yet entertaining learning format - that has gone down very well with many newcomers. Indeed, some of our older kids now take on the initiative to teach the newbies.

At the end of the day, it is important that our young generation form a strong affiliation for their culture and heritage without feeling shy or lacking in confidence to share their views. Their sense of Peranakan pride and identity has to be firmly rooted from a young age. Once they reach their late teens and young adult years, they will have less time for these cultural refinements as school work, sports, social activities and other grown up demands begin to fill their days. *

*Anak-Anak
Wayang in
performance.*

THE GRANDEST PERANAKAN WEDDING!

2012 has been a prolific year for the Main Wayang Company. The troupe participated in everything from mini show concerts at heartland shopping malls and Chingay Heartland events, to a series of *Toa Seh Jit* parties, and fund raising charity events. Our Cultural Outreach Programme has taken us to even more schools as Singapore's Heritage Month festivity gathers momentum.

The highlight of this year has been a meaningful collaboration with The Ground-Up Initiative (GUI) Youth Group. They collaborated with Main Wayang in reviving a lost tradition: our Peranakan *Kahwin Berlarak* Procession. It was a great opportunity for the youth of today to learn about our colourful heritage - via a wedding pageant! With Minister of Law, Mr Shanmugam as our Guest of Honour, together with the Spanish Ambassador and over 400 guests in attendance, the evening turned out to be quite a milestone event with authentic Peranakan cuisine served to complete the Baba Nyonya theme.

At the end of the night, it was the happy faces of the GUI Youth who *joget* and danced the night away, that made the entire Kampung Heritage Programme a truly memorable and enriching experience for all! *

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Nyonya Linda Chee goes marketing at Geylang Serai market with Baba Peter Wee

Geylang *si-paku* Geylang... goes the strain of an old Malay song often sung at Peranakan functions. This celebrated location in Singapore called Geylang also holds wet market that's a haven to Peranakan cooking.

Exotic *daon daon* (leaves) and *buah buahan* (fruits) can be readily found here at any time of the week. Need fresh coconut when other a wet markets are closed in the afternoon? Just pop by the only specialist coconut stall on the ground floor where you can buy it grated white, with or without skin, or order bagfuls of the *santan* (coconut milk), freshly squeezed.

Upstairs from the wet market is a spacious food court offering some of the best Malay food for a sumptuous breakfast or lunch. One Saturday morning, Baba Peter Wee, my husband Colin and I indulged in the best *nasi padang*, *tosai* and *wadeh* with green chili, downed with cupfuls of *teh halia* before heading downstairs to shop for vegetables and fruits including the more unusual ones not so commonly found in Peranakan cooking today. Here is what we found:

Buah sukun

(breadfruit)

This starchy fruit has a bread-like texture when cooked. In

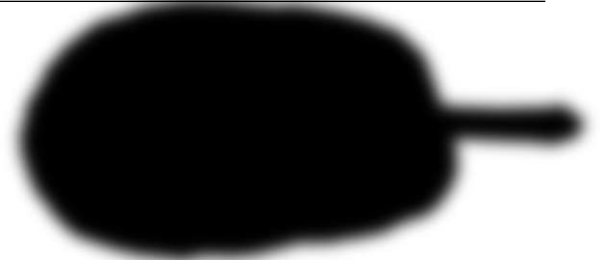
Polynesia it is eaten as a staple and has

various uses, including

in traditional medicines and its wood is used for paper or canoes. Peranakans cut it up into chunks to be cooked with *santan* and prawns as a *lemak*.

Puchok pakis (fern tips)

This is rarely found in other wet markets. Take a drive up north to Malaysia and you can savour them fresh and crunchy in many coffeeshops and restaurants. The fresh greens are simply delicious lightly stir-fried with *rempah chili bawang*, kangkong-style, or cooked as a curry *lemak*.



Nangka muda (young nangka fruit)

Like the *buah sukun*, this fruit is cut up into chunks and usually cooked as a curry *lemak* with chicken or prawns. Malay *nasi padang* often has this dish as part of the food selection and you can get them widely in Malaysia.

