



the **peranakan**

ISSUE **2** • 2012



SINGAPORE
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Odyssey*
*Recipes from Southeast Asia
to Down Under*

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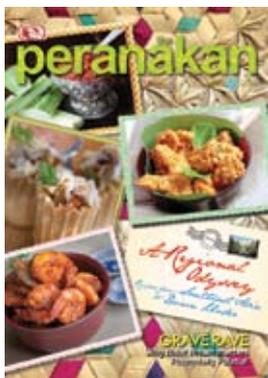
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THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

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LIFE, A CELEBRATION!

For as long as I can remember, which is a long time ago, food ruled our household whether it was a normal day or an occasion to celebrate. In the 1960s, dinner was the highlight when delicious home-cooked food was laid out lovingly by my mother after we children took our bath and obediently sat together at the dining table in our home-sewn pyjamas. We were eager to gobble down the best meal of the day before watching *The Andy Williams Show* on black-and-white television.

Those days, massive feasts (*makan besair*) were the norm when dear aunties - the *Kim Pohs* and the *Kohs* who *pakay kain*, or wore sarongs at home - came out of the woodwork for cook-ins at someone's wedding or during holidays while we children gaily played after school, with no homework to torture us unlike children now.

Food is the *joie de vivre* for us Peranakans! Is it any wonder that we have so many cookbooks? In this issue

we take what is dearest to our hearts and open up *Dalam Dapor* to the varied styles of Peranakan cooking in the region. From Phuket to Jakarta and Melbourne, see how some dishes have evolved uniquely even as common ingredients like *buah keluak* or *belachan* are used.

Apart from life's best moments, the afterlife was of extreme concern to our forefathers. Our special feature on the grave side of life unfolds the great lengths that Peranakans took to secure the best for eternity unknown. Indeed, the 'Palace' that is Bukit Brown is a testimony of these concerns. So many of our forefathers, many of them pioneers of Singapore as well, are buried there.

Make no bones about it, Bukit Brown is a precious part of our Peranakan heritage. ❖

Linda Chee,
Editor

THE PERANAKAN BALL TUA SEH JIT - A Grand Birthday Banquet

Friday, 27 July 2012, 7pm
The Marriott Ballroom, Level 3
Singapore Marriott Hotel
320 Orchard Road

Partake in the delight of a grand birthday celebration with entertainment by theatre doyen G T Lye and a stellar cast. Tuck into a sumptuous birthday feast and be charmed by the delightful melodies of the Dendang Irama Band and the harmonious vocals of The Peranakan Voices. This evening promises to be a truly Happy Birthday for one and all!

To secure your tickets and for more information, please contact Ms Lim Geok Huay at 6255 0704 or email: geok@peranakan.org.sg

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE MAIN COMMITTEE 2012/2013

At the 112th Annual General Meeting of the Association held on Saturday, 31 March 2012 at Peranakan Museum, a new main committee was elected as follows:

President Peter Wee (re-elected)	Assistant Honorary Secretary Ee Sin Soo
First Vice-President Alan Koh (re-elected)	Treasurer Chan Eng Thai
Second Vice-President Bebe Seet	Members Linda Chee Angeline Kong Emeric Lau (re-elected) Edmond Wong (re-elected) Alvin Yapp (re-elected)
Honorary Secretary Lim Geok Huay (re-elected)	

More information in the next issue.

LETTERS

I always look forward to reading *The Peranakan*. Your magazine helps to rekindle in my daughter the interest in things Peranakan.

Betty Ong
Malacca

EDITOR'S NOTE: In Issue 1, 2012, page 25, image 9 showing a group of *baju panjang*-clad nyonyas performing was inadvertently captioned as "Elegant Penang nyonyas who stole the show." Reader Lambert Yeo has pointed out that the nyonyas were from Phuket, noting that "They were really elegant and paid a lot of attention to details of their outfit and turnout." Thanks for the alert, Lambert.

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POSTCARDS FROM THE KITCHEN

A thriving aspect of our culture is the culinary arts. We Peranakans are almost legendary for our obsession over food. Just about everything, from its sourcing to preparation and presentation, is placed under extreme scrutiny. To us, the joy of food is not just about eating. Alliances, friendships and even marriages have been forged - and broken - by virtue of one's culinary prowess.

Foodies Nyonya Linda Chee, Baba Emeric Lau and Nyonya Delicia Seet tracked down expert nyonya and baba cooks, from northwards in Phuket to Melbourne down under, who were happy to share their recipes, reflections and ruminations on their prized dishes and varied styles of cooking. We are honoured to present their contributions in this special cross-border Dalam Dapor feature.

KERABU Asparagus Salad

By Baba David Neo

A few years ago, I started experimenting with *kerabu* (Peranakan salad) recipes and have become so smitten with them that I usually prepare a *kerabu* dish whenever I am serving a Peranakan meal. I simply love the refreshing flavour of *kerabu*. This has earned me the reputation of being more 'Penang style' in my Peranakan cooking even though I have only visited Penang twice and both my maternal and paternal families comprise Peranakans from Singapore and Malacca. As the state of Victoria produces a large asparagus crop every year - *bila ada musim, berlambak* asparagus! ('when in season, a glut of asparagus!')

- I thought I would share my *kerabu* asparagus recipe adapted from *kerabu puchok paku* (fiddlehead fern).

Ingredients

200g asparagus (cut into 3-4 cm long and blanched in hot water)
 200g prawns, peeled whole
 100g crushed roasted peanuts (for garnishing)
 50g shallots, sliced finely
 2 tbsp *kerisik* (toasted grated coconut)



1 *bunga kantan* (torch ginger bud), sliced finely
 3 *daon lemo purot* (kaffir lime leaves), sliced finely

Dressing

1.5 tbsp *sambal belachan* (fresh chilies pounded with *belachan*, *daon lemo purot* and a dash of sugar)
 1.5 tbsp lime juice
 1 tbsp thick *santan* (coconut milk)
 1 tbsp sugar
 1 tsp salt

Method

Simply combine all ingredients, toss to mix well, and serve.



NASI PINDANG (Braised Beef with Rice)

By Baba Joseph 'Aji' Chen

This traditional Peranakan dish is from Kudus in Central Java. It is usually served with steamed white rice. When selecting *buah keluak*, shake the nut. A good nut should have the flesh separate from the shell. The shell should be dark brown, very slightly oily and have a distinct aroma.

Ingredients

500g beef, with some tendons
2-3 stalks *serai* (lemongrass), bruised
3-4 *daon salam* (syzygium polyanthum), bruised
3-5 cm *lengkuas* (galangal), bruised
50 - 60 ml instant coconut milk (*santan encer*)
4 - 5 tbsp oil
Salt and sugar to taste

Rempah (finely ground spice paste)

5-8 garlic
5-8 shallots
7-8 *buah keluak*
7-8 *kemin* (candlenut)
10 - 15 young *daon so/daon melinjo* (belinjo leaves)



Food styling and photography by Anton Kilayko.

5 *daon jeruk* (kaffir lime leaves)
2cm *kunyit* (turmeric)

Method

Bring the beef to boil in a pot with enough water to cover. Simmer for about half an hour to 45 minutes until tender. Remove the foam on the surface.

Heat the oil in a wok, stir-fry the spice paste until fragrant. Add in the lemongrass, galangal and *daon salam*. Add the coconut milk. Transfer the mixture into the pot of beef. Stir well. Add *daon so* or *daon melinjo*. Add salt and sugar to taste. Serve with white rice, a slice of lime (*jeruk nipis*) and ground *cabai rawit* (*chili padi* or bird's eye chili). A popular accompaniment for this dish is *keropok udang* (prawn crackers).

AYAM GALANGA (Galangal Chicken)

By Baba Joseph 'Aji' Chen

Originally known as *Ayam Bumbu Bali*. I prefer to call it *Ayam Galanga* since its unique taste and aroma comes from *kenchur* (Sand ginger or *Kaempferia galanga*) instead of *lengkuas* (Blue ginger or *Lengkuas galanga/Alpinia galanga*).

Ingredients

Whole chicken - cut into 8 pieces or use just drumsticks
Eight hard-boiled eggs
200ml instant coconut milk
3 - 4 tbsp *asam jawa* (tamarind paste)
5 *daon salam* (syzygium polyanthum) (alternatively, bay leaves)
About 5cm, or a thumb of *lengkuas* (galangal), bruised
6 *daon jeruk* (kaffir lime leaves)
4 stalks *serai* (lemongrass), bruised
2 tbsp red sugar
4 - 5 tbsp oil
Salt to taste

Rempah (finely ground spice paste)

10 cloves garlic
6-7 shallots
15 candlenuts (*kemiri*)
3- 4 red chilies or 1 - 2 *cabai rawit* (*chili padi* or bird's eye chilies) to taste



Food styling and photography by Anton Kilayko.

