the Peranakan 120



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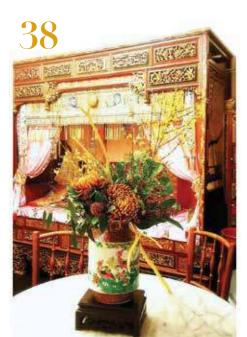
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ON THE COVER • A newly beaded wedding collar done on velvet base made by Jackie Sam. See page 4, 'Needled by Passion'. Photo by Colin Chee



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Email:secretariat@peranakan.org.sg • Printer: Lithographic Print House Pte Ltd.

MCI (P) 032/10/2016

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The Peranakan Magazine house style reflects the Baba Malay spelling found in A Baba Malay Dictionary by Baba William Gwee Thian Hock



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editorial

Not Lost at Sea

When the first Peranakan Association newsletter was published in 1994, I was in my salad days, barely out of my blue and white convent girl's pinafore. It is heartening to see how the one-page, typewritten sheet has evolved into the Peranakan Magazine under the guidance and dedication of previous editors Lee Kip Lee, Peter Lee and Linda Chee. I am honoured to join their ranks as this magazine's new editor.

In 1994, Lee Kip Lee wrote this about Baba youth: "They are not interested in their antecedent... consequently, completely at sea and bored when attending a Peranakan play. These are the brethren whose support we should endeavour to win." Today, in 2017, some still worry that our culture will die out because our children seem disinterested.

I am optimistic that Peranakan culture will persevere. Now, more than ever, with the Internet and social media, Peranakan culture is very visible and appreciated by Babas and non-Babas alike. In fact, the Japanese are our biggest fans! They have even started nyonya cooking schools and *manek* beading classes in Japan. In the past year alone, Baba Malay, kebaya *sulam* and *cherki* classes have been conducted in Singapore; Peranakan festivals were well attended.

Author Felix Chia was spot on when he wrote: "Conservative Babas, purists who believe that the Baba culture can be kept intact are deluding themselves." As with any culture, the key to keeping it alive is to evolve, be curious and be inclusive. In this spirit, I hope that the stories we share in the Peranakan Magazine will inspire you to embrace the new, rediscover the old and celebrate being Baba. This magazine exists to add value to the global Peranakan community.

In this edition, read about Jackie Sam's love affair with *manek* and her passion for rediscovering forgotten beading techniques. Curiosity drove Maddie Tham on a quest to uncover the secrets of the bridal *sapu tangan* (handkerchief). Ronney Tan reveals the inner workings of an ancient Baba brotherhood. Be tickled by Bibik Ayam's adventures in our new humour section. Share your stories of Peranakan household vessels and stand to win a sterling silver Peranakan charm bracelet with mini *kamchengs, chupus* and many more.

I believe that our best stories come from you, our readers. We need to hear from you to make this magazine, and the Peranakan Association vibrant and relevant. Please write in to us with your news and views, or, if you'd like to volunteer. We welcome anyone (Baba or not) with a love for the culture. Ours is a nebulous identity, constantly evolving. When the winds change, we do not abandon our voyage, but reset our sails.

Dawn Marie Lee Editor editor@peranakan.org.sg

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Needled By Passion

NYONYA LINDA CHEE COMBS THROUGH THE EXQUISITE BEADED WORKS OF JACKIE SAM

rom a husband's worthy sacrifice has emerged scintillating works of art.

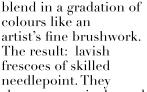
At least, that is the logic behind Mrs Jackie Sam indulging in her passion, at the expense of time spent with her hubby. "Have some sympathy for me," says KC Sam, with a cheeky wink.

I pay a casual visit to their home one weekend morning. On the walls, from the living room to the backyard, are frame after frame of cross-stitch and beading on display.

Jackie comes down the staircase with a pile of works done over the past 24 years, carefully layered with acid-free paper. What strikes me on scrutinising her works is a finely honed sense of colour. Shades



Panel done on a velvet base, using the couching method. 34cm x 23 cm. The design was taken from an old mirror cover.



showcase meticulous planning of colour palettes, keen visualisation and intricate coordination. "Keeps me alert," quips the retired 69-year-old primary school teacher.

Her cross-stitch works sewn on linen go up to a dense 18 counts per square inch. (My unlearned



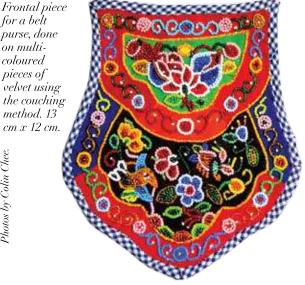
Jackie at home, happy doing her beadwork. She draws inspiration from various sources and old designs.

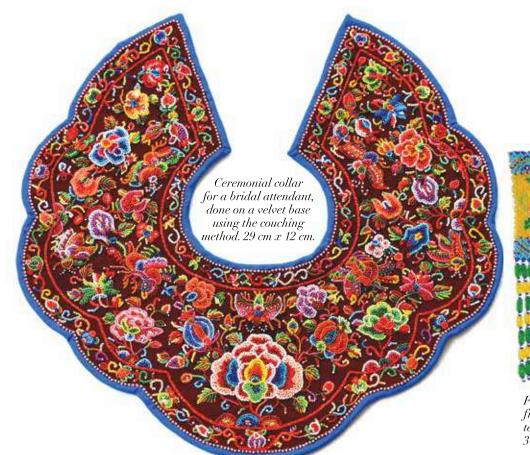
mind associates this with the 600-upwards threadcount of luxurious Egyptian cotton sheets.) Piqued to try something new, Jackie started beading eight years ago. She has her own way of stitching kasot manek. Unlike the norm, where the central motif is done first, she starts beading the background and works inwards to "see the impact of the background before I proceed". This way, she says, "I can coordinate the colours properly." Spoken like a true artist.

I spot two pairs of mini *kasot manek* lovely on a little girl's feet. They are stitched in traditional patterns. Jackie has no desire to create or modernise patterns. "I like to replicate old designs to see how they turn out." Every bead is angled perfectly, fused on canvas with a curved needle that reminds me of the hair-like fish bones in the delicious ikan parang that Peranakan fish lovers often get stuck in their throats.

She pulls out from the acid-free papers a couple of silk and velvet ceremonial

for a belt purse, done on multicoloured pieces of velvet using the couching method. 13 cm x 12 cm. Photos by Colin Chee.







Flower panel (16 cm x 6.5 cm) with fringe (7 cm), done with the threading technique of needle & thread on a 3-bead weave.

wedding collars. Done on velvet background, they are meant to be worn by the pageboy or girl. The collars are evenly hand stitched and use the smallest of coloured antique beads. She spent three months of her "free time" to complete each one. These are what I came to see. I do not know of anyone producing such collars these days.

Oh wait. I see more master works in the pile. I hold up a translucent panel of beadwork strung with the prettiest of fringes, using the threading technique. No canvas, no frame to guide the needle. It is like discovering the Holy Grail. This threadwork is what has been written as a lost Peranakan art.

Jackie has successfully produced beautiful beaded Peranakan panels just by using a needle and thread. Unlike the classical multi-string threadwork of Peranakan beading - which can no longer be found



Abovee: Child's kasot manek, done on a small pidangan (wooden frame) incorporating antique beads and cross-stitch.

Below: Green-bordered panel, using the square-stitch technique. 69 cm x 10 cm. - this needle & thread method is still difficult to work on. So far she has done a few beaded panels. The challenge to do more is in finding the time to replicate old designs salvaged from damaged pieces.

Comparing the look of modernday beads, Jackie says vintage beads have a richer and finer appeal. She counts herself fortunate to have inherited a tidy lot of antique beads from "two dear old ladies". But old beads are equally a challenge to handle. "Selecting the same size can be a tedious and slow process. Threading can also be frustrating because the beads tend to get brittle with age and they break easily." Fine needles have become a rarity too, so Jackie uses hers sparingly.

Asked if she would exhibit or sell her works, Jackie gives a modest reply: "I am only interested in churning out pieces of beauty for personal satisfaction."

She ponders. "Maybe one day, I will." •



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The Unwanted Daughter

NYONYA DAWN MARIE LEE TELLS THE INSPIRING STORY OF LEE KIM CHOO

A s I watched my son hungrily wolf down his third *kueh chang babi* (glutinous rice and pork dumpling wrapped in bamboo leaves) in a row after *taekwando* practice, I began to wonder about this delicious dumpling's beginnings and popularity in Singapore. Curious, I spoke to some elderly babas and nyonyas who had lived in the Joo Chiat area, and soon found out about Lee Kim Choo, whose remarkable life story is inspiring.

Born in 1933 in Trengganu, the daughter of a wealthy merchant and a Singapore nyonya, Kim Choo's father insisted on giving her away immediately after her birth. He had been advised by a Chinese astrologer that his new daughter's stars clashed severely with his own, and that she would bring him ill fortune. Desperate, Kim Choo's mother quickly wrote to her own mother in Singapore and begged her to take the baby. Kim Choo's grandmother adopted her and raised her in a strict Peranakan household in Joo Chiat. From a young age, Kim Choo was taught to cook and prepare *kueh*, a source of income for the family.

Baba Victor Goh, who was a neighbour of the family, recalls that Kim Choo's grandmother was nicknamed *Bibik Kueh Bakol.* "Her *kueh bakol* (steamed glutinous rice flour cake) was the best! Every family ordered from her, especially near Chinese New Year. Her secret recipe made the *kueh bakol* stay soft for weeks. The *kueh* was steamed for almost 15 hours in an old biscuit tin with holes pierced into the bottom and lined with *daon pisang raja* (king banana leaves). Joss sticks were burnt as a measure of time. Menstruating ladies were forbidden to make this *kueh*."

> Kim Choo wearing the jade butterfly from her grandmother. In later life, she had it made into a necklace.



One of Kim Choo's favourite portraits of herself.

merchant. Little did she know that *of herself.* Kim Choo had already fallen in love with a coffeeshop assistant, Wong Yee Dee. She had met him by chance while running an errand, and then continued to sneak out to meet him. The clandestine couple was eventually spotted by neighbourhood *kaypohs* (busybodies) who swiftly reported this to her outraged grandmother. At that time, it was scandalous for a young nyonya to meet boys unchaperoned. Her grandmother insisted that the young couple marry immediately to stop tongues wagging.

Soon after the

war in the 1940s, the

had blossomed into a

budding beauty. Her

grandmother began to

seek out wealthy suitors

for her. She had good prospects,

being the daughter of a wealthy

teenage Kim Choo

Thus in 1950, 17-year-old Kim Choo got married. To supplement her husband's meager income, the resourceful nyonya sold *chap chai png* (rice with mixed vegetable stew) for fifty cents. However the money was hardly enough to feed the family. She then made a bold decision to set up her own business selling *kueh chang babi*. Her grandmother had taught her how to make the dumplings.

Bravely, Kim Choo set up her makeshift stall under a *buah ceri* (local cherry) tree at the junction of Joo Chiat Place and Everitt Road. In 1950s Singapore, it was almost unheard of for a decent young woman to do business, what more, a nyonya, who was supposed to be a genteel, obedient, home-bound wife. Some even considered it shameful for a married nyonya to go out and earn a living.

Undeterred by her critics, Kim Choo sold her *kueh chang* at her little stall, rain or shine. They were well made and delicious, and became very popular in Joo Chiat and beyond. It was from these humble beginnings that Kim Choo supported her family and raised five children. (One of her sons died in childhood, causing her much anguish.)

In her old age, she recounted to her grandchildren that she was not bitter that she was an unwanted daughter. Even her grandmother, who had raised her as her daughter, left her with just a pair of silver *chochok sanggol* (hair pins) and a small jade butterfly when she passed away because she was not her blood daughter.

Kim Choo was proud to have built her business on her own. She passed away in 2015 but her legacy lives on. Today, the name Kim Choo is synonymous with quality *kueh chang*. After I learnt of her story, I feel that it's an uncanny tribute that these dumplings are popularly known as 'Nyonya Chang' in Singapore. The next time I eat one, I will remember the tenacious nyonya who dared to defy convention.

Bibik Ayam's Batty Adventures: That's one kooky family!



A Deadly Game of Cherki

BABA BRYAN TAN HATCHES A DASTARDLY PLOT WITH THE BIBIKS OF BATU BERENDAM TO GET REVENGE ON A CHEATING HUSBAND AND RULE THE WORLD

he room is steeped in complete darkness, except for a single source of light in the middle. Shadowy figures sit around a small square table, dimly illuminated by a naked light bulb. Four pairs of hands with brightly coloured fingernails grasp at *cherki* cards, shuffling and dealing them with practiced dexterity.

"Bibik Pesek(flat), how is your husband?" a voice behind the red claws adorned with miniature dragons booms.

"Sua lah(I'm fed up) Bibik Kerbau(bull). He's out womanising again!" Bibik Pesek complained, waving her glittery blue talons. "He thinks *gua tak tau*(I don't know). The private investigator you recommended *mahair juga*(very expensive), but he's very effective!"