Buah keloh (drumsticks)

More popularly known as "drumstick", *buah keloh* is commonly used in Indian and Malay curries and has been

adopted by the Peranakans as part of our cuisine. The long thin drumstick is typically

chopped into shorter bite-size lengths and cooked until

soft enough to consume. The pulp tastes like lady's fingers.

My mother makes a mean *keloh* curry with chicken. My

children would scrape out the jelly-like pods and soft seeds of the *kelok* with their teeth

before swallowing them and throwing the outer pith away.

Buah binjai

(binjai fruit)

It is thought that Binjai Park in

Singapore was named after this

fruit, perhaps because it was

once plentiful there. There are

two types, the *manis* (sweet) and the *asam* (sour). The *binjai asam* is a delicious appetizer topped with dark soya sauce and a sprinkling of sugar, and served as a lovely accompaniment to fried fish. You can buy *binjai asam* occasionally at Geylang Serai. The sweet variety has become almost impossible to find in Singapore.

these bright green, bitter tasting beans can also be eaten raw or in salads. *Petai* is known to have health benefits especially for diabetics, but beware of the following: a particularly fetid odour in your urine and increased flatulence, and woe betide any one within burping distance.

Sayor *bermis* (*bermis* vegetable)

This leafy vegetable with small round leaves has been a favourite of mine since childhood. I remember sitting with my mother for an hour just plucking the tender tips to fry and throwing the rest of the vegetable away. Once upon a time this vegetable was only fed to the cows, until people realised that they could eat it and also enjoy its “blood cleansing” or detoxifying properties. Stir fried lightly in *rempah chili bawang*, the bitter leaves of this savoury dish arouse the taste buds oddly with a sweet after-taste that leaves one desiring for more. My two brothers and I can finish off a whole kilo-ful of the dish at one sitting.

Daon *kunyit* (turmeric leaf)

While the turmeric root is more widely used, often as an ingredient in the *rempah*, it has very fragrant leaves that are a natural antibiotic. In Southeast Asia, the leaves are used in various ways, either as an ingredient in cooking *otak otak* and *lemak* curries, or shredded and mixed raw in *nasi ulam*.

Petai (stink bean)

Driving up the slopes of Cameron Highlands you can see the *orang asli* (people from indigenous or aboriginal communities) selling *petai* by the roadside. Harvested from the fringes of the jungle, the fruits were clustered in large broadbean-like pods. Delicious when cooked in a *sambal* with prawns, *ikan bilis* or boiled eggs,

Daon *kesom* or *daon laksa* (*laksa* leaf)

This fragrant herb has a strong smell that makes it ideal for fish dishes. It is sliced finely and shredded raw as a garnish for *nasi ulam*, *nasi kerabu*, *asam pedas* and other fish dishes. It is a key ingredient in our spicy *laksa*, so much so that it is commonly identified as *laksa* leaf. Boil it in water and drink to ease indigestion or pound the leaves, squeeze out the juice to and apply it to the scalp to treat dandruff!

Bunga *kantan* (torch ginger bud)

This edible pinkish bud is highly aromatic. Shredded finely, a sprinkling of this ambrosial ingredient will give a refreshing ‘lift’ to any dish. As someone said, it is the soul of many Peranakan curries and stews including *asam laksa*, *perot ikan* and *gulai tumis*, as well as *nasi ulam*, *nasi kerabu* and of course, salads and rojak. I daresay *bunga kantan* complements any kind of meat in curries. It is splendid in fried rice too.

Buah *kedondong* (hog plum)

The *kedondong* tree is hard to find nowadays in Singapore. It reminds me of my childhood exploits when my gang would roam the estate to pick, or rather *churi* (steal) ripe *kedondong* fruit hanging over the fences of many houses in our estate. It has the size of a plum, and its ripe yellow pulp is sweet and crunchy like a mix between mango and guava. Iced *kedondong* juice is heavenly bliss on a scorching afternoon, with a sour plum dropped in. Or pickle it with vinegar, sugar and finely sliced chili to make a *jeruk* or relish for a wonderful appetizer before a sumptuously rich Peranakan meal.