About 1-1.5cm fresh turmeric (*kunyit*)
About 1-1.5cm fresh *kenchur* (*kaempferia galanga*)
1 tsp white pepper
1 tsp coriander seeds, dry-toasted in a wok, without oil

Method

Heat the oil in a wok, fry the spice paste till fragrant. Add *lengkuas* and *salam* leaves. Add chicken and mix well. Add coconut milk. Simmer on medium fire until the gravy thickens. Add eggs. Then the lemongrass and *asam jawa*. Add salt and sugar to taste.



NAM-PRIK (Thai Sambal)

By Nyonya Pranee Sak

When I got married 40 years ago and moved into my own house, my mother gave me a big mortar. The gesture meant that I should carry out my role as wife with firmness, love and care. At the time, I also wondered how I could best make use of the mortar.

Recently, I bought a new, smaller mortar which is of a more manageable heft. I have used these mortars to prepare *nam-prik*, a spicy, shrimp-based Thai condiment.

Thai *nam-prik* (sometimes spelt *nahm phrik*) is a general term used to describe a spicy paste which is prepared in a number of ways. *Nam-prik* is similar to the Indian *sambal* as it is served with rice, vegetables, meats, poultry and fish, and works fine as a dip too!

Thais eat a variety of *nam-prik* made from shrimp paste which is called *kapi* in the central Thai language. The Southern people call this *koei*. Traditionally, we wrap the shrimp paste in banana leaves and grill it over charcoal. Nowadays, we just roast it on low heat in a microwave oven to kill any germs.

Nam-prik should be a blend of salty, sweet, hot and predominantly sour flavours. The basic ingredients are shrimp paste, garlic, fresh chilies, fish sauce and lime juice. Depending on the region, Thais may also add a variety of other ingredients such as dried shrimp, dried fish, tamarind pulp and sour fruit such as green mango, or *zalacca*. We usually grind the dried shrimp until soft and fine.

The names for *nam-prik* are derived by the ingredients added

to the basic recipe. Broadly, there are two types of *nam-prik*. The first is *nam-chub* or *nam prik goong sod*. *Goong* means shrimp. This kind of *nam-prik* consists of boiled fresh shrimp, peeled and cut into small pieces that look like *chinchalok*. We also add a few spoons of water before serving.

The second type of *nam-prik* is a dry version. *Nam-prik goong-sieb* is cooked with large brown, crispy dried shrimp. Put the shrimp in a pan and dry fry without oil until crispy.

Another popular variation of *nam-prik* is *nam-chub pla ching-chang*, using small dried fish.

Southern Thais love to eat *nam-prik* with fresh edible vegetables, including the young leaves. These include young cashew leaves and *pak miang*, which is blanched in hot water and topped with thick coconut cream.

Basic Nam-Prik

- 2 tbsp roasted shrimp paste
- 4 shallots
- 4 small cloves garlic
- 3-4 coriander roots (The roots have a more intense

flavour than the leaves. They also help to 'smoothen' the strong aroma of *belachan*)

- 5-7 fresh red Thai chilies
- 3 tbsp lime juice
- 1 tbsp palm sugar (or white sugar)
- Salt or fish sauce to taste

Southern Thais love to eat *nam-prik* with a variety of edible fresh vegetables, including young leaves.



Food styling and photography by Anton Klasyko.



Photograph courtesy of Pranee Sak.

Method

It is easier to grind all the ingredients if you first grind them separately in another mortar and then mix later. Mash and grind the shrimp paste, garlic, shallots and roots until a thick paste is formed. Add the chilies. Pound the mixture, adding palm sugar and lime juice to suit your taste. Add 2-3 tablespoons of water before serving. *Nam-prik* is best served with warm jasmine rice.



KOAY PAI TI (Kueh Pie Tee)

By Baba Ong Jin Teong

This recipe for *koay pai ti*, known better as *kueh pie tee* in Singapore, is based on my mother's original from the 1950s, when she gave cooking demonstrations to her fellow YWCA members in Penang. *Kueh pie tee* most probably originated from Singapore. In Penang, it is also called Singapore poh piah. Some have dubbed it *Syonanto pie*, *Syonanto* being Singapore's moniker during the Japanese occupation. This '*pie*' may explain the origin of the pie in *kueh pie tee*.

In my mother's version, the vegetables for the filling are drier and simply cooked; the vegetables should be crunchy. This ensures that the *pie tee* shells stay crispy before being consumed. If the shells are not too big, the whole *pie tee* can be elegantly eaten in one mouthful.

PIE TEE SHELLS (Makes about 100 shells)

The *pie tee* shell is made by dipping a hot brass mould into batter. A layer of the batter forms on the side of the mould which is then immersed in hot oil. The batter is pliable before it cooks, so a variety of shapes for the shell can be obtained by carefully manipulating the mould in the oil. If the mould is moved up and down, a top hat-shaped shell will emerge. The *pie tee* shell detaches from the mould once hardened. If the mould is removed from the oil before the batter hardens, the shell will fold up like a clam!

Pie tee moulds are more readily available today. It was difficult to buy one in the 1950s, so my father had to commission a blacksmith to make them. I have a good collection of *pie tee* moulds (above right) including a mini mould that makes a thumb-sized *pie tee* shell!

Ingredients

70g wheat flour
100g ground rice flour
1½ tbsp corn flour
1 egg



Thumb-sized shells.



Pie-tee moulds.



Frying the shells.

1 tsp oil
280ml water
Pinch of salt
Pinch of pepper
Pinch of *kapur* (slaked lime)
Oil for deep frying

Method

Sieve the flours together. Beat the egg and mix with the flour. Add the teaspoon of oil and continue stirring. Water should be added gradually as you stir to obtain a consistent, thick, liquid paste. If too much water is added at once it becomes difficult to get rid of the lumps that form. Alternatively mix all in a food processor.

Heat oil in a deep pan. Heat the pie tee mould in the oil till it is hot. Dip the hot mould in the batter. Do not totally immerse it; leave a gap of ½ cm from the top of the mould. Immerse

the batter-coated mould in the hot oil. Note that the oil is too hot if the batter bubbles when it is immersed.

For a standard-shaped *pie tee* shell, keep the mould steady. For a top-hat-shaped shell, move the mould vertically up and down while the shell is flexible. If the vertical motion is too strong the shell will detach from the mould before it has hardened, giving rise to a distorted shell. In general the first few shells tend to stick to the mould.

When the shell has hardened, it will detach from the mould. If it does not slip off, use a satay skewer to ease from the mould. Remove when light brown; remember it will continue browning for a few seconds after. Drain on kitchen paper. Keep in an airtight container when completely cooled.

PIE TEE FILLING

(For about 100 shells)

1.2kg *bangkwang* (yambean), julienned
200g bamboo shoots (optional)
300g carrots, julienned
300g French beans, sliced thinly on the slant
10 stalks spring onions, chopped for garnishing
4 crabs, steamed and shelled
600g prawns, peeled, deveined and diced
600g belly pork
400g *tau kwa* (bean curd)
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped

6 tbsp oil

2 tsp salt

Note: Reduce *bangkwang* by 200g if bamboo shoots are used.

Method:

Keep the prawn heads and shells aside for the stock. Put them with the belly pork in a pot and add enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, then simmer for about 15 minutes. The pork should not be overcooked. Discard the prawn shells and heads. Keep the stock. Cut the pork and *tau kwa* thinly into 2mm slices, then into strips of about 2 mm thickness. Add the 3 tbsp of oil to a hot frying pan and fry the *tau kwa* until light brown. Drain and keep aside.

Heat the same oil used for the *tau kwa*. Fry the

chopped garlic till nearly brown. Add the diced prawns and salt and fry quickly till cooked. Add the pork and fry till some lard comes off. Then the carrots for 2 minutes. Add the *bangkwang* and fry for another 3 minutes. Add the beans and fry till dark green. Finally, add the fried *tau kwa* and stir thoroughly. A little stock can be added during the frying if the mixture is too dry. The vegetables should be just cooked, yet crunchy.

Fill the *pie tee* and top with the crabmeat and spring onions. Spoon in a bit of the chili sauce described below. Best consumed swiftly, or the shells may turn soggy.