The giant silhouette behind the red claws nods. "Now that you have evidence, what are you going to do?"

"Tak tau lah(I have no idea). If I divorce him, everyone at the market will start gossiping about me. *Malu sekali*(So embarrassing)!"

A bobbing silhouette behind the lime green pinchers makes a clucking noise. "Pesek, gua *boleh tolong*(I can help). At my restaurant I know many ways to *kasi ayam mati*(kill chickens), and I know one special way to serve him right!"

All four erupt in raucous laughter. Neon yellow barbs tap the table with a *cherki* card.

"Nowadays men are even worse, because of that orange *monyet*(monkey) that appears on TV all the time. *Gua sua lupa*, *apa nama dia*?(I've forgotten, what is his name?) Trunk?"

"Salah lah(that's wrong) Bibik Bodoh(silly). You mean Trump," chuckles Bibik Kerbau.

"Yah that one! *Chekek dara*(makes my blood boil)! Yesterday *chuchu gua*(my grandson), the one in Primary Three, grabbed our neighbour's *kuching*(cat) and shook it so hard! The poor little pussycat *terperanjat* (got a shock) and has gone missing since! The neighbours are furious! *Kus semangat, gua sepak muka dia satu kali*(My goodness, I gave him a tight slap on the face). Oi...*Cherki*!"

Disapproving noises fill the small table as the cards are reshuffled. The looming figure of Bibik Kerbau suddenly leans in with a menacing grin on her face.

"So Pesek, what are you going to do? Bibik Ayam



here can settle all your problems, *betol tak*? (isn't that right)"

Bibik Ayam's head bobs up and down furiously, her neck wattle trembling. "Just tell me and I will *potong*(cut) his *timun*(cucumber) for you!"

Bibik Bodoh nods sagely. "Better don't divorce him, or it will be like Brexit! No more benefits! No pocket money and no free time to play *cherki* or go to the spa for massage. Your market value will drop like *batu*(stone) and worse of all *lu mesti pi kreja*(you will have to work)!"

A collective gasp of *kus semangat* escapes. Bibik Kerbau shoots up, knocking her stool over. Her imposing figure obscures the sole light bulb; a softly glowing halo forms around her head.

"Listen to me ladies! The world is changing for the worse because all the men in power are so incompetent! It's time for the Nyonya matriarchs to rise up again! We have been relaxed for far too long. We once ruled our households and were admired by everyone, even by the political and business elite! *Gua ada menimpi*(I have a dream)..."

Suddenly, sunlight streams into the once darkened room amidst hisses of anger and protest, revealing a cluttered space filled with brooms, toilet paper and detergent. Bibik Molly, stands imposingly in the doorway, hands on her hips.

"Oi! Can you all please stop using my storeroom as your illegal gambling den? I can hear you gossiping so loudly from outside! You think you all are gangsters or what? *Semua balik rumah sekarang*(go home all of you)! Shoo!"

Bring Back The Kebaya

NYONYA LEE SU KIM SPEAKS TO LYANA KHAIRUDDIN, FOUNDER OF THE BRING BACK THE KEBAYA MOVEMENT

//bringbackthekebaya started as a hashtag to "celebrate the kebaya as a unifying symbol of strength within diversity among women from many ethnicities and body shapes". On 12 November 2016, a dinner celebrating the kebaya was held at Quill City Mall, KL, which garnered a lot of attention and support from the public.

Organised by Lyana Khairuddin, a virologist, social activist and a columnist for The Star, it was a highly successful event attended by many from all walks of life and various ethnic groups. The joyous support for the kebaya was palpable as ladies came beautifully dressed in kebayas of various styles. Proceeds from the fundraising event went to the SEEDS Foundation.

Guest speaker, Baba Peter Lee, gave an interesting talk on the origins of the kebaya and the multicultural influences that shaped its evolution. His presentation reinforced the notion that the kebaya is very much a part of South East Asia's shared cultural heritage, transcending national boundaries.

In a posting on the Bring Back the Kebaya (BBTK) Facebook page, Lyana speaks out candidly, "Funny, isn't it? The more modern a society is, the more the need to police what women wear. If our great grandmothers were able to raise children, manage households and earn their livelihoods wearing nothing but a sarong berkemban (where the sarong is worn tied around the chest with no blouse), then why are women's bodies so feared today? The exposure of our womanly figures is suddenly considered inappropriate? Every single one of us comes to this earth through a woman's vagina. For us to turn around and shame women's bodies, to hide women's figures, and to sexualise every bit of that same body that gave us life is nothing short of hypocritical."

I met Lyana recently. A vivacious, lovely lady full of a passion for life, she is a champion for the downtrodden and underprivileged. Over a lunch of *nasi lemak* and *sang har meen* (she had the noodles and I, the rice dish) she shared with me how she grew up in a family where it was quite

normal to wear kebayas. She expressed her desire to create an awareness of

Lyana Khairuddin, founder of the BBTK movement. (Photo courtesy of Lyana Khairuddin)



Attendees to the event wore diverse forms of the kebaya. Left to right: Kudsia Kahar, Zainah Anwar, Dr Asma Abdullah, Dr Narimah Awin, Sherry Sheriff, Dato' Faridah Khalid and Datin Rose Ismail.

and pride in our cultural identity.

LSK: Tell us briefly about yourself.

LK: I am a virologist, so I don't usually get to wear the kebaya daily. I wear it whenever I can – to work (under a lab coat) or as casual wear, and definitely during special occasions. I am also a columnist with The Star.

LSK: Where do you think the kebaya came from?

LK: Indonesia! I have Minang roots. Photos from my family archives show my mother, grandmothers and great-grandmothers all in kebayas. The history textbooks that I grew up with also depict Malayan/Malaysian women in kebaya. This only strengthens the close ties we all have within the region.

LSK: What type of kebaya did women in your family wear?

LK: They wore *kebaya rumah* which is made from cool, airy fabric like cotton and cut loose, resembling a *baju kedah* but with buttons. My late grandmother would wear this at home while doing chores. For special occasions they wore kebayas made from fancy fabric like silk, chiffon and satin, some with embroidery and beading.

LSK: What inspired you to organise the BBTK event ?

LK: I was going through my family's archive of photo albums and was feeling nostalgic when I found photos of my mother and aunts in what seemed to be a "ratu kebaya" event. It dawned on me that Malay women especially, do not wear the kebaya often anymore. I started wearing the kebaya more frequently myself, started a Facebook page and encouraged everyone to wear this beautiful heritage dress. The event initially started only as an excuse to get Malaysian women to dress up in

the kebaya, but it morphed into a gathering of unity among Malaysians. It was a wonderful evening with music and dance performances, and an educational talk by Baba Peter Lee on the origins and future of the kebaya in the region. I'm pleased that all the proceeds from the event went to a good cause – an NGO that assists the marginalised community in Chow Kit.

LSK: Did you have a target group in mind for the BBTK movement?

LK: I wanted more youths and people around my age to start wearing the kebaya again. We had planned for a cross-generational fashion show during the event but that didn't materialise. I wanted to show that the kebaya is timeless and still stylish for young people today. I hope through the Facebook page and Instagram, more people will come to appreciate the kebaya and 'bring it back' into their everyday lives.

LSK: Do you see a link between the clothes we wear and our identity?

LK: Absolutely. An issue facing Malays today is the lack of empowerment. We tend to eradicate our cultural identity for a religious identity even when history has shown us that Islam is adaptable to the Nusantara region. We do not need to be Arabs to be Muslims. Today, Arabisation is rife, and I hope that movements such as **#bringbackthekebaya** and other cultural preservation efforts will overcome this.

LSK: Why is bringing back the kebaya important to you?

LK: Imagine a day when all the women in Malaysia only wear black *burqas*. Wouldn't that be boring? Malaysian women are strong, beautiful and diverse!



Baba Peter Lee enlightened the attendees with "Evolution of the Kebaya in the Nusantara".



"Tarian Rampaian" by ASWARA dancers.



Singer Mariam Ahmad and Mr Peter Yeoh showed off their joget moves.

These qualities are so beautifully embodied in the many types and colours of the kebaya. The kebaya is also sexy, and we women should celebrate our sensuality and femininity through such clothing.

LSK: Do you think the BBTK event had any impact at all on creating an awareness?

LK: It has. The publicity photo on the Facebook page shows diverse Malaysian women wearing different types of kebayas. This photo has started conversations on cultural identity, religiosity and body shaming on social media. The kebaya has not disappeared, but it is being sidelined due to body shaming and even religious policing. Thus **#bringbackthekebaya** aims

> to make a woman wearing the kebaya in her everyday life a normal sight again.

LSK: Is there anything else you'd like to add regarding your thoughts and memories on the kebaya?

LK: I think what people tend to forget is how diverse and adaptable our Nusantara region is. We prefer to box ourselves in, claiming that a particular food, like *nasi* goreng or clothing like the kebaya only belongs to a certain group of people. We must not forget that many of our ancestors were traders who embraced cultural fluidity. The kebaya is adaptable despite being a heritage garment; it must endure for generations to come.

Follow the BBTK movment on Facebook and instagram: @bringbackthekebaya

The Kebaya And Me

NYONYA LEE SU KIM SHARES HER VIEWS ON THE KEBAYA AS AN AUTHOR AND CULTURAL ACTIVIST

W ithin the Baba Nyonya community, with the resurgence of interest in our culture, there is no worry that our nyonya kebaya will disappear anytime soon. If anything, we nyonyas are digging into old family cupboards hoping to stumble upon vintage kebayas that Grandma might have stuffed away! Or we secretly hope to chance upon a stash of *kasa rubia* (rubia voile) that Mother or an elderly aunt has left behind, dumped somewhere in the storeroom. If these treasures are discovered, they are gleefully handed to the kebaya maker to convert into a kebaya for the next Peranakan event and for everyone else to oooh, ahhhh and drool over.

The nyonya kebaya, in my view, is alive today and indeed has come into its own, outshining its sister sarong just below her. Nyonyas attending Peranakan functions these days make it a point to don their sarong kebayas, emblems of our cultural identity. Unlike the near-disappearance of the kebaya within Malay society, nyonyas do not face any religiosity or repression in any way. At best or worst, you may bump into a so-called purist or a 'gua-more-baba-than-lu' type, who will frown if your kebaya is misaligned or mutter, "*Alamak, pengsan gua*! (Good heavens!)" (accompanied with slap on the forehead in despair) if you've worn your sarong upside down or it's slowly



kebaya during Chinese New Year.

Right: My grandma all dressed up to play cherki with her neighbours.



Above: At the Singapore Writers festival with my cousin Foo Foong Keng (right), 2014.

Right: At the Malam Rongeng event in Malacca with nyonyas Angeline Kong (centre) and Lillian Tong (right), 2016

kebayas worn backwards, kebayas with denim and leather boots, babas wearing *sulam* of flowers, birds, butterflies on their chests and even gays getting married in kebayas. So what's there to rattle our precious



sangguls (bun chignons) anymore-eh?

The nyonya of the 21st century is no longer the voiceless, sheltered female of yesteryear peeping behind a gilded screen at her designated husband. Nyonyas nowadays (some with deep pockets or lots of plastic in their wallets) will not blink twice and happily pay for a bespoke kebaya. It's one of those things you don't really need but want! Some will think nothing of catching a flight to zip over to another city (or even country) to find a particular kebaya maker, place an order for a bespoke kebaya (or a whole pile of them) then catch the next flight home.

The kebayas of my childhood

I grew up in a household where the women wore kebavas frequently. Both my mother and grandmother wore dainty kebaya *biku* (kebayas with embroidered edges) in soft colours such as mauve, peach, sea blue or light green. It was the gorgeous Pekalongan batik sarongs that held centre stage then. Grandma wore sarong kebaya everyday to play cherki (a card game favoured by nyonyas) with the neighbours. My sister and I loved to watch, fascinated, as she moved languidly through stages of dress and undress. From sarong berkemban (where the sarong is worn tied around the chest with no blouse), she'd slip on a crisp starched sarong under the existing one, don a camisole, then tug off the sarong on top. Ambling to her cupboard fragranced with dried bunga melor (jasmine flowers), she'd pull out a kebaya and put it on, checking that every flower on the lapels and the panel ends were symmetrically perfect, then fasten it with a kerosang (a set of three brooches). Tucking a handkerchief into her bosom, she'd slip on her kasot manek (beaded shoes) and stroll *lengang lengang* (swaying rhythmically) over to a neighbour's house, a few doors away on the next street. No jangling of car keys/house keys, frantic search for smart phone, grab of sunglasses, dab of sunblock. Life was much simpler then.

I was given my first kebaya when I was sixteen. My parents took the family on a holiday to Penang,

sought out my mother's kebaya tailor and ordered a light lemon yellow kebaya for me. There have always been kebayas in my life and in my antique cupboard, hang around 50 kebayas, ranging from hand-medowns, antiques to recent acquisitions. I even have *tua har* (mourning) ones simply because I love the blue and whites. In my ten years as President and founder member of the PPBNKLS, I wore the kebaya to every Peranakan event and official function, as well as to talks, conferences, literary events and book festivals as a writer and academic.