Daon lemo perot (kaffir lime leaf)

The hourglass shaped leaf can be used in almost any Peranakan dish including soups, stir-fries or curries for its very strong citrusy aroma. Any expert cook will tell you that it provides the *oomph* in a mean *sambal belachan* with a squeeze of lime juice. Every year, I visit a Malay friend just to eat the best *kueh lapis* (layer cake) that I have tasted – a greenish cake spiked with *lemo perot* juice, which is just heavenly! The leaves can be frozen and kept fresh for months.

Buah belimbing (camias)

A cousin to the starfruit, this glossy green *belimbing* fruit is very sour and acidic, presenting a good alternative to the *asam gelugor* (tamarind peel) or vinegar. It imparts a delicious tangy flavour to soups such as *itek tim* or in *asam* fish curries. It also goes very well with chicken in a *sambal* or can be pickled into a relish or *jeruk*. The medicinal qualities of this fruit include treating pimples, hypertension, piles, diabetes, giddiness. My favourite use for *belimbing* is *sambal jantung* (banana flower salad) topped with coconut cream. Like pineapple or tamarind, its juice can be used to bleach rust stains from metal.

Belimbing drink

Baba Peter Wee plucks the *belimbing* from his garden to make a refreshing drink as follows:

Wash and dry the *belimbing*. Mix with some salt for at least two hours to drain away the sour juice. Blend the salted *belimbing* pulp and add sugar to taste. Dilute with water and chill. Add ice cubes for a refreshing pick-me-up on a scorching hot afternoon.

Buah melaka

(Indian gooseberry)

This is no longer found in Geylang but up north in Malaysia. Earlier this year, on a visit to Malacca, I believe I saw one *buah melaka* tree growing wild near the end of the bridge towards the red walls of the Stadthuys. It is hard to find such trees in Malacca now, and none in Singapore (as far as I know), although thought to be common in India. This smallish bright green fruit tastes bitter and sour. It is mostly pickled as *jeruk*. A Malay recipe for *ondeh ondeh* uses *buah melaka* for that certain tangy taste.

Jeruk (pickled fruit)

Although *jeruk* is actually a term for an orange, among Peranakans it has come to refer to a fruit pickle. Recipes for pickling fruit can be found widely in recipe books and the internet. As a general rule, the basic ingredients for *jeruk* are unripe fruit, salt, vinegar, water, sugar and chilli. The fruit is sliced as desired, mixed in salt to drain off the liquid and render the fruit crunchy. Sugar and vinegar are mixed with water in a heavy saucepan and simmered for about 10 to 15 minutes. Once cooled, the solution is mixed with the fruit and sliced chilli. The pickle can be served immediately or refrigerated for that extra crunchy texture. *

OF SHRIMP, RICE AND SALT

Baba Louis Chan gets into a pickle!

I have always been fascinated by the many ways that fresh shrimp (or *gerago*) can be preserved. Most of us are familiar with *belachan* (shrimp paste) and *chinchalok* (pickled shrimps), both being integral to Peranakan cuisine. There are also less familiar variations, which include *toh hay* (pickled shrimps with *ang kak*) and *ayer kaypuah* (pickled minced prawns). Of these, *chinchalok* remains my favourite because it is an excellent condiment for bland dishes like fried fish and porridge. It can also be used as a key ingredient in *babi chinchalok* (pork with *chinchalok*), as a substitute when the rarer *toh hay* is unavailable.