PIE TEE CHILI SAUCE

(Makes about 150 ml)

4 fresh chilies (about 50g), seeded and finely ground
60g peanuts, finely pounded
2 tsp sugar
½ tsp salt
130 ml water
2 tsp vinegar (prefer natural vinegar)
1 tbsp toasted sesame seeds

Method

Mix the ground chilies, peanuts, sugar and salt with the water. Add vinegar to taste. Sprinkle the sesame seeds before serving

The recipe for Koay Pai Ti is extracted from Ong Jin Teong's cookbook called Penang Heritage Food, published by Landmark Books.

CHILI PADI LEMAK

By Chetti Nyonya Daisy Jacobs

Since I was very young I remember weekends when my family members would gather to enjoy fun-filled times with great food, singing, dancing and card games. *Chili Padi Lemak* is a Chetti family recipe that is served at most of our gatherings. The Malays have a dish with the same name but with a more runny texture. Our version has very thick gravy. Simply to die for, when served with *nasi lemak!*

Ingredients

1 kg prawns, medium size, peeled and deveined
2 dried bay leaves
1 big tea cup of *santan pekat* (thick coconut milk)
Pinch of salt, to taste

Rempah (ground spice paste):

3 red onions
5 cloves garlic
1 medium size

daon kunyit (turmeric leaf)
4 buah keras (candlenut)
1 stalk *serai* (lemon grass)
1 inch *lengkuas* (galangal)
10 dried chilies
10 fresh chilies
10 fresh *chili padi* (bird's eye chillies)

Method

Heat the wok with 3 tablespoons of vegetable oil. Fry the *rempah* until you see a reddish layer of oil coming to the top. Add the bay leaves and stir for another 5 minutes. Add the *santan pekat*. Stir in the prawns and add salt to

taste. Turn off the fire, cover and let it rest for 30 minutes. Re-heat for 5 or 6 minutes before serving.



KAPITAN CHICKEN

By Nyonya Debbie Teoh

This is a northern nyonya dish which is prepared on joyous occasions such as birthdays or Chinese New Year. Kept overnight, it tastes better the next day! Leftovers are usually welcomed as this means that the dish would be thicker and more flavoured when re-heated and eaten over the next few days. It is traditionally served with white rice and is also great when paired with a baguette, glutinous rice or even *roti prata*.

Ingredients (Serves 4 to 6)

100 ml cooking oil
1 big onion, peeled and sliced finely
700g chicken (half a medium-sized bird), cut into bite-sized pieces
½ tbsp brown sugar or palm sugar (*gula melaka*)
3-4 pieces *daon lemo perot* (kaffir lime leaves), torn
125ml water
125ml thick coconut milk
1 tbsp lime juice
Salt to taste

Rempah (Ground spice paste)

15 shallots
1 clove garlic, peeled
10g young ginger
10g galangal

10g turmeric
2 candlenuts
2 stalks lemon grass
5 dried chilies, soaked and cut into 3cm lengths
5 bird's eye chilies, optional
10g toasted *belachan*

Method

Heat oil, sauté finely sliced big onions till crispy, remove and set aside. Retain the onion oil.

Using an electric blender, combine and finely blend the spice paste ingredients, adding a little water, if necessary. Sauté the spice paste in the onion oil over a medium flame until fragrant, stirring continuously to prevent the paste from burning or sticking to the wok.

Add the chicken pieces, sugar, kaffir lime leaves and cook for 5 to 7 minutes. Add water and simmer until chicken is almost tender, about 15 to 20 minutes. Add the coconut milk, lime juice and salt to taste. Turn off heat and pour over the onion crisps, stirring to combine. Serve with steaming hot rice. ❖

Sample Debbie Teoh's dishes at Parkroyal Kuala Lumpur's Chatz Brasserie buffets from 11 May to 10 June. For reservations or enquiries, please call +60 3 2147 0088 or email chatz.prkul@parkroyalhotels.com.



Food styling and photography by Anton Kilayko.



THE PEARL AND THE LION

Baba Ong Jin Teong explores the distinctness of Penang and Singapore Peranakan cuisine

After the publication of my cookbook, *Penang Heritage Food*, I found myself often being asked about the differences between Penang and Singapore Peranakan food.

It is not a simple question because even within the country, there are differences when the same dish is cooked by different families, and these may be misinterpreted as regional differences.

Both cuisines have strong Malay and Hokkien influences. However, Penang dishes are influenced by Thai, north Malaysian and Hainanese tastes, while Singapore often incorporates Indonesian influences.

You would be hard pressed to find *perot ikan* or *kerabu* in Singapore Peranakan cuisine. *Mee soto*, *sayor lodeh* or *gado-gado* do not feature in Penang food.

Singaporean food tends to be sweeter and my impression is that *tau cheo* is more liberally used. For example, it is discernible in *chap chye* and the fillings for *poh piah* and *kueh pie tee* but this is not the case in Penang. Where some recipes for *chap chye* use fermented soya bean curd (*tau ju*) instead.

Candlenut (*buah keras*) is used extensively in Peranakan dishes in Singapore for thickening gravies and curries. This is most probably an Indonesian influence. In Penang, *buah keras* is used more selectively, for example, in a thick curry like *Curry Kapitan*. Interestingly, in a review of my book (*The Peranakan, 2011, Issue 2*), Baba Colin Chee disputed my classification of *Curry Kapitan* having Hainanese influences, believing that it should be Eurasian. That may be so in Singapore, but it is a dish cooked by the nyonyas in Penang too. The Hainanese used to work for the British and the richer babas. When they opened restaurants later, they cooked the same items.

Penang nyonya food share many commonly-used southern Thai ingredients. For example, *otak* from Penang has Thai origins, and features *daon kadok* (wild betel leaves) and *daon lemo purot* (kaffir lime leaves), which is finely sliced. The *otak* from Singapore usually does not contain these two

ingredients.

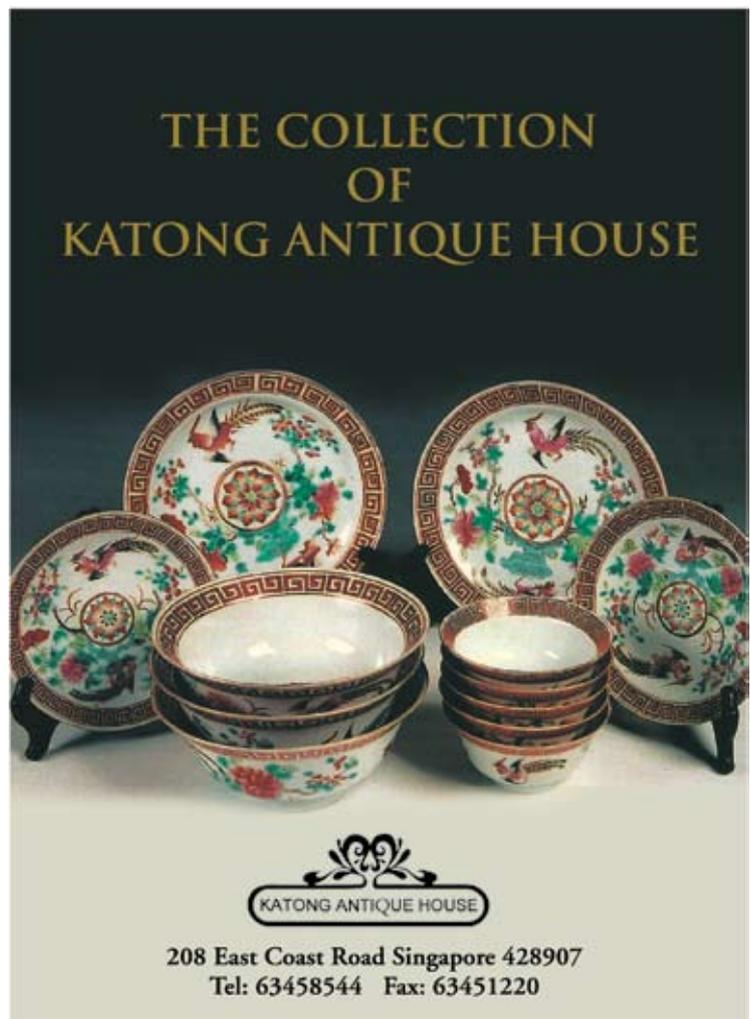
At *poh piah* parties where the guests prepare their own rolls, it is quite easy to distinguish the Penangites from Singaporeans. Penangites will

slice and then spoon some gravy from the filling over their rolls; Singaporeans will have theirs dry. Bamboo shoots make up a fair proportion of the filling in Singapore

but in Penang it is not commonly used, being replaced by yam beans.

Singapore festive entrees include *bakwan kepiting*, *pong tauhu* soup and *ayam sioh*. Penang has *ju hu char*, *pnee hu char*, abalone soup and *gulai tumis*. Interestingly, there is no similarity between the dishes in these two countries ❖

Penang dishes are influenced by Thai, North Malaysian and Hainanese tastes, while Singapore often incorporates Indonesian influences.