A kebaya made for me by the late Aunty Kim from rubia voile given to me by a friend.



In a kebaya with flamenco motifs at the launch of my latest book, Manek Mischiefs at the Peranakan Museum, Singapore

Inspiration for my books

It was the kebaya that inspired me to write my first collection of short stories in 2008, Kebaya Tales: Of Matriarchs, Maidens, Mistresses and Matchmakers. With its rich array of flamboyant characters, family intrigues, multiculturalism, the time was ripe to attempt to capture it in fiction. My plan was to insert visuals of kebayas after each short story, linking the kebaya motifs with its themes. It was a pleasant surprise when the first print run of Kebaya Tales was sold out in less than six months. The second book in this series, Sarong Secrets: Of Love, Loss and Longing was published three years ago with more stories of colourful idiosyncrasies, scandals and matters of the heart. My third collection of short stories, Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours has just been published. The titles of this trilogy are a combined tribute to three notable components of a nyonya's beautiful attire - the kebaya, sarong, and kasot manek.

Lyana Khairuddin and the folks who organised the BBTK event are to be applauded for their courageous stance and efforts. Cultivation of one's cultural heritage and pride in our cultural identity are worthwhile causes. In our Peranakan community, we should be concerned that the artisanal skills needed in the making of a kebaya are in danger of disappearing. Apart from a lack of political will in keeping these skills alive, not many want to earn a living in a time-consuming, labourintensive occupation.

There is a lack of urgency and interest to set up academies to

teach the skills involved or to invest time in this craftsmanship. Soon, nyonyas will have to put up with wearing commercially mass-produced kebayas which come in sizes S, M and L, made in factories with a cast of hundreds. The bespoke nyonya kebaya will gradually disappear to be replaced by a commodified version. So yes my fellow babas and nyonyas, on many levels, bring back the kebaya!

Dr Lee Su Kim is a published author of ten books. Her latest book, Manek Mischiefs is out now. She can be reached through her website: www.leesukim.net.

features

The Seasons of Singapore

BABA EDMOND WONG REDISCOVERS SINGAPORE'S NATURAL HERITAGE INCLUDING OUR VERY OWN VERSION OF THE SAKURA.

any would suggest that the best time Lto visit Japan would be in early Spring, during the month of April, when the *sakura* or cherry blossoms burst into bloom all over the country. The Japanese 'Golden Week' is when hordes of domestic and international tourists flock to cherry blossom hotspots in Japan to view the trees in bloom. However, not many of us will realise that we can also experience the same floral grandeur from our native plants right here in Singapore.

When I was younger,

I recall seeing our native Mempat trees here in Singapore burst into clouds of pink blossoms. It was so special because the trees are glorious in bloom, yet the flowers have such a short lifespan, just like the *sakura*. I never grew tired of this beautiful sight and eagerly tried to guess when these trees would bloom again. Little did I know that the Mempat flowers are seasonal until in recent years, when I started to realise that we are



Sea-Almond trees bring autumn colours to Singapore.

neglecting an important segment in our nation building – our native plants and natural seasons in Singapore.

I discovered that the Mempat tree, with its trumpet-shaped pink flowers, bursts into bloom about twice a year, after prolonged spells of hot, dry weather in Singapore. In recent years, dry

The delicate pale pink blooms of the mempat *tree.*

spells have seen mass blooming of Mempat trees at various spots around the island. Indeed during this time, it looks like springtime in Singapore.

I remember that as a child, I enjoyed spying on squirrels that explored my neighbourhood in Joo Chiat and Katong in the early mornings, brushing through the piles of red leaves in search for Sea-Almond seeds hidden under the shedding leaves of these majestic trees along Dunman Road. The brilliant reds and yellows of these Sea-Almond trees resemble the glory of autumn leaves in more temperate climates.

While serving my National Service in 2003, I started blogging and researching about our natural environment, and realised that there is much of our native flora that we may have damaged through the rapid-path taken to maintain our garden city as it is today.

Singapore can truly be a representation of a garden city within South East Asia if we seek to maintain our native plants. Plants such as the Sea-Almond and Mempat trees are seasonal plants, which may help elevate our cultural presence in South East Asia. Such an approach will also progressively allow our community to appreciate the different seasons that our island enjoys. What makes the *sakura* season so popular not only among the Japanese, but also among international tourists is the sense of anticipation to view nature in all its glory. Why not then in Singapore, do we learn to appreciate our seasonal plants?

In Singapore, there are many beautiful plants that are not native to our island. These have been planted to provide us with good shade and help alleviate air-pollution. Many of these foreign plants also require less effort to maintain compared to some of our native plants. Native plants such as the Sea-Almond tree and Mempat tree are being replaced so rapidly that if we do not attempt to re-establish their presence in our garden city, we will inevitably lose the important natural heritage of our country. My hope is that we spread awareness of our native plants and campaign for them to be appreciated and planted in more spots all over the island.

If you are keen to find out more about preserving Singapore's native plants like or follow Edmond's Facebook page 'Mempat Tree Awareness (Singapore)' at URL: https://www.facebook.com/ MempatTreeAwareness/

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Chef Yamashita Masataka trained in Tsuji Culinary Institute, a renowned and respected culinary institute in Osaka, Japan. He has worked at various patisseries in Japan for a decade before starting his own patisserie in his home town, Nara and quickly became one of the top rated patisseries there. Eight years later, yearning for new challenges and a change of scenery, Chef Yamashita relocated to Singapore and has since opened his very own Japanese artisan pâtisserie at Tanjong Pagar Plaza.

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Costume Drama

BABA EMERIC LAU CHATS WITH MOE KASSIM, A VETERAN DESIGNER WHO GARNERED MUCH PUBLICITY FOR HIS PERANAKAN-INSPIRED NATIONAL COSTUME FOR MISS UNIVERSE SINGAPORE.

Towering pagodas, elaborate sprays of plumes in rainbow colours, warrior-like armour. The national costume segment in beauty pageants is often a showcase of the most outlandish creations from around the world. To represent Singapore's multi-cultural society, designers often feel challenged to create outfits that adequately reflect our identity. Moe Kassim is one designer who has done so repeatedly. His latest creation for this year's Miss Universe pageant was inspired by a nyonya's wedding dress, and drew much public attention.

Comprising a 1kg headdress made of metal, glass and 500 Swarovski crystal beads, a 3kg backpiece of "phoenix feathers", Moe's interpretation of the Peranakan bridal phoenix collar, and a rich brocade dress, Moe describes his creation as a "de-constructed version of a kebaya".

EL: Could you tell us how you became a designer?

MK: It all started back in the days when I was in the SAF MDC (Singapore Armed Forces Music & Drama Company). I was caught several times for using the company's costumes for external engagements. I then decided that it would be better to sew my own costumes to avoid trouble. The rest is history!

EL: How do you derive inspiration for your designs?

MK: I'm inspired by anything that catches my interest, be it food, utensils, architecture, painting and so on. I love to travel to get ideas.

EL: Since the media publicity about your Peranakan-inspired Miss Singapore Universe costume, could you share any comments or feedback that you have received?

MK: I've received a torrent of comments from many people, and do my best to take everything graciously. As I said on Facebook, I'm very sorry to those who don't like it; I will try harder in future. Happily, there are more positive than negative comments!

EL: And how was the costume received at the Miss Universe pageant on 30 January 2017 in Manila?

MK: I wasn't there at the pageant itself, but I caught it on television. I must say that Cheryl Chou (Miss Universe Singapore 2017) carried the costume well with poise and elegance.

EL: Would you consider designing another pageant costume?

MK: I've been supporting and designing national pageant costumes for the past eight years and am hoping to do so for many more years to come. So the answer is yes!

EL: Any dream projects or commissions that you would love to take on?

MK: I have created costumes for almost everything from theatre and film to the National Day Parade and Chingay. I think my dream project would probably be

Moe Kassim poses with Cheryl Chou, Miss Universe Singapore 2017. Ms Chou is wearing the Peranakaninspired national costume he designed. Photo courtesy of Moe Kassim

either designing costumes for an epic period movie or designing something for our First Lady.

EL: You've been in this industry for over 20 years. What would you say has been your most memorable project or design to date?

MK: There are plenty, but I think the most memorable one is designing costumes for Royston Tan's acclaimed film, 881, about the *getai** scene in Singapore. The film was nominated for Best Costume Design at the 2007 Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan, which is the Asian equivalent of the Oscars. Being the first self-taught Singaporean designer to achieve such recognition made me realise that nothing is impossible.

EL: Any advice you'd like to give aspiring designers?

MK: Never give up if you fail! Always be humble, sincere and passionate about what you believe in. Take criticism positively and do not stop honing your craft.

EL: What would you say to the notion that Peranakan culture has lost its soul?

MK: To me, Peranakan culture is one of the richest and most vibrant cultures ever! There are so many activities: various organisations have mounted Peranakan Festivals and efforts to promote the culture engage not only the younger generations but also foreigners. Some members of the community even travel around the globe to promote Peranakan culture. So I don't think it has lost its soul.

EL: What do you find the most intriguing thing about Peranakan culture?

MK: It has to be the fantastic food! The language, Baba Malay, is a close second. •

*Getai – Colourful, loud and lively concerts staged for the spirits' enjoyment during the Chinese Hungry Ghost Month.

Jangan Lepas Jembatan Buang Tongkat

BABA CHAN ENG THAI SHARES HIS VIEWS ON HONORING OUR ANCESTORS

Dulu dulu orang Peranakan manyak kan semayang Datok sama semayang Abu. Tapi sekarang manyak orang Peranakan masok Christian atau ikot ugama lain. Sekarang punya orang Peranakan muda jarang reti atau ikot hadat nenek moyang kita sebab Mak Bapak dia pun tak lagi ikot hadat nenek moyang. Bila orang Peranakan masok Christian, dia memang berenti semayang Datok sama Abu.

Manyak kan pun tak pegang hio bila rumah dia punya orang semayang abu, ada pun laok semayang tak boleh makan, ada pun bila rumah dia punya orang semayang Abu, tak boleh tengok! Masok apa apa ugama pun, macham ugama Christian atau lain lain ugama, itu suka hati orang; orang mo perchaya apa apa atau tak mo ada ugama, itu orang nya pilehan.

Bila orang masok Christian atau perchaya lain ugama, orang itu perchaya dia ada "second chance", lagi satu pilehan yang kekal sama baik boleh kasi dia sama anak beranak dia kasi Tuan Jesus iau-kiu dia. Ugama yah-lah satu pilehan orang punya suka hati, apa dia orang mo perchaya dia orang boleh ikot sama pileh.

Ini taon Sar Guek Chuay Puek Cheng Beng, orang orang China pergi kubor nenek moyang dia tek chua. Orang Peranakan kalu semayang Abu, pergi tek chua dulu, lepas itu di rumah semayang Cheng Beng. Semayang Abu bukan satu pekara senang, laok macham itek tim, pong tahu, babi pong tay, ayam buah keluak semua kena masak untok semayang. Lagi pun buah-buah, kueh-kueh suma pun ada buat semayang.

Walau pun orang Peranakan sudah masok lain ugama, gua perchaya, kalu dia tak boleh amek hio semayang dia punya Mama Kongkong dia boleh pakay tangan sembah hormat Mama Kongkong dia bila semayang abu. Ini tak salah sebab ugama apa pun ada ajair kita hormat Mak Bapak Mama Kongkong. Bila pergi kubor Mama Kongkong, dia orang boleh bawak bunga rampay atau bunga melor teybeh kubor kah tempat abu.

Mo makan kah tak mo makan laok semayang itu pun pilehan dia orang. Ikotan orang Peranakan hormat nenek moyang kita yah-lah satu ikotan kita mesti kasi tau dengan orang muda kita, sebab kalu tak nenek moyang kita tak akan di ini dunia! Jangan lah kita lepas jembatan buang tongkat atau kachang lupakan kulit!

Don't Throw Away the Walking Stick after Crossing the Bridge

ost Peranakans descended from families that followed Confucian traditions and practiced ancestral worship. Nowadays, many Peranakan families have converted to Christianity or are nonreligious. Many young Peranakans are ignorant of the traditional practices of their ancestors. They do not follow traditions because their parents do not follow such traditions.

When Peranakan families converted to Christianity, many ceased praying to deities and stopped ancestor veneration practices called, *semayang abu*. Christian Peranakans avoid using joss sticks in paying homage to their ancestors when their non-Christian family members conduct *semayang abu*. Christian Peranakans also tend to abstain from eating dishes that are placed on the *tok semayang* (offering table) as offerings to the ancestors. Zealous converts even refuse to watch the *semayang abu* when it takes place.

Religious freedom is everyone's prerogative and one is free to choose what religion one wants. When a person converts, for example, to Christianity, he believes that his savior is Jesus Christ and that he and his family have been given an opportunity to enter a new life. That belief is one that someone chooses of his own free will. No one can say that it is right or wrong.