When I was a child, *chinchalok* was prepared by the late Anna Lim, my *Tua Ee* (eldest maternal aunt), whenever *gerago* was available. She would pick the *gerago* clean, mix it with cold cooked rice and salt and bottle it with tablespoons of brandy swirled into the bottle. This concoction was then allowed to ferment. Within three days, a lovely aroma developed. The *chinchalok* also matured into a beguiling lavender shade. *lemo kesturi*, sliced shallots and red chilies were then added into the mix. Served as a condiment to fried fish or eggs, *chinchalok* was an acquired taste - heavenly to those acquainted with its divine flavour but probably off-putting to the uninitiated.

Well-made *chinchalok* should have a slightly mellow aroma, due to its alcohol content. The *gerago* should be fresh, and still alive at the point of purchase, and should remain largely whole throughout the pickling process. It should also be free from artificial colouring and can appear in various shades of pink or lavender, depending on the type of alcohol used.

Pop and stench

I first made *chinchalok* when I was 12. There was a fishmonger at the old market at Siglap Road who sold fresh, live *gerago* every morning. I remember that it cost \$6 a kilogramme in the 1980s. One Saturday morning, armed with my *Tua Ee's* recipe and a kilo of the shrimp, I prepared it accordingly. After bottling it in cleaned, recycled chili sauce bottles, I proudly waited for the 'mysterious transformation' to occur. The next day, I heard a loud pop. One of the two bottles of *chinchalok* had exploded, spewing its contents as high as the ceiling! The contents of the other bottle were also oozing out, creating a huge mess and stench! I found out the hard way that the bottles should not be filled to the brim; some air space was necessary to accommodate the gases released during fermentation.

Over the years, I have refined the preparation process. My *Tua Ee* and *Chim Poh* said that the *gerago*

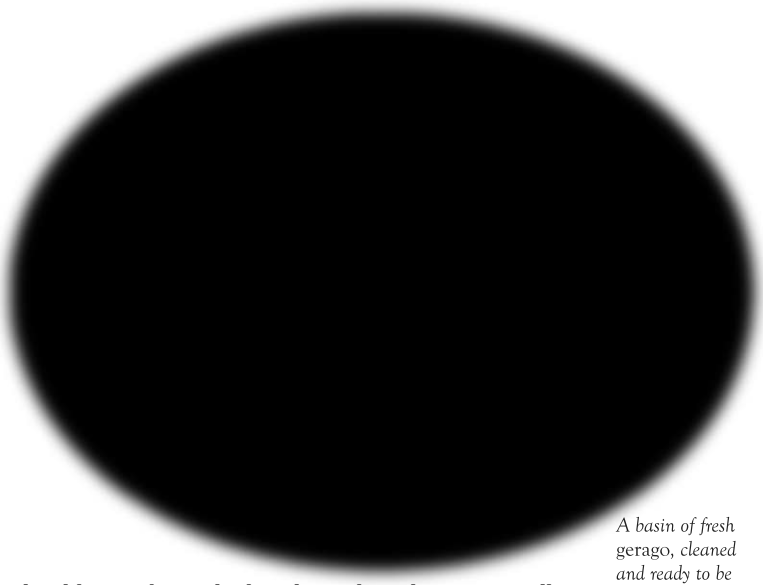
should never be washed or the end product may smell bad; nyonias describe this as *bau koh hong*. In contrast, a Portuguese-Malaccan friend said that the shrimp are usually dirty and so must be washed with sea water. A Cantonese *Ah Pek* selling *chinchalok* at the Chowrastra Market in Penang confirmed that sea water was indeed used to wash the shrimp. He said that tap water could also be used after the addition of salt and then allowed to stand for two days to allow the chlorine to settle. However, I have not been able to verify the accuracy of his theory.

In my view, washing the shrimp with sea water is probably related to the belief that tap water may strip the shrimp of their sweetness and flavour. Another old family friend with Indonesian links claimed that her family used hot boiling rice gruel, instead of cold cooked rice, to prepare the *chinchalok*. I tried this method once, but the end product was less than successful with the mixture bubbling undesirably on the second day.