UNIQUE INGREDIENTS IN PERANAKAN CUISINE

Baba Joseph 'Aji' Chen casts light on some essentials for cooking

Photography by Joseph Chen.



Buah keluak is poisonous before fermentation.

Peranakan food is a challenging adventure for our senses. It engages our sight, taste and sense of smell. It indulges our tastebuds with an unforgettable culinary experience. It is our treasure, for it does not exist anywhere outside Southeast Asia.

Here is a glossary of some key ingredients in Peranakan food.

Buah keluak (Pangium edule)

This is the fruit of the *keluak*, which is also known as *keluah* or *kepayang*, a tree that is found throughout Malesia, the term for a bio-geographic region spanning from the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, to Papua New Guinea and even further eastwards to Micronesia. There is a fine specimen in the Singapore Botanic Gardens. It is used in all the areas where it is to be found and it is a staple of the Peranakan dish ayam buah keluak. The black 'nuts' are the densely packed seeds of a large fruit. The fruit itself rots. The seeds are intensely poisonous and have to be buried in ash for at least three months at their point of origin before they are sold to the markets. Nyonya ladies take the precaution of soaking them before use

Lengkuas (Alpinia galangal)

The exact origin of *Alpinia galangal*, known as *lengkuas* to the Peranakans, is unknown. The oldest reports about its use and existence come from southern China and Java. It is cultivated in all Southeast Asian countries.

Daon salam (Syzygium polyanthum)

This tree is widely distributed in Myanmar, Indo



Old lengkuas (left) is yellowish compared with the pinkish tinge of young lengkuas. The kenchur roots (right) are smaller and more fragrant.

A TREASURE TROVE OF VINTAGE COLLECTIBLES

Peranakan beaded items, silver, early photographs, out-of-print books, advertising signs, clocks, cameras, tin toys and many more exciting finds



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China, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The aromatic leaves of salam are used fresh or dried as a spice in many Southeast Asian dishes. The use of these leaves is comparable to that of laurel leaves (bay leaves) in European cuisine. The leaves are added to a dish early and left to cook as the flavour develops slowly. The tree grows to a sizeable height and the small red astringent fruits are popular with birds.

Santan (coconut milk)

Coconut milk is another key ingredient in Peranakan dishes. It enhances the flavour and taste in a wide range of specialties from Medan, Aceh, Jakarta, Semarang, Solo, Jogja, Surabaya, Bali, Malacca, Penang, Singapore and Thailand. It can be found in Indian cuisine as well. Its *machtig* (Dutch for rich and tasty) characteristic lends a distinct flavour to the dishes.

Jintan hitam (black cumin or aniseed)

One more unique spice is *jinten/jintan hitam*, known in latin as *Nigella sativa*. It is a native of south Asia and southwest Asia. Indian and Middle Eastern cooks use *jintan* liberally in the preparation of dishes. Combinations of coriander and *jintan* give the unique aroma



Left: Daon Salam (Salam leaves).

Below: Jintan hitam seeds.

of dishes like kebabs. Some Peranakan foods in Indonesia also use *jintan*. This includes *opor* and *babi chin*, amongst others. Though not as widely used as the other ingredients, *jintan* gives a unique and special flavour to some of the signature Peranakan dishes in Indonesia. ❖



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GROWING UP IN A NONYA KITCHEN

Baba Colin Chee turns nostalgic at reading Sharon Wee's charming cookbook

This nostalgic cookbook is like a post-war visit to an old beloved aunt living in Katong or in a half-forgotten nook in Siglap. Yet it is also about everyday Peranakan life in the west coast of Singapore – in Pasir Panjang. It is not the epic that Wee Eng Hwa's *Cooking For the President* is. Even so, Sharon Wee's 307-page *Growing Up in a Nonya Kitchen - Singapore Recipes from My Mother* is a real charmer.

It will bring back many much-loved memories for Peranakans of the 1950s and right up to the 1970s. Flipping through the pages of Sharon's book, I gently recall the excitement of riding on my foster brother's bicycle to visit Tay Ban Guan supermarket and department store on East Coast Road, the highlight of any evening out in Katong besides getting my fix on the latest hit pop songs taped in one of the many record shops in Katong Shopping Centre.

But I also remember fondly spending days off a relative's home in Pasir Panjang – catching large five-inch prawns in the evenings close to shore, sea water knee-high, with just torch lights and hand nets, and then having them steamed fresh for supper. The feel is all there in the book.

Sharon's collection of 127 recipes is imaginatively divided into eight sections – *Chinese New Year, The Housewives Baking Club, Sunday Family Gatherings, Life of the Party, A Very Festive Family, The Secrets of Arab Street, Our Family Fare and Sweet Rewards*. Surprisingly perhaps, it took all of 10 years for Sharon, her sisters and friends to help put this book together.

Driven to action by her mother's unexpected passing while she was away studying for a master's degree, Sharon writes: "Like many nyonias of her generation, my mother took many of her best cooking secrets to her grave. Still shocked by her passing, my sisters and I rummaged through her belongings and documented her...collection of cookbooks...decades-old recipes...I interviewed older relatives and family friends..."

The book is a harvest of love and careful, dutiful remembrances. I especially like the section, *Our Daily Fare*. It contains quick-to-prepare recipes of everyday foods that my mother used to cook for

the family – squid stuffed with minced pork in soup, *ayam tempura* (even though I don't recall the name the recipe looks familiar), *ikan sambal*, *tauk yu bak*, and *ikan nanas*, to name a few.

Each recipe is accompanied by a little snippet. Of *Ikan Nanas*, Sharon writes: "Many recipes abound with a version that includes shrimp and titled *udang masak pedas nanas*. When I asked my father, he recalled that we often made ours with fish. He simply called it *ikan nanas*. The pineapple imparts a sweet and sour tang to the thin gravy. We drizzled the gravy over the plain white rice and it made all the difference to the meal."

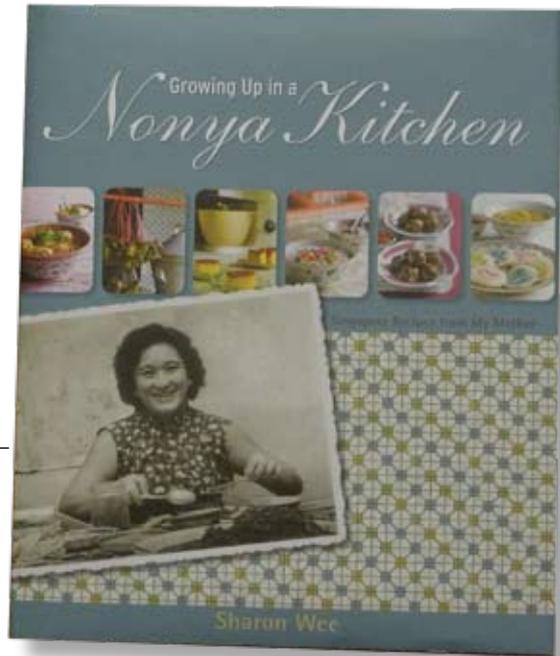
Writing about *Ayam Tempura*: "...It was only a few years back that my sister Molly talked about how she missed

having *ayam tempura* for dinner. Then only did I realize that it was indeed a low-key *nyonya* dish we ate often. 'Tempura' is a Malay word related to the Portuguese word 'tempura' which means seasoning or gravy in English."

Sharon recalls: "My father was very much an old-school Baba who believed that daily dinner should consist of a soup, one vegetable, perhaps some pickles and *belachan*, and two other dishes consisting of meat or fish... served with rice as staple...he forbade us from stacking plates while we ate, saying that it was taboo or else one would owe money to others. He also disliked children eating with their elbows resting on the table." How true of the time!

These days, our children will be unbelievably lucky to have a fully home-cooked meal prepared daily by mum no less. Often, it will be something indigestible cooked by a poorly trained domestic help, or *tapau* (packed) in from a *zhi char* stall somewhere on Geylang Road. Or better yet: "Let's meet at *I Want To (112) Katong* for a meal, ok?" ❖

Published by Marshall Cavendish. Available at all book stores.



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POST

PERANAKAN HERITAGE COOKING

Baba Colin Chee takes to Baba Philip Chia's anecdotal approach in this sumptuous visual spread

It is just incredible how Peranakan cookbooks are dominating cookery shelves in local bookstores. Baba Philip Chia's *Peranakan Heritage Cooking* hit the bookshelves last December. For the assiduous cookbook collector, this may be another acquisition for its simple and logical layout, authentic family recipes and sumptuous photography.