This year, the Cheng Beng Festival was on 4 April. Cheng Beng is loosely translated in English as "Tomb Sweeping Day" or "All Souls Day of the Chinese". Paying respects to one's ancestors at the grave, tomb or columbarium niches can be done ten days before or after Cheng Beng. Hokkien Peranakans will go to *tek chua* during the Cheng Beng period, which means to place joss paper on the tombs of their ancestors. Peranakan families who practice this tradition will visit the graves of their ancestors and clean them. They will burn joss paper and light joss sticks to honour their deceased forebears. After visiting the graves of their ancestors, they will then conduct the *semayang abu* ritual at home.

The *semayang abu* ritual entails placing Peranakan dishes like preserved mustard vegetable duck soup, tofu meat balls cooked in prawn stock, braised pork in soya bean based soup and the laboriously prepared *buah keluak* cooked with chicken in a gravy of many spices. The *semayang abu* ritual requires many hands to prepare the food, fruits and cakes to be placed on the



Contemporary semayang sbu.

ancestral table as offerings honouring the memory and sacrifices that the ancestors had made for their descendants.

Peranakans who do not practice *semayang abu* or are non-religious, can still honour their ancestors when the ritual is conducted. They need not light joss sticks to honour their ancestors. They can bow to their ancestors' portraits as a mark of respect. If they choose, they may eat the food offerings after the prayers are over.

During Cheng Beng, they can visit the graves of their ancestors with traditional offerings such as flowers like the *bunga rampay* (potpourri of various scented flowers with sliced pandan leaves) or *bunga melor* (jasmine).

Young Peranakans should be made aware that honoring one's ancestors is an integral and time-honoured tradition. They are encouraged to continue this traditional practice.

We are here today because of our ancestors. Their love and sacrifice enabled us to reap the benefits of their hard work. Some descendants inherited properties or businesses. Most importantly, we should recognise that the efforts of our ancestors have made us what we are today.

The Peranakan saying of "throwing away the walking cane after using it to cross the narrow bridge", reminds us that we should honour our ancestors.

A Panton to honour our ancestors or collectively known in Baba Malay as "Mama Kongkong". •



Panton Hormat Mama Kongkong

Empat changkay teh china, Bila pak puay kertawah, Samseng tengah buah warna, Semayang abu turunan mewah!

Offerings of Chinese tea, Tossed the coins, both tails, Three realms pay homage, Honour Ancestors & Prosper!

Hanky Panky

SWEPT AWAY BY A SAPU TANGAN, MADDIE THAM EMBARKED ON A QUEST THAT SPANNED HALF A DECADE

am at the Peranakan Museum walking purposefully in the galleries of a special exhibition, *Nyonya Needlework: Embroidery and Beadwork of the Peranakan World*. Eventually, I spot one glinting at me from a glass display case. For years, this elusive specimen had taunted me, perched high up on a museum wall. Now at last, I could get up close to this exotic beauty – a Peranakan bridal handkerchief!

Why would anyone yearn to go nose-to-glass gaga for a handkerchief you may ask? Some years ago, when I was guiding a tour at the Peranakan Museum, I heard a visitor mutter, "It doesn't look like it could be of much use as a handkerchief." She was looking at an embroidered velvet bridal handkerchief. I had to agree. It did not offer much surface area for a dainty dab of one's lips after nibbling on *kueh*. The bridal handkerchief was kite-shaped and richly embellished with raised embroidery, making it quite beautiful to gaze upon, but uninviting to touch. I shared with her that the Peranakan bridal handkerchief was meant for ceremonial use. Dangled from a ring on the bride's finger, it would sway enchantingly as she walked.

Some months after that, I was struck by several pictures in Valery Garrett's book on Chinese dress accessories. There were versions of a Qing era (1641 to 1911) dress accessory that highly resembled the Peranakan bridal handkerchief. However, they were not described as handkerchiefs but kerchief holders. Such kerchief holders were attached to a button at the top of a woman's garment. Squares of silk were placed inside these decorative holders and accessed via openings at the sides, so while the silk squares got soiled, the beautiful holders remained pristine.

The hunt begins

It set me thinking that there was a possible link between the Chinese kerchief holder and the Peranakan bridal handkerchief or *sapu tangan* A beaded sapu tangan pengantin at the Peranakan Museum, Singapore. Note the metal ring at the top and fringed ends. Photo by Maddie Tham.



Lee Beng Guat Neo, greatgranddaughter of Tan Tock Seng, holding a ceremonial beaded bridal handkerchief, 1923. Photo courtesy of Baba Mark Wee.

pengantin. I decided that I must get my hands on one immediately, but soon discovered that antique Chinese kerchief holders were very hard to find! After five years of trawling the

Internet, I finally obtained a Chinese kerchief holder from an antique dealer in Canada.

When I received it, I was happy to see that it was in good vintage condition. Both sides were embroidered with auspicious Chinese motifs of longevity peaches. I eagerly inspected its construction, especially the side openings. The upper part of the kite shape had slits on both sides.

I was ready to commence the next part of my research.

It was fortuitous that there was a special exhibition on at the Peranakan Museum that featured embroidered and beaded items. However, it was hard to ascertain from the displays if the Peranakan bridal *sapu tangan* had side openings like a Chinese kerchief holder. Of those I saw through display cases, only one *sapu tangan* seemed to have an opening at the side, but I could not be sure.

I made an enquiry with the Peranakan Museum, and learned that some of the *sapu tangan* in the Museum's collection did indeed have openings and hollow centres. However, at time of printing, I did not have the opportunity to confirm if the placement and construction of the openings were similar to those of the Chinese kerchief holders.

Many of the Peranakan bridal *sapu tangan* at the Nyonya Needlework exhibition featured metal mounts at the top of the handkerchief, unlike the fabric loop on a Chinese kerchief holder which would have been used to fasten it onto a robe. The metal mounts of the *sapu tangan* could be in the form of a chain link or a direct attachment to a metal ring.

Ringman over Pinky

Over time, the way a bridal sapu tangan was worn seems to changed. According to a Malaccan source, the *sapu tangan* was worn several times during the 12-day Peranakan wedding. Apart from being worn on the first day of a wedding, the sapu tangan pengantin was also used as an accessory with the *baju hock chiu* which was worn on the 5th and 12th day of a wedding. The bridal *sapu tangan* was originally worn on the last finger of the left hand. By the early twentieth century, it became the practice to dangle the *sapu tangan* from the fourth finger instead, which in Western culture was where the wedding ring would be worn. This is an instance of the Peranakan openness to cultural borrowing of meanings and forms to create their own unique material culture.

Thanks to Baba Mark Wee, we have a wonderful picture of his mother, Lee Beng Guat Neo taken in 1923. It shows her wearing a *baju hock chiu* (also known as *baju koon sah*) with a bridal *sapu tangan* dangling from the fourth finger of her left hand.

Cross cultural origins

Was there any way the Chinese kerchief holder could have influenced the Peranakan *sapu tangan*?

The late Cheo Kim Ban described the bridal *sapu* tangan as a coordinated accessory. "The colour of this ornamental handkerchief always matched the colour of the costume worn by the bride." In the

early days, matching Qing era kerchief holders may have been included in sets of bridal clothes ordered from China. It is speculative, but the Chinese kerchief holders could have evolved over time in Peranakan hands to emerge as the *sapu tangan pengantin*.

A book to accompany the Nyonya Needlework exhibition provides pictures and more information on the *sapu tangan*. Interestingly, author Cheah Hwei-Fe'n, points out that the ceremonial *sapu tangan* was not only used by the Peranakans but by Malays as well.

> I am of the view that Chinese textile forms and techniques could have melded with South east Asian elements to result in the kite shaped ceremonial handkerchief. It is known that Chinese textiles have influenced Malay and Indonesian embroidery. Interestingly, the Malay *sapu tangan* pictured in the book has a fabric loop like the one on my Qing kerchief holder, though admittedly the shape is more diamond-like.

I wondered: If many auspicious motifs on the Peranakan sapu tangan are of Chinese origin, why not the shape? What is quite different between the two is the presence of a fringe on the Peranakan bridal sapu tangan. The few Chinese kerchief holders that I have seen (including the one I own) do not have fringed ends. Quite possibly, the fringes were a local addition to the bridal *sapu tangan*, partly for aesthetics and partly for talismanic purposes. In many parts of South east Asia, there was a shamanistic belief that tassels and fringes could ward off evil.

Art Historian Khoo Joo Ee had made a connection between the Peranakan bridal *sapu tangan* and Chinese kerchief holders based on their similar shapes. My

own comparison of the two highlights additional similarities such as the similar dimensions and presence of openings in some of the bridal *sapu tangan*. If you have an interesting story about how the Peranakan bridal handkerchief was used in your family, I'd love to hear it. Who knows?

A cultural adventure might start when you dig into your own cupboard. •

An embroidered Qing kerchief holder from

the collection of Maddie

Tham. Note the fabric

loop at the top.

Maddie Tham is a sociologist by training and a banker by trade. She enjoys her retirement by researching Peranakan culture. She can be reached at maddietham@gmail.com.



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Tolong tolong (Help) Please Give Back to Me

NYONYA LINDA CHEE WAXES LYRICAL OVER BABA ALVIN OON'S SONG DIPLOMACY

n 9 January, 2017, a delightful three-minute ditty on Youtube, *Give Me Back My Terrex Chia (Car)*, drew chuckles from Singapore to Shanghai over a political hot potato.

Coming home from military exercise in Taiwan, nine armoured infantry vehicles had been seized at Hong Kong port on 23 November 2016, causing a diplomatic standoff between Singapore and China.

Baba Alvin Oon's Singapore-style plea, sung in a colloquial *rojak* (mix) of English, Hokkien and Malay, was his hope that some light-hearted local humour could help defuse the tension and "perhaps help get our military vehicles back."

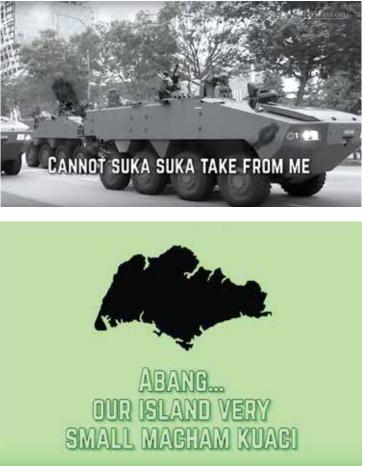
What happened next was a public relations dream. Alvin's song, which took just two days to complete, went viral. It hit the top spot on YouTube with over 150,000 hits in three weeks. In quick time, the press caught on. The tune was shared widely on Whatsapp and Facebook and a host of media including Mothership, Stomp, Coconuts Singapore and Channel 8. Lianhe Zaobao online, which usually features only Mandarin songs, voted it as the most popular song for a week. It also drew smiles from bemused Ministers and Members of Parliament, and garnered of a mention by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at a dinner event.

Alvin was interviewed by BBC, Asiaone, Today and Hong Kong's South China Morning Post. BBC described his "jaunty tune" as "a creative approach to demanding their return... in cheesy karaoke style". Alvin laughs, "My friends in Hong Kong were amused and excited to hear a Singlish song on their TV channel!" Even China's CCTV station gave it airtime.

Pouncing on opportunity, a shop selling embroidered badges mimicked his lyrics by creating a *Why You Take My Terrex Chia? Aneh kuan buay sai mah* (You can't do it like this) badge.

The Terrexes were finally returned and reached Singapore shores on 30 January. Glad that the issue was settled diplomatically, Alvin says his YouTube posting became a "natural platform for comments and debate from both sides of the South China Sea." He saw social media bringing out the best and worst in people: "Everyone was voicing what they personally felt as the truth. They were just being patriotic."

It is said that fame grabs you when you least expect it. Alvin found the social media attention overwhelming at times. He had composed the tune "for my circle of friends and family to enjoy, to reflect how the average Singaporean felt." He found the compliments, many from strangers



Cheeky local humour in Alvin's Terrex video.

around the world, "very nice yet humbling".

Alvin, 49, is a self-taught musician "with an alltime high ABRSM Grade 1 theory" to his name. Some may remember his baba nyonya version of the Gangnam Style hit by Psy, back in 2012. That garnered an admirable 32,000 views. In June 2013, when all of Singapore turned grey with haze, he came up with *All I Ever See Is Haze*, mimicking the Everly Brothers' hit, *All I Have To Do Is Dream*. That rocketed to 130,000 hits!

Alvin has long championed Peranakan culture through songs and creativity. Since 1995, he has been running an events and entertainment company called Encore Showstation. "We have a great performing group called Peranakan Sayang that promotes the culture through songs appealing to the young and the young-at-heart.

"I believe if we all contributed what we are able to, for our culture, it can flourish once again in new, exciting ways!"

Alvin Oon can be contacted on email at alvin@encoreshow.com or on Facebook.