Colour variations

I was also interested to find out the reasons for the variation in the colour of *chinchalok*. My aunt's version was lavender, while those commercially prepared came in various shades of pink. I found that recipes containing brandy produced a lavender colour while those containing rice wine were more pinkish. *Chinchalok* containing brandy also had a slight bitter aftertaste, which explains that being over generous with your brandy may not always produce a better tasting end result. One *bibik* claimed that I should not bruise the eyes of the shrimps, lest it discolour the *chinchalok* and cause it to turn lavender. Another nyonya friend swears by using chopsticks to swirl around the cleaned shrimps to remove the strands of whiskers or *jangot* from the shrimp, despite the fact that their eyes may be bruised in the process. Yet another *bibik* claimed that the bottled *chinchalok* should be put in the hot sun to achieve that pinkish tinge!

Recently, I was in Ho Chi Minh when I stumbled upon fresh shrimp in the wet market. They were dark grey and different from the off-white shrimp available in Singapore and Malaysia. I bought 650 grammes of shrimp, cooked rice from a beef noodle stall, and salt



A basin of fresh *gerago*, cleaned and ready to be pickled.

and wine from the market. I also had to buy a glass bottle from one of the market stalls. Back in my hotel room, I estimated the proportions of the ingredients and mixed them together before bottling the mixture. I also taped it securely before wrapping it in multiple plastic bags to ensure that the contents would not leak. Arriving home two days later, I was rewarded with a bottle of *chinchalok* with an unusual brick-red colour and a lovely aroma. I hope to replicate the process during my next trip to Ho Chi Minh.

These days, *chinchalok* is hardly prepared at home. Working with shrimp is messy and may attract flies although homemade *chinchalok* is less salty and much cleaner. I humbly share my recipe below.

CHINCHALOK

Ingredients

1 kg very fresh *gerago*, well-cleaned
5 tbsp sea salt, fried and cooled
1 cup cold cooked rice
400 ml or 5 tbsp rice wine
2 very clean bottles, sterilised by dipping in boiling water and then thoroughly dried

Method

Mix the salt and rice together well. Add the *gerago* and mix well with a light hand. Add about 1 tablespoon

of the rice wine or brandy into each bottle and swirl it around to coat the walls. Pour the prepared *gerago* mixture into the bottles till three-quarters full.

Add rice wine till it barely covers the shrimp. If using brandy, do not over indulge or the end result will be slightly bitter. Cover the mouth of the bottles with kitchen towels and secure with rubber bands. Gently shake the bottles occasionally for the next two days. On the third day, the *chinchalok* should be mellow. If not, allow to pickle for a day or two longer. Cap the bottles and refrigerate.

To serve, add 3 tablespoons of the mixture with the juice of 2 limes and the following: 1 red chili and 2 shallots, finely sliced. A little sugar may be added to temper the saltiness, if desired. *

Note: If the wine or any form of alcohol is omitted, double the quantity of salt to prevent the contents from spoiling. This explains why commercially prepared chinchalok is usually very salty.

THE PERANAKAN SEESARGON

Baba Ong Jin Teong shares his quest for the perfect *seesargon*

S*eesargon*, a sweet mix of desiccated coconut, ground rice and egg is a favourite childhood snack in Penang. The ingredients are all mixed together and fried in low heat in a traditional brass pan with pandan leaves to enhance the flavour. Getting the *seesargon* done just right took me ages during my first attempt; I even tried microwaving the mixture!

The challenge is to uniformly coat the grated coconut bits with the egg, *kapor* and ground rice flour mixture without causing too many large lumps to form, and then to break up the lumps as the mixture is slowly fried. I am still trying to find a better way of mixing the coconut with the egg and ground rice.

The grated coconut mix is fried till it is crunchy. It should be cooled, mixed with fine sugar and stored in air-tight brandy or whisky bottles to keep it crispy.

Paper cones - smaller than those used for *kachang puteh* - are filled with *seesargon*. The proper way to consume it is to tear off the cone at the bottom, tilt your head backward and tap the cone to let the *seesargon* flow out into your mouth, a little at a time so that it doesn't get into your air passage!