No truly new ground is broken. How to, when we are talking heritage? The purist would protest otherwise. The reader is assured of a very good reference cookbook that tells you how to go about cooking hearty traditional Peranakan meals that Mama (grandmother) used to lovingly wok out in the kitchen.

The most interesting element in Baba Philip's book is the personal anecdote that accompanies each dish. They help to contextualise the dishes. To mention a couple:

Pong Tauhu

As a child, I was fed many types of soup and this was one soup dish that my nanny prepared on a regular basis. Like *bakwan kepiting*, this is a meatball and bamboo shoot soup. But while the meatballs for *bakwan kepiting* contain both crab meat and fish

paste, these meatballs are made from a simpler mixture of minced pork, chopped prawns, mashed bean curd and beaten egg.

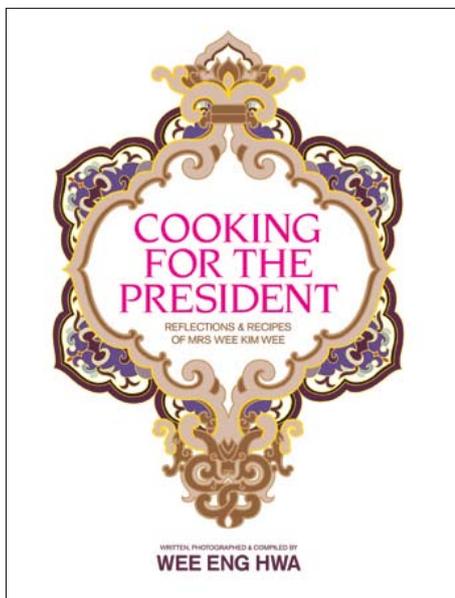
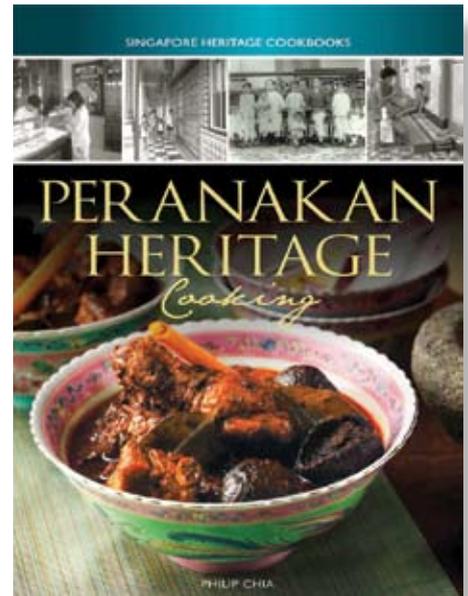
As a child, what I really enjoyed about this soup was that the meatballs were large!

Nyonya Laksa

Given how tasty this noodle dish is, it is no wonder that there are many variations to this dish, although the essential difference is whether coconut milk or tamarind juice is added to the gravy. My family's version of *nyonya laksa* includes coconut milk in moderation, so it is not too rich. We also use fish stock as a base for the gravy unlike the traditional recipes that call for stock made from dried prawns and prawn shells and heads. Using fish stock gives the gravy a lighter taste. Instead of fishcakes, we also use fish paste. Try it and you will love it.

Don't miss out on the book, especially if you are new to Peranakan cuisine. ♦

Peranakan Heritage Cooking is published by Marshall Cavendish Cuisine.



EXTRA: MENUS FOR A PRESIDENT

Cooking for the President, which was recently voted "Best First Cookbook in Singapore" by the Europe-based Gourmand World Cookbook Awards, is into its second edition with a new 12-page chapter on menu recommendations. These include recommended menus for formal entertainment, home servings, one-dish meals, barbecues, tea parties and breakfast.

Cooking for the President is available at selected book stores, museum shops and the Raffles Hotel gift shop. For enquiries, call 6223-0309 or 9827-1027 or contact wehbless@gmail.com. Visit www.cookingforthe-president.com for sample extracts.

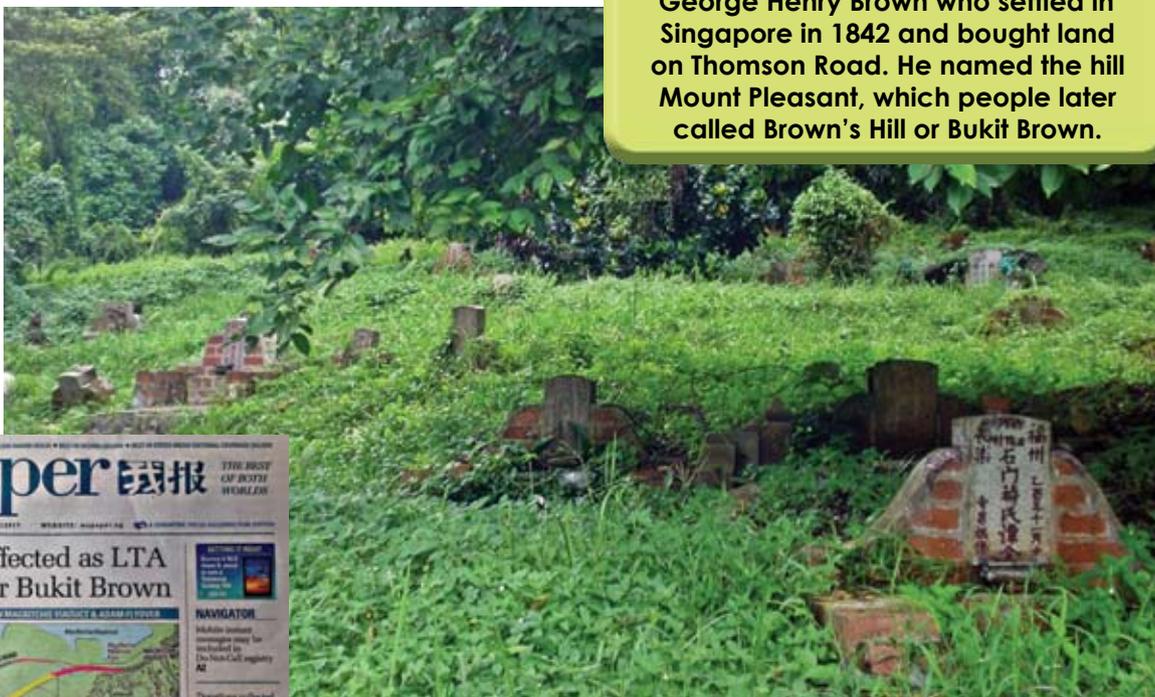
FEATURE

BRIDGING THE BUKIT HERITAGE

Sharing in a community's impassioned efforts to conserve a living museum in its natural habitat

Bukit Brown was named after George Henry Brown who settled in Singapore in 1842 and bought land on Thomson Road. He named the hill Mount Pleasant, which people later called Brown's Hill or Bukit Brown.

Graves at Bukit Brown.



20 March 2012: The front pages of Singapore's national papers proclaimed the final alignment, affecting fewer than the original 5,000 graves earmarked for exhumation.

Cemetery was first announced by the government in September 2011. It was meant to alleviate the notorious traffic congestion on Lornie Road and the Pan-Island Expressway. A huge public outcry ensued. A large community of passionate activists campaigned long and hard to preserve the rich historical heritage of Bukit Brown.

After numerous representations and dialogues with interested community groups and civil societies, the government announced on 20 March 2012 the final alignment of the new road through Bukit Brown. Instead of the 5,000 graves originally thought to be affected, a reduced number of 3,746 graves will have to give way. In addition, a 670-metre bridge, making up a third of the length of new road, will be built to preserve the eco-linkage and natural

A new four-lane dual carriage-way to cut across the 200-hectare Bukit Brown

streams in the Bukit Brown area.

If nothing else, the activism and ensuing publicity has ensured that resources have been secured for the comprehensive documentation of the cemetery and its graves. These include 3D mapping technologies that will enable a virtual walkthrough of the sprawling site, and the proper recording of the text on each tombstone. In the absence of regular maintenance and upkeep, these efforts certainly beat leaving Bukit Brown to languish and deteriorate further.

Construction work for the proposed roadway and bridge is scheduled to begin in 2013 with about 3,700 graves to be exhumed. When completed, one will be able to discern a rather poetic palimpsest of the times: Some of the past will remain in the form of unexhumed graves, wildlife should continue to flourish at ground level, and rising above it all, a new bridge to cater to the demands of Singapore's road transportation system well into the future.