A Baba Brotherhood

BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG, CURRENT SECRETARY OF THE KENG TECK WHAY, WRITES ON A BROTHERHOOD THAT SPANS ALMOST TWO CENTURIES

"All men within the four seas are brothers, how then can a fine man grieve he is without a brother?" Confucian Analects – 12,5

In 1831, just 12 years after Sir Stamford Raffles founded the fledging colony of Singapore, 36 farsighted, enterprising young men wanted to ensure that their families would have a mutual support system. Most were Hokkien Babas from established business families in Melaka. They made huge fortunes from trading in opium, gambier and nutmeg. As trade with Europe developed, they engaged in the high-risk but lucrative business of compradores for European firms. They made friends in high places. They wore Chinese clothes but spoke several languages – Hokkien, Dutch, English and Malay. They were the crème de la crème of Singapore society.

Flush with their newly-created wealth, the 36 men formed the Keng Teck Whay (Whay), a mutual benefit society. They were not related by blood, but traced their ancestry to Zhangzhou, China. Each man contributed 10 Spanish dollars into a common fund. In 1843, the group bought a piece of land along Telok Ayer Street and built a magnificent ancestral house next to the Thian Hock Keng temple. A surviving lease document in the Whay archive shows Tan Tock Seng as the head of the Hokkien Huay Kuan, founded in 1840. 16 Whay members had also contributed to the cost of building the temple completed in 1842. Membership in the Whay is restricted to the male descendents of the founding members.

A code to live and die by

The Whay was more than just a mutual benefit society, but a way of life for its members. The 48 Rules of the Brotherhood prescribed strict codes of conduct from which no member was exempt. Even one prominent founder member, Tan Koon Swee, was not spared after he married the wife of a deceased Whay member. The rules deemed it as incest and Tan was expelled; his descendants had their right to hereditary membership forfeited.

Members of the Kheng Teck Whay during the 175th Anniversary celebrations in 2006. The concept of brotherhood harks back to the era when a Manchu emperor was "poisoned" by the lies of jealous court officials who alleged that Shaolin monks





Photo by Daniel Wong

were plotting treason. He ordered imperial troops to eliminate the monks and burn down the Shaolin Temple. Only five monks survived the massacre. They went on to form the largest brotherhood in Southern China which endured for three centuries. Even in death, those in the brotherhood never forgave the Emperor's betrayal. Some tombs in Singapore dating from the mid-nineteenth century bear the Chinese character "Ching", indicating their rejection of Manchu rule in China.

The Whay's original rules from 1831 were translated from Chinese to English in 1915 by a bilingual old Rafflesian. This reflected the changing social mood of the Babas who by 1900, wanted to be more English than the English. Around the same period, China was rocked by populist revolution in 1911.

Notable Whay members

The history of the brotherhood parallels that of Singapore and Melaka from the late 1800s. The original founders were men of great prominence in society. An unwritten rule was that founder members should be the eldest son in their family. Because of this, men like Tan Tock Seng, Tan Kim Seng and Chia Ann Siang did not join the Whay.

In the early 1840s, Seah Eu Chin worked as a bookkeeper for Yeo Kim Swee, the first president

Ornately carved beams and corbels at Keng Teck Whay.

of the Whay. 50 years later, Yeo's grandson brought a civil suit against Seah Liang Seah, son of Eu Chin. He alleged that Seah Eu Chin had in 1845, appropriated all of Yeo Kim Swee's assets upon Yeo's death. Chief Justice Goldney dimissed the case, ruling that all the protagonists had already died, and that the testimony of Yeo's surviving wife could not be relied on as she was a woman!

In 1874, Whay member Seet Boon Tiong, assisted Tan Kim Ching, son of Tan Tock Seng, in bringing a peaceful conclusion to the fractious Larut Wars of Perak. Boon Tiong amassed huge wealth through gambier and opium trading. His grandsons, Tiang Lim and Tiang Chuan both carried on a flourishing opium trade until opium was banned by the colonial government in the 1930s.

Another important Whay member was philanthropist Chee Swee Cheng, affectionately nicknamed *Towkay Longkang*. He was the first chairman of OCBC, the third largest bank in Singapore today. Being an astute businessman he had investments in rubber, property and banking. His grandfather Chee Yam Chuan, was a larger-than-life personality who had financed tin mining ventures with the Sultan of Selangor, but was assasinated in 1862 during a wedding dinner.

In 1925, Chee Swee Cheng, with two uncles, built an ancestral house at Melaka's Heeren Street (now

named Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock). The magnificent building, which still stands today, was built in the Dutch style by Dutch architect, J E Westerhout. This distinguished family (now in their 13th generation) was founded in Dutch-occupied Melaka by their ancestor Chee Soo Chan, an army general who fled China around 1750 from an oppressive Ching emperor.

The toll of time

After revolutions, two world wars, and economic collapse, the Whay survives as the oldest brotherhood in Singapore. Few Whay members today possess the great wealth and influence of their ancestors. The Babas never fully recovered from the loss of political and economic influence after Singapore gained independence despite distinguished politicians like Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee being Baba themselves.

Similarly, 170 years took a toll on the original Whay building in Telok Ayer Street. Around 2002, cracks started to show in the timber. Falling leaves from trees planted along the street encouraged insects to breed on the gateway roof, which eventually led to leaks. Soil subsidence also exacerbated the problem of an ageing building. Restoration was estimated at \$3.8 million, which was beyond the means of the Whay. With heavy hearts, but being realistic, members approved to have a suitable party take over the building. The loss of the original Whay premises was a tragic episode in its long history, but the historic building was given a new lease of life by the Taoist Mission.

A White Knight to the Rescue

Aster Lee Zhiwang is an extraordinary priest. Exuding calm energy and sporting a sage's white beard, he spouts simple snippets of wisdom for anyone willing to listen.

Master Lee appeared when the Keng Teck Whay building was in need of urgent repair. In 2009, under his lead, the Taoist Mission (Singapore) offered to take over the building and convert it into a Taoist temple. By chance or divine intervention, his deputy, Master Tan Zhixia, was this writer's childhood classmate, so the transfer proceeded under genial circumstances.

Keeping within the strict conservation guidelines set by the Preservation of Monuments Board, Master Lee embarked on the uphill task of restoring the building. He engaged Dr Yeo Kang Shua, a conservation specialist whose work on the Hong San See and Yueh Hai Ching temples had garnered accolades.

The hardest part was fund-raising. Dinners and events were organised and many well-wishers came forward to contribute. There never was any doubt that the target would be fulfilled. It was pure faith!

Restoration work was patiently carried out by craftsmen and workers in consultation with restoration team, architect, contractor and conservation specialist. The roof had to be dismantled and new roof tiles put in place. The artistic and religious complexion of the temple had to balance aesthetics, conservation and the need to reflect the image of a temple. Meticulous

documentation recorded the state of the building before restoration began. Craftsmen from China were hired to restore and replace portions of timber which had deteriorated. Scenic jade



Master Lee Zhiwang.

murals were studied and enhanced by a famous Quanzhou artist. These important murals depict Chinese virtues and morals of the mid-1850s.

Using the *jian nian* technique, where pieces of colourful ceramic bowls are cut and pasted together to form lively mosiac friezes, the dragons, fish and flowers on the roof and walls were restored to their former glory. Conservation guidelines prohibited replacement of the late Victorian tiles which adorned the floor and walls, so they had to be painstakingly restored and cleaned by hand.

The temple was gazetted as a National Monument in 2009, finally correcting a gazette mistake from 1973

when the Whay premises were mistakenly included as part of the Thian Hock Keng temple next door.

In January 2015, the temple reopened as the Yu Huang Gong (Temple of the Heavenly Jade Emperor) in a solemn ceremony attended by local dignitaries and religious leaders of other faiths.



Pagoda before and after restoration. Photos courtesy of the Kheng Teck Whay archive.

chakap chakap

New Directions

BABA EMERIC LAU DISCUSSES CULTURAL SHIFTS WITH THE NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD'S NEW GROUP DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS, KENNIE TING

Relatively young and brimming with bright ideas, Kennie Ting is looking to evolve the National Heritage Board's offerings. I sat him down for a wide-ranging interview on his abiding passion for all things cultural.

EL: As a self-ascribed "obsessive compulsive cityophile", what aspects of the urban environment do you find most entrancing? Is this what you try to capture in your photographs and writing?

KT: I love historic architecture and places where the sense of the past seems particularly strong. So yes, in my photography and writing I try to document and evoke the past. My obsessive-compulsiveness pertains to how I go out of the way to see and photograph all the major historic buildings in a city. But of course, there's always too much to take in.

EL: Cultural hybridity vs the McDonald-isation of global cities – can these two threads co-exist?

KT: Yes. We have always been culturally hybrid to some degree. Not just Singapore but all global cities. This is because we are by nature open and cosmopolitan, and exposed to cultures from all over the world.

I take an optimistic view of globalisation in that I believe a city and its people are always sophisticated consumers. We choose what we believe are the best and most attractive aspects of these various global cultures to absorb and adopt. In so doing, we reinvent our own identity and culture, making it

fresh and relevant. This is the essence of cultural hybridity.

Even multinationals, like McDonald's, have to adapt and be culturally hybrid to survive. I grew up thinking McDonald's was Singaporean because they were so local! I remember their Chinese New Year Happy Meal collectibles, and their Samurai Burgers.

EL: As someone who has travelled, researched and written extensively, what have you discovered, if any, are common threads across various cultures?

Kennie Ting is a true blue culture vulture. Photo courtesy of the National Heritage Board

KT: The urban and human landscapes of many of Asia's port cities are very similar. They are all multi-cultural and multi-religious to some degree. Calcutta, Yangon, Batavia and Shanghai (for example) were and are still, like Singapore. In their historic downtowns, you find mosques, churches, temples, also synagogues in close proximity to each other. This multi-culturalism extends also to communities. The Bowbazar area of Calcutta, for example, houses the city's Chinese, Muslim, Parsee, Catholic and Anglo-



chakap chakap



Cargills, Colombo.

Indian communities, still living and worshipping there. It resembles our Waterloo Street/Queen Street area with its many places of worship literally standing side by side.

Another common thread in the urban landscape is the emergence of hybrid, east-west forms of architecture. The Former Tao Nan School Building, where The Peranakan Museum is housed, is a great example of Tropical Eclectic architecture, where the basic form of the building is European but fused with aspects of Asian vernacular architecture and other adaptations to account for the weather - e.g. large balconies. Other great examples of hybrid architecture include the Indochinese style of the Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and the Indo-Saracenic style of the Chatrapati Shivaji Railway Terminus in Mumbai (formerly the Victoria Terminus in Bombay).

EL: If we drill down to the domestic sphere, are there any Asian practices that you believe can remain relevant?

KT: I think the most important Asian value is hospitality, which I take to mean being welcoming and respectful to persons of all faiths and cultures, from beyond or within our shores. Hospitality, as a value, is grounded in a sense of our common humanity. Hospitality is in short supply these days with national rhetoric in many places in the world emphasising difference.

EL: What would you say to the notion that Peranakan culture has lost its soul?

KT: I think it is important for us to discuss and explore the idea of "Peranakan-ness" in the context of today, bearing in mind that cultures and traditions are never static but evolve and adapt over time. Adaptation (and creativity) is important for a culture to stay alive. At the same time, there is a certain authenticity in adaptation and creativity that has to be grounded in an understanding of heritage and history. The goal of preserving tradition should always also be to provoke explorations into how the tradition can evolve to survive, even as it holds on to its core values and aesthetics.

On a related note, there is tremendous potential for research, collecting and new knowledge in the



Interior of the Khoo Kongsi, Georgetown, Penang.



Jami Ul-Afar Mosque (The Red Mosque), Colombo.

field of Peranakan-ness, if we consider the meaning of the term broadly as referring to the condition of being culturally hybrid. Beyond the Baba-Nyonya community, there are also the other Peranakan communities like the Chitty Melaka and the Jawi Peranakans. If we look beyond the Straits Settlements, the scope of research and collecting expands to include communities such as the equivalent of the Baba-Nyonya in Indonesia and Thailand, the Mestizo in the Philippines, the Indische in Indonesia, the Anglo-Indians in India, etc. It is my wish that even as The Peranakan Museum deepens its research and understanding of the Baba-Nyonya community, it also expands its scope to include other Peranakan and hybrid communities in Asia.

EL: Could you share your objectives and goals as the new ACM Director?

How do you see yourself contributing or evolving the organisation's vision/mission?

KT: I'd like the ACM to be relevant and accessible as a museum. That means being central to discussions of what "being Asian" and "being Singaporean" means. Our key message is that Asia has always been cross-cultural. No culture or religion in Asia has ever existed in isolation - the grand world civilisations in Asia have always interacted with and mutually informed and enriched each other.