Traditionally, the rice is ground using a *chio bor* (stone grinder) where a cylindrical stone is rotated over a fixed flat circular base. The top of this contraption has a vertical hole to let the rice and water in, while around the bottom stone is a mini moat that collects the watery ground rice. The ground rice flows through a funnel and is collected in a cloth bag. This bag is suspended so as to drain away the liquid.

The *nyonyas* use a *parot* (grater, of which there are two types) to laboriously grate the coconut by hand. *

FACEBOOK PHASE-IN

A gathering of Peranakans who interact virtually delights Baba Richard Tan

Do you know where you can you find Peranakan friends? On Facebook *lah!*

And they come from all over the world: as far as Australia (Perth, Melbourne), Canada (Vancouver), United Kingdom (London, Ramsgate), United States (numerous cities in California), China (Shanghai and Beijing) and as near as Malaysia (Malacca, Penang, Kuala Lumpur), Thailand (Phuket), Indonesia (Medan, Jakarta, Semarang), and so many more places where Peranakans have emigrated. They comprise an eclectic mix of Peranakan *jati* and those who wish to keep their roots and heritage close to their hearts.

There are fresh posts practically every day, with interesting stories, photographs of rare and unusual family heirlooms, black and white family portraits, forgotten historical heroes and outstanding philanthropists from the past. Many of these nuggets can never be found in history books. Facebook has enabled a true sharing of memories, a virtual 'show and tell' to all and sundry.

Antique collections (everything from jewellery, bridal accessories to porcelain) have been photographed and discussed, rare recipes and forgotten *laok embok embok* have everyone's tummies a-growling, forgotten rites and rituals have resurfaced, generating academic debate.

With so much online interaction, it was only natural to organise a meet-up. On Sunday, 14 June 2012, a gathering of Facebook Babas and Nyonyas met for a simple *makan kecil* at Rumah Kim Choo in Katong. We started off with individual introductions, and then screened a selection of photos (from Facebook) sparking comments and conversations. Two hours flew by and it was time to *balek*. With new friendships made, and the urge to *jumpa lagi*, the next gathering was on Sunday, 28 July. Do spread the word and invite more to join in the fun.

There are also other similar gatherings being held in Malacca, Penang and Kuala Lumpur. Let's face it: times have changed, and Facebook has opened up new friendship frontiers, uniting Peranakans near and far! *

Some Facebook Groups:

- The Peranakan Association Singapore
– 2,530 Likes
- The Peranakan (Nyonya & Baba) Clan
– 3,641 members
- Rumah Perot* – Peranakan Food Culture
– 125 members
- Peranakan Material Culture
– 180 members

The third monthly get-together on 29 July, Sunday at NAC-Goodman Arts Centre. Nearly 30 people attended the makan kecil and sing-along. The fourth monthly Sunday gathering is on 26 August.

PERANAKAN PASSION RUNS RED!

Baba Emeric Lau goes to the birthday ball

A traditional altar, laid out to mark a birthday in the family

Tok seh jit setting.

*Our gorgeous
guests came
in every
shade of red
imaginable!*

Every shade of red in a Pantone catalogue and then some... the Peranakan community turned out in fully bejewelled force to celebrate The Peranakan Association, Singapore's (TPAS) 112th anniversary. The event was graced by special guest Mr Charles Chong, MP for Joo Chiat SMC. Honorary Life President of TPAS, Mr Lee Kip Lee, was also in attendance.

The evening's entertainment commenced even before the Grand Ballroom of the Marriott Hotel opened its doors. As guests mingled at the reception area and browsed stalls stocked with nyonya tidbits, collectibles and traditional jewellery, five boisterous characters burst forth. They comprised Peranakan Theatre Doyen G.T. Lye and the stellar cast from an upcoming play, *Senjakala* (Sunset), written by Lye himself. Soon, it became apparent that matriarch Lye was holding a birthday celebration, hence setting the Ball's *Tua Seh Jit* (Big Birthday Bash) theme and the reason for everybody to dress in red.