Do you know that Bukit Brown is also a wonderful place for bird-watching? Ninety or a quarter of Singapore's 364 species of birds can be found nesting in Bukit Brown. Friendly horses also come to graze from the nearby Polo Club. It is a place where you can get away from the hustle and bustle of city life, and immerse yourself in heritage, history and habitat amidst the lush greenery where time seems to stand still.

RECORDING FOR POSTERITY

Dr Hui Yew-Foong, a member of the team working to document the graves, unearths a wealth of memories

Bukit Brown Cemetery opened in 1922, was the earliest Chinese municipal cemetery in Singapore. Currently, with about 100,000 graves sprawled over 173 acres of undulating terrain and lush greenery, it is also one of the largest historical Chinese cemeteries outside of China. Before Bukit Brown was opened, the Chinese were generally buried either in clan association burial grounds or private family plots. Others were buried in religious cemeteries such as Bidadari Cemetery. In contrast with conventional burial grounds, Bukit Brown has Chinese of diverse surnames, dialects and provincial origins buried next to each other. These different origins often influence the inscriptions and style of the grave, and it is this diverse and colourful cultural heritage that the Bukit Brown Documentation Team seeks to record.

Since starting work on 1 December 2011, the team has documented some 4,000 graves that could potentially be affected by the road project that would cut across Bukit Brown and Seh Ong cemeteries. Such documentation involves copying inscriptions and photographing all pertinent features of the graves, such as the intricate stonework and tiles.

In the course of our work, we have discovered the graves of some of the more prominent residents of early 20th century Singapore. The table at right is a non-exhaustive list.

SOME PROMINENT NAMES IN BUKIT BROWN

Grave No.	Name (English)	Name (Chinese)	Background
239	Ong Seah Say	王聲世	Tongmenghui member; a leader in the Eng Choon Clan Association.
1063	Hon Siak Kuan (Ho Lok Yu)	何式均 (何乐如)	Asst. Secretary for Chinese Affairs; Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.).
1190	Gan Teong Tat	顏仲達	Nephew of Gan Nghoh Bee of Penang; formerly Penang Municipal Commissioner; manager of spirit farm; 2nd Lieutenant of the Pinang Volunteer Cadet Corps; later moved to Singapore and became a diamond merchant.
1497	Wee Eng Cheng	黃永清	Donated funds for the building of Tan Tock Seng hospital; great-grandson of successful 19th century businessman Wee Bin; from Peranakan family that owned 157 Neil Rd, currently the Baba House Museum.
1838	Wee Chim Yean	黃深淵	Kapitan Cina of Bengkalis i.e. Dutch-appointed leader of the Chinese community at Bengkalis in the Dutch East Indies.
1901	Ng Aik Im	黃奕寅	Philanthropist, donated funds for Ai Tong School, Chinese Industrial & Commercial Continuation School and Nan-an Clan Association; sat on the board of schools and charitable organisations; Kuomintang member.
1906	Khoo Kay Hian	邱繼顯	Tongmenghui member; founder of Kay Hian & Co (earliest Chinese-owned brokerage in Singapore).
1919	See Tiong Wah	薛中华	Municipal Commissioner; Justice of the Peace (J.P.); Comprador of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation; Former President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce; Former President of the Hokkien Huay Kuan.
1930	Lim Kim Seng	林锦成	Municipal Commissioner, M.B.E. and J.P.; served on the boards of Po Leung Kuk, Tobacco and Alcohol Licensing Board, Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, Ngee Ann Kongsi etc.
2536	Khoo Seok Wan	邱菽园	Gained <i>Ju Ren</i> (举人) title through provincial examination; at one time supporter of Reformist Movement and Kang Youwei; Chinese literary figure and renowned poet with more than 1,400 poems to his name; Editor of Chinese newspapers; numerous academic works written about him and his literary contributions.
2600	Khoo Boon Seow	邱文紹	Penang Tongmenghui; general manager of <i>Guanghua Ribao</i> , Penang; manager of <i>Guomin Ribao</i> , Singapore; worked at Ho Hong Bank.

What is interesting about this list is the sheer diversity of the backgrounds of these personalities. There are names of businessmen, community and political leaders, a high-ranking colonial servant, and Chinese intellectuals who contributed to the cultural life of Singapore. Those who were concerned with the political plight of China included Khoo Seok Wan, for example,

who at one time had sympathies for the Reformist Movement led by Kang Youwei, and others like Ong Seah Say and Khoo Kay Hian, who supported Sun Yat-sen and the Tongmenghui. Kang Youwei's Reformist Movement sought to reform and modernise imperial China and institute a constitutional monarchy during the reign of the Guangxu Emperor. Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui, on the other hand, was an alliance that sought change in China through revolution. Others buried at Bukit Brown were more rooted in local politics, serving

Below: See Tiong Wah's grave is a more elaborate rendition of the Hokkien style. The headstone consists of three panels put together, with an offering table in front. These have intricate stone reliefs depicting Chinese fables that were cut out of fine stone imported from Fujian, China, in the early 20th century. The arms of the grave stretch out in an angular manner.



Above: Lim Kim Seng's grave is a good example of a Teochew grave embedded within a family cluster. The graves situated in front of and beside Lim Kim Seng's grave belong to his two wives, while the grave behind is that of his mother's. The headstone is couched against a rounded armchair-like frame that extends outwards in a curving manner.

as municipal commissioners and a Kapitan China.

Although all major Southern Chinese dialect groups like the Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese are represented in the Bukit, the most dominant are the Hokkien and Teochew. In terms of tomb style, the Hokkien and Teochew styles tend to be the most common and distinctive as well.





Another distinctive style that stands out involves the use of tiles by Peranakan Chinese to decorate graves. This is the massive grave of Oon Chim Neo, wife of Ong Boon Tat.

It is important to note that many of those interred there did not come directly from China, but like the Peranakan Chinese, could trace their more recent roots to the immediate region. The examples in the list show connections to the Straits Settlements and even the Dutch East Indies. This regional dynamic can be seen in the language of the inscriptions as well.

The use of different languages common to the region including Dutch and Thai, suggests diverse origins for those who found their final resting place in Bukit Brown.

There is much to be learned and I believe we have only just begun to scratch the surface. The graves form a mnemonic landscape that reminds us not only of our forebears, but of the history and material culture of pre-independent Singapore and the region. In a sense, the place triggers a desire for memories we have never known. ❖



One of the graves we came across in our documentation work had Dutch inscribed onto the headstone.

The inscription reads:

In Memory
of our Beloved
Father
TAN TANG HOAJ
aged 65 years
died 7 August 1923
—
Wife
Lim Boon Nio

The use of Dutch and the way the Chinese names were transliterated suggest that Tan Tang Hoaj was probably a Peranakan Chinese from the Dutch East Indies. His name was recorded as “Tan Tang Whye” in the burial register, following British convention. In another case, a son with a non-Chinese sounding name inscribed Thai onto the headstone to commemorate his mother.

Get the latest news and share your own thoughts on Bukit Brown at the [Save Bukit Brown Cemetery](http://www.facebook.com/bukitbrown) page on facebook at www.facebook.com/bukitbrown. To obtain a list of affected graves, visit www.lta.gov.sg/content/lta/en/projects/exhumation.html. The burial registers for Bukit Brown Cemetery are available for download at http://www.nhb.gov.sg/nas/BukitBrown_signage.htm.

GRAVE (KUBOR) ENCOUNTERS

Intrepid tomb explorer Raymond Goh has guided numerous organised groups on heritage tours of the *kubor* kind, up and down the slopes of Bukit Brown since 2006. He is one of the few who knows the tombstone sites like the back of his hand. Baba Colin Chee speaks with Raymond on his favourite hill.

Was it a passion from the very beginning?

Yes, I was amazed at the historical and heritage value, especially when I saw the number of Qing dynasty graves there.

Do you have any ghost tales to tell?

No, I have never encountered any ghost. All I have felt during my explorations is the quest to uncover more of the history and Singapore's pioneers buried there.



Raymond Goh, the Bukit Brown "tour guide".

What discoveries do you consider personally satisfying? Why?

The discovery of Cheang Hong Lim and his family grave cluster of four generations, the family cluster of Dr Lim Boon Keng's ancestors, and the graves of Tan Tock Seng's descendants. I feel great satisfaction when I can reunite them with their current

living descendants searching for their roots.

How and when did this passion evolve into heritage activism?

When the government announced it had development plans for Bukit Brown in the middle of last year. My brother Charles and I decided to do our part to create awareness by publishing online Bukit Brown maps, the location of tombs of interest, trail markers and DIY maps. Some of us also started facebook groups and websites to publicise Bukit Brown. Separately, the Nature Society of Singapore and Singapore Heritage Society started to ramp up their educational and outreach activities. These social media platforms

and outreach activities helped evolve into heritage activism for the common voice to be heard.