In that light, the museum's curatorial mission has shifted towards exploring the historic and present-day interconnectedness of Asian cultures. At a practical level this means that the permanent galleries are no longer organised by geographic region - East, West, South, Southeast Asia. Instead, they are structured to address two grand themes that focus on connections rather than boundaries – Trade, and Faith & Belief. These two themes also draw on Singapore's nature as a cosmopolitan multi-cultural, multi-religious, port and trading city – in a way, we are "seeing Asia through the lens of Singapore", so to speak. This ensures that our exhibitions and programmes also resonate with Singaporean visitors.

I also hope to bring a human touch to the museum. By this I mean ensuring that it is an open and welcoming space; that we always have a diversity of programmes for all segments of society - educational programmes for students, weekend programmes for families with children, lifestyle programmes for the folks that are just across the river at Boat Quay. I'd like for the museum to be a space people feel they can just hang out at.

EL: How did your passion for culture arise?

KT: I have always loved museums, art and history, even as a child. I have always wanted to work in a museum and to write about history. My interest in Port Cities and Historic Architecture arose more recently from a Masters Degree I did at Goldsmiths College London on World Cities and Urban Life; as well as some time I took off to explore photographing and writing about cities.

EL: What's on your iPod and on your reading shelf?

KT: I love 1920s jazz and show tunes and my favourite playlist/album is a set of 100 Roaring Classics from the 1920s, which I play in the background when I'm doing chores or reading or hanging out or having friends round for drinks and dinner.

I love history, historical fiction and fantasy novels. Aside from my ACM role, I'm also contracted to write a new coffee table book on Singapore Heritage, as well as a Young Adult Fantasy Novel trilogy set in Singapore and inspired by regional myth and magic. As such, I've been spending loads of time reading up on Singapore history and heritage, as well as Malay myth and magic. For entertainment (when I have the time), I'm presently reading V.E. Schwab's *A Darker Shade of Magic*.

EL: Heritage organisations like the Peranakan Association are often accused of naval gazing. In your opinion, what can be done to counter this point of view?

KT: It is important to engage different segments of the community - to understand what makes them tick; what practical and existential questions are they grappling with in this phase of their lives, and how we (as in the heritage organisation) can address their needs, aspirations and questions.

books

Stitches In Time

BEADWORK AND EMBROIDERY BRING BACK CHILDHOOD MEMORIES FOR BABA COLIN CHEE AS HE DELVES INTO CHEAH HWEI F'EN'S LATEST BOOK

y first encounter with Peranakan embroidery ₋was as a little boy of about 11 years old. I had curiously opened an unlocked drawer in my parents' teakwood colonial cupboard. In there, I found two strange-looking, old, Photo courtesy of the Peranakan Museum small purses that were beautifully embroidered and beaded. My mum said that they had belonged to her mother, a Sarawak-born nyonya, who had made them. I have not seen them since.

My faint memory of those faded beauties leapt to life when I saw the gorgeously made belt purses on display at the Peranakan Museum's exhibition, Nyonya Needlework. This fascinating and exquisitely

curated exhibition was launched on 24 June 2016 and ended on 18 June 2017.

This book, written by Cheah Hwei-Fe'n, is published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, which she also helped conceptualise and develop.

Hwei-Fe'n wrote another book in 2010, Phoenix Rising – Narratives in Nyonya Beadwork from the Straits *Settlements*, published by the National University of Singapore. It established her as an authority on the subject. For collectors, these two books by Hwei-Fe'n are real gems, simply for the lavish photographs of needlework treasures and in-depth, well-researched narratives found within their pages.

Hwei-Fe'n's current hardcover book is a wonderful tome of 267 pages covering the craft heritage and history of nyonya needlework, and her studies on gold and silver embroidery, silk embroidery, drawn thread embroidery, and bead embroidery.

In her latest opus, she writes:

"Luxurious materials, intricate workmanship, minute details and complex textures characterise the beadwork and embroidery of the Peranakan Chinese...Amongst the Peranakan Chinese, beadwork and embroidery are associated with women, the nyonya and bibik (older nyonyas)...Much of nyonya beadwork and embroidery is easily recognisable. Styles changed over time and differed by region, but certain features can be considered as fairly typical."

Nyonya needlework and embroidery were manifested in many objects. They range from alter frontals, table covers, and betel box covers



Belt purse, Peranakan Museum, Gift of Mrs Mabel Hudson. [G-0873].

to accessories like slippers, purses, belts, pillow covers and things simply decorative and ornamental.

They were hand crafted in the confines of the nyonyas' homes for everyday use, as part of a wedding trousseau, as a demonstration of her skills in homemaking, in as much as some of these objects were specially commissioned by the wealthy to commemorate and celebrate some special community event.

As they say: those were the days! Today, nyonya needlework is more likely to be an indulgence of an

amateur as well as serious craft hobbyists, and as a small cottage business.

One artefact highlighted in the book that must be mentioned in this review: the Peranakan Museum's magnificent beaded tablecloth. Alan Chong, the museum's former director, has described it as "one of the greatest works of art in Singapore". It is made up of over one million tiny, multi-facetted glass beads. Although it is about a century old, the tablecloth is still a dazzling beauty.

In the book, the author describes it as an "imposing" table cover, likely created for the table in the nuptial chamber, where the newly weds would have their first meal together. During a traditional Peranakan wedding, the family would decorate the table with prized pieces of silver and porcelain, as well as gifts and food.

The design of the tablecloth (which is shown on the book cover) is well composed with motifs based on the then popular Berlin wool work of birds, floral bouquets and insects. The combination of pink and yellow on a turquoise ground is characteristic of Penang Peranakan beadwork. Although the beads used are from Europe, this tablecloth could have been commissioned from professional beadworkers in the region or in China.

Even after the Nyonya Needlework exhibition at the Peranakan Museum has ended, this book will long remain a feast for the eyes and an inspiration for one's soul, nyonya or not.

Published in 2017 by the Asian Civilisations Museum.

If Walls Could Talk

BABA COLIN CHEE DISCOVERS THE SECRETS OF A COLONIAL-ERA PERANAKAN TOWNHOUSE IN THE NUS BABA HOUSE GUIDEBOOK

This book is a must-have companion guide for any visit to the NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road. The Peranakan townhouse is a conservation project undertaken by the National University of Singapore (NUS). It is one of the rare, architecturally intact colonial pre-war townhouses left in the country.

It was purchased by a wealthy Peranakan family, the Wees, in 1910 and remained in the family for three generations. In 2007, it was acquired by NUS with a substantial donation from Ms Agnes Tan in memory of her father, Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

Mr Peter Lee, Honorary Curator of the NUS Baba House explains in the book's introduction why the Baba House is so named:

"Among the various terms, Baba has perhaps the most profound resonance for the (Peranakan) community. Like the history of the Peranakans, it has a typically hybrid evolution, beginning as an Indian and Persian form of address for a revered elder gentleman....By the mid-nineteenth century it was used almost exclusively for Chinese men who were born in the archipelago....In the late nineteenth century its meaning developed a different nuance, referring to the Peranakan community in general, and not just to its menfolk."

The book takes the reader systematically through the house, from the five-foot way and courtyard at the front, through the reception hall, ancestral hall, kitchen, then up into the bedrooms on the second floor and finally into the third floor gallery. Artefacts and ornamentation found within these spaces are described in detail.

This guidebook is unlike many others of its genre. Tucked between architectual descriptions, there are delightful anecdotes from the last two remaining Wee brothers, Wee Lin and Wee Sun, who lived in the house as children. Reading their personal experiences gives the reader a glimpse into the life of the house.

In the section on the front courtyard, Wee Lin shared a mischievous boyhood memory:

"There was an Indian store next door outside the verandah. I would visit it regularly to read the comic books Beano or Dandy. I didn't have a lot of money then and at times would overstay my welcome. The Indian uncle would chase me away and I took my 'revenge' by turning off the electricity supply which we allowed him to tap from our house."

One attraction of the guidebook is its rich tapestry of visual images, both sketched and photographed, of the building's artefacts and ornamentation resplendent in Daoist symbolism.



Among these are the ornately carved blackwood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which are a fixture in wealthy Peranakan homes of that period. In the section on the building's reception hall, there are interesting explanations of their elaborate motherof-pearl inlays intricately cut into symbols of coins, bats, flower bouquets, and Daoist deities like the Eight Immortals.

On the backrests of the chairs, marble slabs from the Dali prefecture of Yunnan, China, provide cool comfort in Singapore's steamy weather. The slabs, with their natural grey, black and white gradations, resemble Chinese brush paintings of mountains, rivers and clouds. Perhaps it was the Peranakans' way of bringing the motherland's much-treasured and missed vistas into their homes.

The guidebook is also filled with snippets of mythology and Chinese history.

In its section on the ancestral hall, one's attention is drawn to a large plaster relief. The panel is decorated with beautiful reliefs of animals of the Chinese zodiac. An anecdote explains how the rat came to be the first animal in the zodiac. Apparently it came in first during a race organized by the Jade Emperor. It was said that being poor swimmers, the cat and rat rode on the back of the ox while crossing the river. The crafty rat then pushed the cat off the ox's back to clinch the race, and forever left the cat out of the zodiac cycle. Now you know why rats are always at the head of the game of life!

Because of the way it is written, the reader need not start from page one of this slim handy volume. Simply take it up and enjoy it leisurely as you would sips of fine first-growth oolong tea. •

Published in 2016 by the National University of Singapore & Editions Didier Millet with the support of Ms Agnes Tan in memory of her father the late Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

dalam dapor

A Blustery Second Wind

NYONYA NGIAM MAY LING DISCOVERS HOW A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT GAVE BABA WINSTON TAN A SECOND WIND IN HIS CAREER

When having a meal at Baba Wins' restaurant, one would think that given the slickness of its operations and maturity of its menu, owner Winston Tan, 64, has been a restaurateur his entire career. In fact, he has been in the restaurant business for only four years, since he hesitantly opened his first restaurant with a seating capacity of 16. Today, Baba Wins at Tiong Bahru Plaza seats 60. Prior to this, Winston wore many hats including a corporate banker and a travel consultant.

In 2005, he suffered a haemorrhagic stroke which left him half-paralysed. Prognosis for recovery was bleak, but after a year of physiotherapy, he regained use of his legs, followed by use of his hands some months later. Doctors dubbed his recovery as a miracle, citing the statistic that only 1.5% of stroke victims ever recover some form of mobility. Winston remains bittersweet that he has recovered only 85% of sensation in his hands. Today, he admits that he was suicidal during that time, and while his wife and daughter provided him with the motivation to carry on living, he attributes his source of strength to God.

After his recovery, Winston searched for a sustainable career and realised that he had to be adaptable. Having a strong entrepreneurial streak, he acquired the franchise for a local bakery and set up shop in Lot One mall. Encouraged by brisk business, he set up another branch in a different location. However, one month into operations, he realised that the new branch would not take off due to poor foot traffic. However he was locked into the lease for three years and had to quickly come up with an alternative use for the premises.

At their wits' end, Winston and his wife Felicia, 60, decided to channel Felicia's lifelong passion for cooking into a Peranakan restaurant. Felicia, a Cantonese, had learned to cook Peranakan cuisine from Winston's mother, a Peranakan chef extraordinaire. The gamble paid off as business grew by word of mouth, and Wisnton saw his fortunes turn around slowly but surely. Today, the restaurant is located in the newly refurbished Tiong Bahru Plaza and is the only one in the mall serving Peranakan cuisine. The restaurant has also cultivated a loyal following that includes perennially hard-to-please bibiks.

Both husband and wife concede that owing a restaurant is hard work, but one of the most rewarding things that they have ever done. The couple are at the restaurant daily and are very involved in its operation – from sourcing supplies to taking orders from patrons.

Winston tries to impart nuggets of the Peranakan

culture to his patrons. For example, if someone is celebrating his or her birthday at the restaurant, he would serve that person a hardboiled egg



Baba Winston Tan with his wife Felicia.

with a red dot and *mee sua* in sugar water, explaining the significance of the elements at the same time.

Being a Peranakan cuisine purist, Winston does not serve fusion dishes at his restaurant and would baulk at, for example, using asparagus in Peranakan dishes. He prefers to stick to traditional recipes and ingredients, but innovates in the way they are served. "I noticed that my customers find it inconvenient to fiddle with the *buah keluak* to get the flesh out. So we removed the flesh and cook it in the gravy. This does not change the authentic taste and richness of the dish and it is much easier for my customers to eat," says Winston.

He desires to revive Peranakan food as a heritage cuisine. Energised by the success of his restaurant, he dreams of organising a festival to showcase and celebrate the heritage cuisines of Singapore.

At the end of this interview, I asked him if he would consider his restaurant as his second wind. At this precise moment, his wife passes our table and quipped sagaciously, "Second wind and second chance! This second wind is his second chance at life!"

Wisnton has generously agreed to share his recipe for Hati Babi Bungkus.

HATI BABI BUNGKUS

Ingredients:

500g pork caul (membrane), cleaned and cut into 500g pork caul (membrane), cleaned and cut into 15cm squares (Wash caul thoroughly.) 4 tablespoons cooking oil 3 shallots, finely pounded 300g minced pork 300g pork liver, boiled and finely diced (Note: Do not over boil the pork liver. It should only be half-cooked so that it will not harden after frying.) 2 teaspoons pepper 2 tablespoons roasted ground coriander seeds

Seasoning:

- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons dark soya sauce
- 2 tablespoons vinegar





Pork caul.