And what a riot of red! The entire ballroom was awash with nyonias and bibiks clad in coral, fuchsia, mauve, pink, vermilion – endless permutations of the most passionate shade. This time, even the men were not to be outdone, as many eschewed the traditional batik shirt for the silky comfort of *baju lok chuan*, which shimmered in singularly bold hues of gold and maroon.

Dinner proved equally delightful. The Marriott's respected kitchen served up a traditional Chinese birthday feast, where each course has a unique and significant meaning. 'Live' band Dendang Irama provided the music, and no one needed an invitation to get up and joget. The Peranakan Voices, TPAS' resident choir, delighted all with their songs. Host Alvin Yapp was in his effervescent element, holding a Peranakan 'pop' quiz and teasing guests feverish with anticipation as to the results of the raffle draw. We only wish the night didn't have to end.

Enjoy the photos...

The Peranakan Ball Committee 2012

Alvin Chia	Emeric Lau
Alvin Teo	John Lee
Alvin Yapp	Lim Geok Huay
Bebe Seet	Monica Alsagoff
Christine Ong	Pauline Chan

The cast of Senjakala entertain onstage.

Charles Chong and Baba Peter Wee share a laugh.

Our VIPs.

Banquet in full swing.

Dancing the night away.

Our ebullient PVs.

Host Baba Alvin Yapp in action.



Our first prize raffle draw winner, Raymond Goh.

PERUNAKAN 2012

Baba Edmond Wong takes on racing and repositories

Baba Peter Wee and the Nanyang Polytechnic team behind PeRUNakan at 112 Katong.

The race began when the *bibik* screeched *Cheelaka sehaja!* PeRUNakan returned this year with more activities and thrills, all involving your active contribution to our online repository system (<http://perunakan.sg>) and engagement with our physical Amazing Race-style game.

The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) is proud to be the main organiser of this year's race held in and around Singapore's very first Heritage Town on 28 July 2012. We partnered with Nanyang Polytechnic and were supported by the National Heritage Board (NHB) and the Heritage Fest.

As the custodians of our Straits heritage and culture, we engaged the public in a *Totally Baba-licious* time (Peranakan Festival 2009) and received great reviews. This year, we collaborated with the Heritage Fest to celebrate all things Peranakan at 112 Katong.

We hope that our initiatives will encourage greater family bonding, as stories can be transmitted from grandparents to the younger generations. Indeed, the online repository system was introduced with the purpose of data collection from the second and third generation of Singaporeans.

In the near future, we aim to collect sufficient information to introduce an online archive of venue-specific memories that is freely accessible by the public. *

SINGAPURA RUMAH KITA: ENGAGING NEW CITIZENS

Baba Chan Eng Thai and the Peranakan Voices spend an afternoon with new Singaporeans

The People's Association, together with the Peranakan Museum, organised a Straits Family Day at the Museum on 10 June 2012 for new Singapore citizens. The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) was invited to make a presentation. The Peranakan Voices (PVs)

performed a song, while I delivered a talk on the Peranakans.

Addressing a room filled with new Singapore citizens, I shared that the Peranakans were once new Singaporeans too, as most of our ancestors had migrated from China to Malaya

and Singapore. I also shared photos covering the Peranakans' material culture, cuisine and lifestyle from the 1880s to the 1960s. Peranakans were very much in the limelight during the colonial era, until the formation of independent Singapore, when they

had to grapple with the learning of Mandarin as their 'mother tongue'.

The audience learnt that many early leaders of Singapore were Peranakans: Dr Lim Boon Keng, Sir Song Ong Siang, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Dr Goh Keng Swee and the late President Wee Kim Wee. Even our current Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong and our President Tony Tan Keng Yam are Peranakans.

The talk challenged new citizens to find their place in Singapore's *rojak* of cultures, just like how Peranakans adapted various Malay and Western influences into their practices, but still remained largely Chinese.