Is the phenomenal interest in preserving Bukit Brown just a flash in the pan?

Not for those who have ancestors, nor for those who value Bukit Brown as a heritage site worth preserving. Bukit Brown is uniquely Singapore and in my opinion, worthy of being listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site.

What can possibly go wrong or be of any concern if only a few graves that have never been tended to in the first place were to be exhumed?

I will cite one example. There are some communal trenches, never tended to as we are still confirming the exact location although we know their approximate locations based on tomb keepers' oral history. Based on Bukit Brown burial records, some of these trenches contain hundreds of skeletons covering the war period of 1942 - 1945. I don't think people who have relatives who died during those tragic years would want these unknown individuals to be hastily exhumed and disposed into the sea?

Tell us something about these tomb keepers. How knowledgeable are they?

All the tomb keepers grew up in the villages surrounding the cemetery. Some are more than 60 years old, but their children are also helping out especially during Qing Ming. Each tomb keeper has an area to look after. Some of them have been looking after a particular area for many decades, starting from their parents' time. So they know their own area of graves well, but are not so familiar with other areas not looked after by them.

How historical can a huge uncared-for cemetery get?

Borobudur and the Angkor ruins come to mind. They were uncared for and unknown until restoration put them in the world limelight.

Should Bukit Brown be preserved? After all, there was no outcry over the exhumations in Bidadari.

Yes, because of its unique blend of religion, culture and history stretches from the founding of Singapore (earliest tomb found there is 1833) to its closure in 1973. Also, it is nested in a green lung with threatened fauna and flora, making it a compelling case for preservation as a heritage park. ❖

A Session at the Museum

On 10 March, just 10 days before the government announced the final alignment of the bridge, The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) hosted a talk by Raymond Goh at the Peranakan Museum. He delivered a lively and detailed presentation with photos and vignettes of Peranakans buried at the site. Many in the audience of about 80 people had relatives who were also buried at Bukit Brown. ❖



Ms Jennifer Teo, one of the activists behind the Save Bukit Brown movement, said: "We'll just keep on pressing for the preservation of Bukit Brown. It was a foregone conclusion that Chek Jawa on Pulau Ubin would be redeveloped as well, but persistence finally made the authorities do an about-turn."

FEATURE

A PALACE FOR THE DEAD

Baba Peter Lee muses on the Peranakan obsession with funerals and cemeteries



At present, the remains of the dead, by their inability to contribute to the national GDP, have, literally, no place in the national cause; in a certain sense, their welfare and protection have become lower in priority than even trees, let alone animals. Trees have a national agency to protect them. Even dogs have the SPCA. Like the ultimate grim reaper, powerful enough to destroy even the dead, acronymed government agencies have gradually cast their shadows over, and claimed, all land where our departed rest. Who protects such vulnerable relics?

In the Peranakan universe, the *Family* is the spiritual epicentre around which everything revolves. Just look at a traditional house. The gods are not revered as supreme beings, but rather, as useful door guardians for, and as emissaries to give

good reports about none other than... the *Family*! The fearsome Guan Gong's only job is to protect the most precious and revered altar in a Peranakan house, positioned in the most sacred inner sanctum: the ancestral shrine. The concept of family extends well beyond just blood ties. A person's

place or rank within the household hierarchy was defined in terms of family relationships. This structural model extended to society and state. Even an elder who was not a relation was addressed as 'uncle'. Similarly, an ideal

ruler was described as a 'benevolent father'. Would it therefore be surprising that the most malign Hokkien hexes concern someone's mother, father and ten generations past, present and future?

In Peranakan tradition, and for that matter, Chinese tradition, dying was as important as

“In Peranakan tradition, and for that matter, Chinese tradition, dying was as important as living.”

A Chinese cemetery in Singapore, possibly Bukit Brown, c. 1900.

living. Funerals, graves and cemeteries were integral elements of what it meant to live as a ‘Chinese’. Ensuring a proper burial for yourself and your forebears, encompassing both rites and sites, and having or producing someone to pray for your and their souls, was, in the old days, virtually the only reason for living!

Don’t laugh, our ancestors took this very seriously. In 1706 a stone inscription in Malacca’s Cheng Hoon Teng explains that the then-Kapitan had acquired a hill to bury the poor souls who had left China and had no descendants. Bukit China in Malacca is perhaps the oldest Chinese cemetery outside the mainland, and is filled with graves from the Ming and early Qing dynasties. A later inscription from 1795 explains that the temple at Poh San Teng at Bukit China had been renovated that year as an act of compassion towards the many brave people who had left China to trade in the South Seas, only to die in Malacca, unable to be buried back in their ancestral villages.

***Balek tng sua* (Back to the motherland)**

The classiest thing to do in the good old days was to go six feet under back in the old motherland. Many of course, were unable to do so. My dearly beloved ancestor, Lee Kan, was one of the lucky few who could. According to the family genealogical book, he was born in 1760, left

his village (Eng Choon, or Yongchun) for Malacca as a teenager in the 1770s, worked hard and cleverly wheedled his way as an “outsider” and “newcomer” into the older Chiang Chew (Zhangzhou) cliques, which had been around since the 15th century. Eng Choon people were nominally part of the Chuan Chew (Quanzhou) gang, another group of Hokkiens who had been around for centuries. But Eng Choon was really upcountry, *suakoo*. He was accepted as an “insider” and became a success by his 30s, as a partner in a company known as the Hai Kwan Kong See, which acquired the monopoly from the Dutch to collect customs taxes in Malacca, vacuuming in money like Sands, oh, sorry, I mean, sand. One of the partners was the Kapitan Chua Soo Cheong himself. He married a local-born girl whose father was from the same village, and had a son and several daughters. He travelled back and forth between China and the Malay peninsula, got two more China wives and had a new child every time he went on “home leave”. He retired from business in the 1820s, leaving his Nyonya wife and Baba son to run the family concern, went back to China and raised his ‘pure’ China-born boys as scholars, most of whom passed some imperial exam or other. He lived to a ripe old age as part of the local gentry, and when he died in 1844, had his grand wish: burial in his place of birth, near his ancestors.

Nowadays in Singapore it is even surprisingly

A photograph taken of an imposing grave, possibly in Bukit Brown, by the studio G.R. Lambert & Co., c. 1900.



possible for non-politicians to aspire to the ultimate ostentatious send-off - a state funeral at the Istana, with gun carriage thrown in. But in the good old days, do you know that that was not really possible? The only way for a rich man to show off big-time was to die and have a lavish, absurdly expensive funeral, which he had to pay for himself. Throughout the Straits Settlements and the Dutch East Indies, Peranakans organised the most ridiculously pompous ceremonies. Funeral processions became like *mardi gras*, with bands, giant puppets and magnificent hearses. Lee Kan's grandson, my great-great grandfather Lee Quee Lim, had a really fancy farewell in Malacca in 1890. The procession started from his house in Heeren Street, and made its stately way to the family burial ground, Pat Choo San ('The Hill of Eight Sons'), in the distant suburb of Cheng. *The Straits Times* provides a short but fascinating account:

Malacca, 17th April: Lee Quee Lim's burial procession yesterday drew large crowds from town and country to witness the grand doings. Flags, banners and music enlivened the passage of the coffin to the family cemetery; an elephant with caparisons and driver showed to great advantage amid the moving throng. A free supply of drinks and refreshments at the place of burial heightened the general enjoyment, which came to nothing more or less than holiday making amid the funeral pomp and display of moneyed worth. (*The Straits Times*, 21 April 1890, p. 2)

Another lavish funeral that took place 13 years earlier may have been the town's most dramatic event ever. A chaotic riot erupted during the procession accompanying the hearse of Madam Tan Leng Kiam, widow of the Baba tycoon Chee Yam Chuan, between members of the Hok Beng, Gee Boo and Gee Hin Secret Societies. We are reminded that Baba towkays in those days had to behave like mafia chiefs, in order to control the massive gangs of coolies under them. Many of these tycoons were pimps extraordinaire, controlling all the brothels and gambling dens in town, which were established as a form of coolie social control. Hey, come to think of it, this form of governing somehow sounds so familiar!