Method:

Heat oil in pan and fry pounded shallots until light brown, then lower the heat.

Add seasoning ingredients and fry for ½ a minute. Put fried shallots in large bowl and add minced

pork, liver, pepper and ground coriander and mix well. Make meatballs out of mixture. Meatballs should be the size of walnuts.

Hati babi bungkus.

Wrap each meatball tightly with a square of pork caul, rolling many times over to prevent the meat from spilling out during frying.

Heat the pan with oil and place the meatballs, sealed side facing the pan and fry over moderate heat until brown. Turn meatballs over at least once.



dalam dapor

An Enabler of Second Chances

NYONYA NGIAM MAY LING SPEAKS TO BABA RAYMOND KHOO ABOUT HIS APPETITE FOR CHARITY

Setting up The Peranakan was a breeze for chef-owner, Raymond Khoo. After all, it is his 22nd restaurant in his three decades of F&B experience. Ironically, Raymond was happily ensconced in cushy retirement prior to opening The Peranakan. However, his mother and godmother, both fastidious nyonya cooks, cajoled him to revive authentic Peranakan cuisine. Their family recipes are used in his restaurant today, and both ladies visit weekly to carry out quality control checks.

At his restaurant, Raymond serves the traditional tok panjang (long table banquet) in a modern way by plating the quintessential Peranakan feast in individual portions and presenting each guest with a personalised certificate after the meal. This has proved to be wildly popular among diners.

Appetite for charity

Apart from running a restaurant, Raymond's voracious appetite for charity has led him to feed more than just hungry bellies, but hearts and souls too. In 2011, Raymond volunteered with his church to distribute food to the needy at Lengkok Bahru. The poverty he witnessed irrevocably changed his life. "Some elderly residents didn't have beds or even a mattress to sleep on. My wife and I were so shocked that this was happening in modern day Singapore", shares Raymond.

He swiftly decided to start Saturdays@Lengkok Bahru, a volunteer group that reaches out to families in the area living in one-bedroom rental units and are on social assistance. Most are elderly folk, but there are also children amongst them; whose parents have been incarcerated and live with their grandparents.

Raymond and his volunteers started out distributing food packs to the households. However, he quickly realised that the residents needed more than just food; most were desperately lonely and yearned for meaningful social interaction. He began to organise Saturday tea parties in the void decks of the HDB blocks. Today, well over 100 residents attend each session. After tea, each attendee takes home a loaf of fresh bread and fruit. Why these two items? Raymond reasons that "bread provides sustenance; and while fruit is affordable for most, it is a luxury for these residents". Raymond's wife, Janet who works in finance, and their son, Justin, 11, also volunteer with him. "My son has made friends with the residents. He entertains them!" chuckles Raymond.

Raymond shares poignantly that most of the elderly folk have been abandoned by their children. While many are aware of the law that requires children to provide monetary support to their parents, most loathe to take steps to enforce it. Through Saturdays@Lengkok Bahru, he aims to



provide the residents with a sense of security, hope, and dignity.

Giving others a second chance

Raymond and his son Justin in the kitchen of The Peranakan.

Through the Prison Fellowship, Raymond has connected with the wives of prisoners, and hired them to work in his restaurant. He also counts ex-convicts among his staff. In keeping with his generous nature, he never turns away anyone seeking a job at the restaurant if he can help it.

Ever the entrepreneur, Raymond dreams of expanding his volunteer group. "Why can't we have a Saturdays@Bukit Batok? Or a Saturdays@Toa Payoh? Since the concept is desirable, feasible and viable, why not multiply it? It can only be for the greater good," he ruminates wistfully.

If you wish to volunteer with Saturdays@Lengkok Bahru, Raymond can be reached at: raykhoo22@gmail.com.

Raymond has generously agreed to share his recipe for *nasi ulam*, which ranks among his best-selling dishes at The Peranakan.

Photo by Baba William Xiong.



A beautifully set table at The Peranakan.

NASI ULAM RECIPE

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

Raw herbs and vegetables: *Daon kunyet* (Turmeric leaves), ½ stalk *serai* (lemongrass), 6 *daon lemo perot* (kaffir lime leaves), 4 strands *kachang panjang* (long beans), ½ stalk *bunga kantan* (wild ginger flower), 2 stalks *daon kesom* (laksa leaves)

1 whole *ikan selair* (horse mackerel)

30 gm of salted fish

2 rice bowls of cooked, cooled rice. (Note: Use only rice that has cooled to room temperature. Warm or hot rice will cause the raw herbs to brown and taste bitter.)

Method:

Finely julienne all herbs and long beans. Deep fry the whole fish and salted fish seperately. Once cooled, debone and shred the whole fish by hand. Mince the salted fish.

Raymond's signature tok panjang feast, plated in individual portions.

SAMBAL TUMIS

100 gm b*awang merah* (shallots), 15 gm *buah keras* (candlenuts), 30 gm *chili kering* (dried chillies), 10 gm *belachan* (shrimp paste)

Blend all the above together, then stir fry for approximately 7 minutes until fragrant.

Assembly:

Mix raw ingredients together with 2 tablespoons of *sambal tumis*, cooled rice and fish in a mixing bowl. Toss everything together till well mixed.

Plate the rice and garnish with a generous sprinkling of mixed raw herbs. Add more *sambal tumis* or herbs according to personal preference.

Raymond Khoo's nasi ulam.

Dare to Dream Together

NYONYA PEGGY LEE REPORTS ON THE 29TH BABA NYONYA CONVENTION HELD IN PHUKET

un, sea and spas come to mind immediately when one thinks of Phuket, but there is another relatively unexplored facet of this beautiful part of the Land of Smiles...its Peranakan heritage.

The 29th Baba Nyonya Convention was held at the Sentido Graceland Khaolak Resort from 25-27 November 2016. I was excited to be a part of the Singapore delegation and could not wait to meet fellow Peranakans from Asia and Australia. Member associations in the Federation of Peranakan Associations take turns to host this annual event.

On our arrival in Phuket, we were warmly welcomed by our Thai Peranakan hosts who graciously accompanied us to the resort to help us get settled in. The lush greenery, azure pools and lovely beach were the perfect setting for a relaxing convention by the sea. There was a lively and vibrant program that included Thai dance performances, a Muay Thai demonstration, flower arrangement and fruit carving workshops and many more. I enjoyed the hands-on papaya salad demo by the resort chef and enjoyed my creation afterwards. Aroi mak mak! (Very delicious!) Meaningful presentations and seminars also gave us an opportunity to celebrate Peranakan culture.

On 26 November, we enjoyed a balmy evening under the stars with live music and a delicious buffet spread. While I found it tricky to tread the fine, soft sand in *kasot manek*, some nyonyas gamely kicked off their *kasot* and gaily danced barefoot on the beach.

I have attended several Baba Nyonya conventions, but something rather special that I will always remember about this one in Phuket is how respectful everyone was in view of the Thai King's passing just a month before, in October 2016. King Bhumibol was well loved by his people. Many of our Thai Peranakan counterparts were dressed in head to toe black, which is their mourning custom. In solidarity, many delegates from other countries took great care to dress in traditional Peranakan *tua har* (mourning) colours – black, blue and white. Some wore black ribbons on their sleeves or chests.

I will always treasure this spirit of camaraderie among Baba Nyonyas and look forward to the next convention in Penang!

Photos courtesy of Angeline Khong.



Smiles all round at the 29th Baba Nyonya Convention in Phuket.



Gracious Thai host Ael Sirima teaching a delegate the art of garland threading, one orchid at a time.





The effervescent Pranee Sakul gave a talk on important personas in Phuket during a convention seminar.

Left: Delegates were treated to graceful Thai dance performances.

Below: Paying respects to the beloved Thai monarch, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej.





Joget to joyful tunes.



Enjoying a balmy evening on the beach, under the stars.



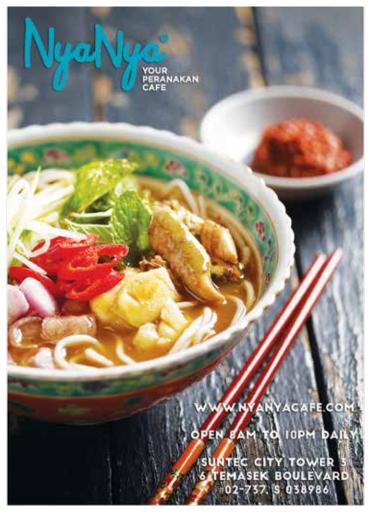
Baba Cedric Tan with fellow Malaysian delegates.

Below:Mr Ponno Kalastree, presenting a gift from the Association of Chetti Melaka (Singapore) to Mr Kosol Teangutai of the Thai Peranakan Association

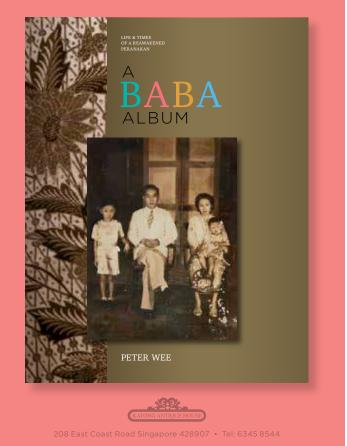
Below: Many delegates donned somber tua har (mourning) colours out of respect for their Thai counterparts who were mourning their King.







A BOOK FOR CULTURE BUFFS



events

Flowers For The Fowl

NYONYA KHONG SWEE LEE REPORTS ON A PERANAKAN THEMED IKEBANA DEMONSTRATION

That better way to kick off preparations for the Year of the Rooster by organising an Ikebana demonstration using Nyonyaware filled with fresh Lunar New Year blooms?

Members and guests gathered for a floral demonstration by Angela Kek, Second Sanyo's Diploma Teacher Holder from the Sogetsu School of Ikebana and Vice President of the Ikebana International Chapter 135 (Singapore), held at Rumah Kim Choo, East Coast Road on 15 January 2017.

The ubiquitous kamcheng took on a new role by serving as an attractive receptacle for an impressive display of pink anthuriums while an antique incense holder bore delicate branches of forsythia paired with brassica.



Happy participants.

At the conclusion of the demonstration, a lucky draw was conducted and the delighted winner, Mei took home one of Angela's exquisite floral arrangements, of bronze chrysanthemums and forsythia.

Thereafter, participants enjoyed a sumptuous tea at Baba Chew's, Hotel Indigo, located in the conserved Joo Chiat Police Station. Head Chef Alvin Leong prepared a special menu of Nyonya Laksa and Mee Siam, Kueh Pie Tee, pulled Beef Rendang en croute and Chendol pannacotta, to the delight of our little group. Participants busily exchanged New Year decorating tips whilst "confined" within the luxurious premises of the former police station! Indeed a good time was had by all.

An Evening Of Distinction

NYONYA PEGGY LEE REPORTS ON THE PERANAKAN VOICES AT THE 20TH INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM GALA DINNER

Eld at the Fullerton Hotel on 15 and 16 February 2017, the 20th International Women's Forum Singapore (IWF) was attended by over 140 participants including dynamic women leaders from 35 countries. The mission of the IWF is to build better global leadership across careers, continents and culture by connecting the world's most preeminent women of distinguished and diverse achievements.

The theme for the 2017 Singapore forum was "Harmony in Diversity". The two-day event saw prominent speakers including a Nobel Prize team winner, Sister Denise Coghlan, a Roman Catholic

Bringing a bit of Peranakan culture to women leaders from around the world. nun and Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, Dr. Aline Wong, Chancellor, Singapore Institute of Management University, Barbara Barrett, Chairman of the Board of



the Aerospace Corporation, Mr. Bahren Shaari, CEO of the Bank of Singapore, visually-impaired IBM Research Fellow, Ms. Chieko Asakawa, and Ms. Yang Lan, Chairperson of Sun Media Group and Sun Culture Foundation, China.

Panel discussions ranged from how public space, private beliefs, arts, culture, language, politics, technology and business influence and impact harmony; to how different generations view diversity. Participants of the forum also visited the Housing Development Board and the National Gallery where they were hosted by the respective CEOs Dr Cheong Koon Hean (HDB) and Ms Chong Siak Ching (National Gallery).

The Peranakan Voices performed at the fundraising Gala Dinner at the end of the forum. It was our privilege to perform for such a distinguished audience

that included Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth. Under the magnificent sparkling chandeliers of the Fullerton's Grand Ballroom, we delivered a lively repertoire of Peranakan songs and ended up dancing with the participants. The Peranakan Voices are proud to be ambassadors of Peranakan culture and are truly honoured to be a small part of a successful conference that raised over \$250,000 for the IWF Singapore Education Grants Fund for Young Women. These funds will go towards financing twenty young women each year in their educational pursuits for the next eight years.