The PVs then rounded off the session with a medley of songs in English, Baba Malay and Mandarin, and had the new citizens clamouring for more. I composed this *panton*, entitled *Singapura Rumah Kita*, to conclude:

<i>Dari dulu sampay sekarang,</i>	From ages beyond time,
<i>Sudah ada Bukit Timah,</i>	Bukit Timah was here,
<i>Empat penjuru semua datang,</i>	Four corners do we come,
<i>Singapura buat jadi rumah!</i>	Making Singapore our home!

Flanked by the PVs, Baba Chan Eng Thai recites his *panton* to the new citizens.

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To contact the President,

WELCOME

A big welcome to our new members:

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Ms Chee Kwee Ping Jasmine

Mr Chee Teng Wah Charlie

Ms Foo Foo Su Ling

Ms Kho Guek Neo Joan

Mr Liew Chay Ming Rodney

Ms Jennifer Lim

Ms Lim Siew Yin Belinda

Ms Lu Sui Tin Magdalene

Ms Ni Qing

Ms Oh Winfred

Mr Shen Shuyliang Bryan Cruis

Mr Teh Chee Kiong

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Ms Michelle Wong nee

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OBITUARY

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

Mr Arthur Thum Tuck Low

Mr Tony Goh Kim Beng

We appeal to all members who have not submitted two hard copy passport photos of themselves to please do so in order for the committee to produce your membership cards.

All members are to ensure that the Association is kept updated of all their contact details, including email, mailing address and telephone numbers. Please contact Mrs Lim Geok Huay at 62550704 or email geok@peranakan.org.sg

Thank you to all sponsors of the Peranakan Ball on 27 July 2012

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Ms Soon Puay Keow

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and all other anonymous supporters of the Peranakan Ball

MUSEUMS

Peranakan Museum.

See the world's first national Peranakan Museum with the most comprehensive and finest collection of Peranakan artefacts. The 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: 6332 7591.

Emily of Emerald Hill: Singaporean Identity on Stage. Featuring the iconic play by Stella Kon, the exhibition looks at its milieu and background in Peranakan culture and theatre, as well as its impact on the Singapore

art scene. On display are original costumes, props and other stage artefacts, which together aim to present a fresh and original perspective on Peranakan heritage and its national influence. From 1 June 2012 to 17 February 2013.

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 goes back in time to 1928. Experience what a grand Peranakan terraced house would have been like. Formerly owned by the Wee family (whose ancestor Wee Bin was a mid-19th century shipping magnate) since 1910. 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>

Capturing the Straits: Painting and Postcard Views from the 19th and Early 20th Centuries. The exhibition brings together

the work of Charles Dyce, who lived in Singapore in the 1840s and made fine sketches of the island, and postcard views of Malacca from the early 20th century. From 9 February - 31 October 2012. Please call to arrange visits.

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: 6332 2982, 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>

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall The old Sun Yat Sen Villa reopened in October 2011 after extensive renovations with a new name. Fitting tribute is given to the former owners of the house, especially Teo Eng Hock, a son of Teo Lee, one of the pioneer Teochew merchants in Singapore, together with his nephew Lim Nee Soon, who were among the loyal supporters of Sun Yat Sen's bid to overthrow the Qing government. The exhibition shows how

Singapore, and the Chinese community here played an important part in this pivotal moment of world history. Intimate photos of family life, and of Teo Eng Hock's nyonya mother, Mrs Teo Lee née Tan Poh Neo (granddaughter of the kapitan of Muntok), add charm and a Peranakan angle to the experience. 12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874, Tel: 6256 7377, Opening Hours: 10am-5pm daily. Website: wanqingyuan.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/dds2b/blair/study/Blair.html.

Emerald Hill Road. Another interesting residential district showcasing the best of

eclectic Peranakan residential architecture, just off Orchard Road.

Katong and Joo Chiat. Once 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. Also <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: 6423 4616.

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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