A New Home In Joo Chiat

NYONYA DAWN MARIE LEE REPORTS ON THE GUNONG SAYANG ASSOCIATION'S NEW CLUBHOUSE

n 5 February 2017, the ninth day of the Taon Baru Cina, the Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) officially opened its new clubhouse at 80 Joo Chiat Place. The move from Geylang to the new premises, marked a new chapter in GSA's 107-year history.

"We want to make our clubhouse a welcoming place where anyone can come to learn and appreciate

Peranakan culture through various activities and workshops. We want this place to be full of life." shared Cynthia Lee, 2ndVice-President.

120 members and guests attended the opening of the clubhouse, which began auspiciously at 11.08am with a performance by a lion dance troupe. The black and gold *ji ho* (signboard above the entrance) was unveiled by GSA President, Alvin Teo, 1st VP, Fred Soh and 2nd VP, Cynthia Lee.

Guests including GSA Patrons Professor Walter Woon and his wife Janis, and Ms Anastasia Liew of Bengawan Solo, were treated to a lunch reception where delicious Peranakan food and *kueh* were served. *Sulam* and *kasot manek* beading demonstrations, as well as *cherki* games were held on the second floor and guests were invited to participate. The GSA singers



and Suara Sayang provided melodies for lively *joget* sessions that went on all afternoon.

Since the opening of the new clubhouse, GSA has organised a variety of workshops and classes that have been fully subscribed, including an 8-week *sulam* course conducted by kebaya master Baba Heath Yeo, 8 weeks of Baba Malay classes, *cherki* sessions, a *Fengshui* workshop and many musical evenings.

Catch GSA's new wayang Peranakan, Kain Chik Dua Mungka, featuring doyen GT Lye. 24-26 August 2017 at The Drama Centre. Tickets available from SISTIC.

Aussie Babas Joget The Night Away

BABA JOSEPH THEN REPORTS ON THE ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE OF THE MELBOURNE PERANAKANS

n Saturday, 18 March 2017, the Peranakan Association Australia (PAA) Inc (Melbourne) held our Annual Dinner & Dance at Favourite Kitchen in Wantirna, our fourth time at this venue. Since there are no Peranakan restaurants in Melbourne with the capacity for more than 50 people, the event was held at a Chinese restaurant. We had a turn out of 165 attendees inclusive of four children under 12 years old. Members and their guests were resplendent in Peranakan haute couture.

The versatile Mauritian, Marceau Camille, provided entertaining music that kept every one on their feet dancing the night away. He didn't disappoint with displays of musical prowess, playing over eight different instruments and serenading us with his impressive singing voice - a veritable crowd pleaser! The organising committee had allocated much time for dancing in the evening's program, and they were spot on! There wasn't a moment that the dance floor wasn't occupied on the night. Our very own PAA choir and our newly formed ukulele band also gave rousing performances.

The sumptuous ten-course Chinese dinner banquet ended on a sweet note with nyonya kueh provided by an external supplier.

All the raffle tickets for the 24 lovely prizes donated by our members were sold out. Each table also had a table prizewinner. As usual, every attendee received a gift from the PAA. This year it was a Peranakan



tile fridge magnet. One of our new sponsors, Oriental Merchants, also donated a 'foodie' bag to each attendee.

The event was a success and the organising committee received good feedback and compliments from members. One email read, "Congrats

on a great evening! The hours invested in the planning of the Annual Dinner paid off handsomely. We went home happy. The unbridled energy on the dance floor coupled with the camaraderie and happy chatter says it all."

Next year, the PAA will celebrate our 10th anniversary. We are looking for a bigger venue with a capacity to host at least 200 people. Hopefully the celebrations will be held either on 17 or 24 March 2018. The PAA would like to extend an invitation to all of you to attend if you find yourself in our city at the time.

Aussie babas and nyonyas having a jolly good time! Photo by Pat Cheah.

MEDIA RATE CARD

THE PERANAKAN magazine is published twice a year by The Peranakan Association of Singapore (TPAS), established in 1900. The magazine is a non-profit publication packed with insightful heritage and lifestyle features, valuable information, learning opportunities and other relevant topics which keep our readers in touch with the rich Peranakan culture.

The magazine has an easy-to-read, attractive, full-colour format which encourages all who receive it to read it cover to cover.

Its aim is to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of Peranakans in Singapore and worldwide. It is the only print magazine published within the Federation of Peranakan Associations (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia).

Please contact our advertising manager, May Ling at +65 9741 0610 or email mayling.ngiam@yahoo.com for more details.



WHO SEES YOUR AD?



Print Circulation: **3500** print copies. Online Circulation: Accessible to public **24/7** Published: **Twice** a year Specifications: 40-48 pages, **full colour**

The magazine is distributed to Association members as well as various international clubs, museums, Singapore Tourism Board visitor centres, the National University of Singapore, the National Library and various other points of interest. It is also available free at participating restaurants and retail outlets.

THE PERANAKAN is often kept as a collector's item and is a must-have resource for all things Peranakan. It is read by a wide range of people including antique collectors, museum curators and docents, media professionals, foodies, expatriates, tourists and researchers.

AD SIZES

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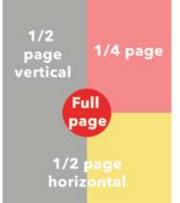
One year, 2 Issues Note: Ad will also appear online on the TPAS website for one year

> Full page colour (4 process colours only)

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contest

Win a Sterling Silver Peranakan Charm Bracelet & Charms

A *kamcheng* filled with luscious *kueh ee* basking invitingly in a bath of fragrant syrup; a *bakol sia* brimming with plump, juicy mandarin oranges, ready to welcome the Taon Baru Cina; a *tingkat* layered with piping hot *ayam sioh*, the thick, rich aroma of coriander gravy making your mouth water. These are the memories of common items in a Peranakan household that many a Baba or Nyonya may cherish.

In the Peranakan world, utilitarian items such as vessels for food, drink and even spitoons have been heavily decorated and elevated into art with the myriad of colourful and auspicious motifs that adorn them. These vessels have become closely associated with Peranakan culture.

Inspired by these quintessentially Peranakan items, Penang jeweller Jonathan Yun has immortalised them in minature form. Finely crafted in sterling silver, his **Vessels** collection features mini Peranakan vessels such as the *kamcheng*, *chupu*, *bakol sia*, *tingkats* and many more. These charms can be worn on charm bracelets or as pendants. Sets of *kerosangs*, rings, brooches and cufflinks featuring these mini vessels are also part of the collection.



WRITE IN AND WIN!

Send us your stories (fiction or non-fiction) of Peranakan vessels and stand to win these beautiful sterling silver minatures.

The best story wins a CHARM BRACELET WITH FIVE CHARMS (worth SGD\$680). The next five best stories win a SINGLE CHARM (worth SGD\$108) each. Winning stories will be published in the Peranakan Magazine.

- Closing date: 15 October 2017
- Email your entries to the Editor at editor@peranakan.org.sg with PERANAKAN MAG CONTEST in the subject field.
- Include your full name, phone number and address.
- Contest is open to all readers of the Peranakan Magazine except members of the Editorial Team and sponsor's staff.
- Each story must have a minimum of 400 words (max. 1000 words).

- The Peranakan Magazine reserves the right to publish edited versions of the winning stories.
- Winning stories may be used by the prize sponsor to promote the *Vessels* collection.
- International entries will be accepted.
- All prizes may be collected in Singapore or Penang only.

All prizes sponsored by:



Discover more of Jonathan Yun's work at: www.jonathanyunjewelry.com Facebook: www.facebook.com/JonathanYunJewelry/ Instagram: jonathanyunjewelry Boutique: 152 Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, Georgetown, Penang 10200, Malaysia Enquiries about the *Vessels* collection may be directed to Gwen Ong, Email: gwen1011@hotmail.com

noticeboard

The Federation of Peranakan Associations

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Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indians) Singapore

5001 Beach Road #08-09 Golden Mile Complex, Singapore 199588 Contact: Mr Pono Kalastree (President) Email: p.kalastree@mainguard-intl.com.sg Phone: +65 6297 1229 / +65 9678 1767 Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ Chetti-Melaka-of-SingaporeOfficial-FB-235773946497507/

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Peranakan Tionghoa Warga Indonesia (Pertiwi) Address: Yayasan PERTIWI c/o KING'S EEC, Jalan Baharudin No.8, Tangerang 15111, Banten, Indonesia Contact: Mr Udaya Halim (President) Email: info@pertiwi.org / info@ bentengheritage.com Phone: +6221 5523880 / +6221 5526748

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Peranakan Association Australia Inc. (PAA NSW)

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Website: peranakanaustralia.org

Gentle Reminder to Overseas Members

We would like to gently remind all overseas members to email to our Asst Hon Secretary, Koh Hwei Ling at *secretariat@peranakan.org.sg* your local (Singapore) postal address for us to mail your copy of the magazine. Posting overseas is too huge a cost for your Association to bear as we do not collect subscriptions as income. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Calling All Creatives

We are looking for writers, photographers and illustrators with a passion for Peranakan culture. If you would like to contribute to *The Peranakan Magazine*, please write to Dawn Marie Lee at: editor@ peranakan.org.sg

Welcome

A warm welcome to our new members!

Betty Gan H. Christiane Duckworth John Joel Seow

Obituary

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

Susan Leong Khoo Hock Choo Annie Yeo Chee Chee

chakap habis

A New Hope

BABA BRYAN TAN JOINS THE YEOWS IN WELCOMING THE LATEST ADDITION TO THE FAMILY

W 7 illie Yeow looked curiously at his wife. It was a strange sight to behold the love of his life sitting quietly by their daughter Vera's hospital bed. He was so sure that she would be pulling her hair out over Vera's wedding that didn't go according to plan. Yet, there she was, looking perfectly calm.

The elders were shocked when the sacred *cheo thau* ceremony was rudely interrupted by a wailing ambulance siren. Paramedics rushed through the ancestral home of one of the most prominent families on Jalan Tun Tan



Cheng Lock, and in their haste almost brole several priceless family heirlooms.

Vera, in all her bridal finery, was carted off unceremoniously to the nearest hospital because her water bag had broken. Guests hurriedly left in hushed whispers, leaving behind only a few close family friends of *Kohpoh Chik* (grand aunty) Soh Bee Neo. Willie shuddered as he recalled the look on her face. *Kohpoh Chik* was livid with rage, berating her hapless husband and the household staff to relieve her severe embarrassment.

In contrast, Molly's face was serene, and for a brief moment in her life, free from frown lines. Her lips curled into a contented smile as she softly hummed and cradled her newborn grandson. Vera lay on the hospital bed beside her, exhausted from labour but glowing with pride.

There was a knock on the door.

Before anyone could say anything, a flurry of colourful, lacy fabric flooded in like a burst of fireworks. Instantly, the room was filled with excited chatter and hurried clacks of bright beaded slippers on the linoleum floor.

"Molleeeeeeee! *Apa kabar chuchu lu* (how is your grandson)?" boomed the loudest bibik in a bright red kebaya. Bibik Nancy 'Kerbau' Lee was Molly's oldest friend and 'leader' of the bibik entourage that had come along to get a glimpse of the new baby. Nancy's prosperous belly pressed against an equally massive hamper, which her scarlet–tipped hands thrust onto the nearest bedside table. Her topknot wobbled tremulously as she scanned the room for Molly's grandson.

"Kamsiah ya, Nancy. *Chuchu saya* (my grandson) is doing great! *Dia makan kuat sekali* (he eats a lot)!" Molly gratefully obliged. "Annie, Daisy, *duduk duduk* (sit, sit)!"

"Hello Aunty Nancy, Aunty Annie, and Aunty Daisy!" exclaimed Vera.

Bibik Annie 'Ayam' Wong had a distinctly dotty look about her, with tiny feathers stuck in her hair and stains on her forest green kebaya; she resembled a peacock that had been blown away with the wind. "Molly, Vera! *Aiyee, muka dia manis sekali* (his face is so sweet)," she squawked, swooping down on Molly and Vera, flapping her sleeves excitedly.

"Ya juga. Mata dia sama lu Vera (his eyes are just like yours)!" squealed Bibik Daisy 'Pesek' Choo. "Have you thought of a name for him yet?"

Creases in Vera's forehead formed as soon as she heard the question. "Not yet," she murmured wearily. *"Kohpoh Chik* says that she will choose his name."

Nancy 'Kerbau' Lee puffed at Molly indignantly. "Apa ni (what's this)? Surely you can't let her bully Vera like that!" The two other bibiks nodded vigorously in agreement.

Molly stared contentedly into the deep brown pools of her grandson's eyes. A new chapter had begun. She would take no more of *Kohpoh Chik's* bullying.

"Not anymore. You just wait and see." •

In the next issue, Molly confronts the iron matriarch of her family, Kohpoh Chik Soh Bee Neo!

directory

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. 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.

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941. website:www.peranakanmuseum.sg Email: nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg Tel: 6332 7591.

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 sireh 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

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, *sireh* 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, 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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