Back to the story: it must have been troubling times with these societies, as Baba Yam Chuan had been assassinated at the age of 42 in 1862. For Mrs Chee's funeral, the head of the police had earlier called a meeting of the societies and determined that only the men from Gee Hin could carry the coffin, to which the other secret societies grudgingly agreed. Before the arrival of the funeral procession, the mandore of the burial ground ordered all the society flags to be taken down. As none of the members could see where they were meant to gather, some smart alec began raising his group's flag, which was seen as an act of



aggression, and a riot ensued. When news travelled to the funeral procession heading towards the burial ground, that there was a riot at the cemetery, the bearers and guards abandoned the coffin on the roadside and rushed to join the *melée*. British inspectors had to guard the coffin, as "there was much jewellery on it". Fortunately there seems to have been no fatalities, except for a poor horse (*Straits Times Overland Journal*, 2 November 1877, p. 16). Anyway I am not sure what all the fuss in the press was about. All that boisterousness sounds like nothing more than a *Malam Jolly* at our annual Baba Convention.

The funeral procession of my great grandfather, Tan Keong Ann, through the streets of Malacca, 1933.

No expense spared

No expense was spared for funerals. For example, according to the will of Baba philanthropist Tan Kim Seng, legacies of \$10,000 each were bequeathed to his two daughters; and by comparison, he set

A Peranakan Chinese funeral procession in Java, 1870s, including giant statues of guardians.





The grave of Liem Dwan In, a native of Juana in east Java, at Bukit Brown, with food offerings placed before it, 1923. The inscription on the grave of his wife, Yeo Ai Lin was painted red, as she was still alive at that time. Interestingly the tomb guardians are all painted in various tones. Photograph courtesy of the Lim family, Singapore.

aside \$6,000 for his own funeral, a sum that was worth the equivalent of some large properties he owned. Mrs Wee Boon Teck, the daughter-in-law of shipping magnate Wee Bin, set aside \$10,000 for her funeral in her will dated 1920 (which her descendants kindly allowed me to inspect), which could probably have bought a row of houses.

Coffins were a large part of the expense, made of solid hardwood, and the best were imported from China. Many towkays bought their own coffins and had special “coffin garages”, where these massive boxes were parked.

This is a true story:

A dear uncle of mine told me when he had to exhume the remains of all his ancestors in his family’s burial ground, he filmed the process and was astonished to see his grandmother perfectly preserved, with her hair in place, wire-rimmed glasses, and even the pearl jewellery and white silk *baju* and sarong were pristine within her massive *namkau* hardwood coffin when it was pried open, which was all caught on super 8. Talking about sarongs, I am reminded of an old court case presided by the Chinese Council of Batavia (Jakarta). In 1790 the grave of the wife of a certain Tan Tin was desecrated by robbers, and her corpse was dragged out of its coffin, and her sarong and silver jewels stolen!

“I wonder if a highway would one day replace Kranji War Memorial and the Presidential Cemetery? Or would a spanking new short cut, laid right across the Istana grounds, ease congestion from Orchard Road?”

Wealthy families all had their own private family burial grounds. Among the discreet old clans in Malacca, traditions that are hundreds of years old continue to be practised. I have had the privilege of being invited to these private cemeteries, and feel proud that the tradition still lives on. Peranakan families often reserved certain properties that would generate income in perpetuity for the maintenance of the ancestral graves and for the traditional offerings made at death anniversaries at the ancestral altar. For example in 1826, a certain Lee Soo Kam donated a

house to the Cheng Hoon Teng, the rental income from which was used for sacrifices on behalf of his forebears. In 1884 my ancestor Lee Quee Lim signed an agreement with his siblings, some of whom were prominent

members of society (the businessmen Lee Cheng Gum and Lee Cheng Yan, and the Chinese language journalist Lee Cheng Wee), to use the rental income from six houses in China and Pekin Streets for the maintenance of the family burial ground in Malacca, Pat Choo San, and of the *rumah abu* or ancestral house, Hong Joo Choo, on Heeren Street. But decades later the whole deal fell apart when descendants started to squabble over money. Interestingly, on this old agreement, all the Baba brothers signed their names in Chinese characters.

My great-grandfather Lee Keng Kiat was among the first Babas to study English, and therefore signed his name in beautiful, calligraphic romanised letters. He moved to Singapore, started a steamship company in the 1870s, went bust in the 1890s, and when he passed away, was not buried in Malacca with his ancestors, but in a new burial ground provided by his wealthy first cousin Lee Choon Guan, in Upper Serangoon. His sons, most of whom ran through whatever was left of his money, somehow scrambled together enough to build an impressive grave. As a child I remember the long car journey from home, the walk through coconut groves, and approaching a large, silent field bordered by dense, rustling greenery, and sited before us in the distance, the sombre grey granite tomb mounds of my great grandparents, set Vatican-like in an expansive semi circular shape with extending, embracing arms, and flanking it, an ornately carved pair of sentient stone lions. As a child it felt so massive, as if a football pitch could fit within that arc. Surrounding this were the graves of other family members, including that of my grandfather.



cemetery. My sister rested at Mount Vernon.

After some years the family could no longer suffer this undignified situation the ancestors were in, and the elders decided to give all our dearly departed a sea burial. Only my late sister, who was a Catholic, would be moved to St Ignatius Church, as Mount Vernon had been earmarked for redevelopment. We first had to exhume the remains of my grandmother, who was all alone in the cramped and overcrowded concrete expanse of the Choa Chu Kang necropolis. The exhumation was traumatic. I was in a daze. It was the rainy season. The gravedigger dug down

the wet orange clay. They broke open the coffin, which was flooded with milky orange mud water, the colour of *teh tarek*. There was not much space for the exhumer to work in. The hole he dug was only wide enough for him to stretch one hand down and fish for my dear grandmother's remains, which caused a whirlpool effect in the *teh tarek*. I remember being totally mesmerised by seeing her batik sarong repeatedly appearing then disappearing in the churning muddy water, as though it were in a washing machine. Whatever they could gather together was put in a bag and sent for cremation.



The graves of my great grandfather Lee Keng Kiat, and his wife, Koh Gim Tien, in the family burial ground, Upper Serangoon, photographed by my uncle Lee Kip Lin in the 1970s.

My grandparents, Mr and Mrs Lee Chim Huk, and my aunts Joo Lee, Joo Har and Joo Leng, at the graves of my great grandparents, Mr and Mrs Lee Keng Kiat, c. 1950.

My grandfather Lee Chim Huck's funeral procession through the family burial ground, 1958.

For the national good

Well, predictably, like many Singaporeans, we had to buy in to the story that we must give up our ancestors for the national good. In the early 1980s, after we had to go through the trauma of a mass family exhumation, my grandmother, uncle, aunt and sister passed away in quick succession. Some family members felt these events were connected. Their remains all ended up in different places. My ancestors were cremated and rehousing by the HDB in a depressing, hastily assembled concrete "urn condo" or columbarium filled with the remains of the exhumed dead, which during *Cheng Beng*, was always filthy, strewn with waste paper and plastic, and the air filled with floating "black snow", the flying ash from too many burnt paper offerings. My grandmother had to go to Choa Chu Kang public



After that, arrangements were made and permits applied for, and a Taoist priest was invited, in deference to the religion of the deceased family members. We boarded a boat in Raffles Marina, and one by one we released the ashes from the yacht into the sea, while the priest chanted prayers. The wind was not very kind to us, and kept changing its mind about its direction, often blowing ancestors back towards the boat. Clumsy as it was, it was nevertheless a very moving experience. My father and his siblings collectively released the remains of

their mother into the sea, together holding the bag containing her ashes. One aunt, who was herself dealing with terminal cancer, sobbed uncontrollably as the fine grey powder vanished into Singapore's murky green sea. After we got back on land, it was heartbreaking to see her daughter scolding her for being so emotional. But for the rest of us, there was a sense of closure. The ancestral musical chairs that we were made to go through, was finally over.

But I do miss those visits to our family burial ground. As you may have guessed by now, some people hang out in pubs, but, well, I hang out in cemeteries. Ever since I was a university student I was fascinated with this subject, and have a whole stuffed folder dedicated to it, a scrap book of gravestones. Several years ago I began to write about this topic (see *The Peranakan*, a Straits Chinese cemetery in Bangkok). It is a race to document all the information on tombstones. Luckily I have a dear cousin who lives in Australia who loves history as I do, and he has taken me on treks through Malacca grave sites. The suburbs of the town are littered with very old graves, many inscribed with Qianlong reign dates.

I wonder if a highway would one day replace Kranji War Memorial and the Presidential Cemetery? Or would a spanking new short cut, laid right across the Istana grounds, ease congestion from Orchard Road? It is not impossible considering that "Singapore is land scarce", as we are constantly reminded. May your ancestors, may your hearth and home, be safe from our dear "friends with acronyms" (who, like Harry Potter's arch enemy, I better not name). They destroy important parts of our past, bulldoze our cemeteries, and sometimes even take our homes, in the name of development. We are all vulnerable and at the mercy of these terrifying supreme powers, and dread the arrival of that letter in the post, or that announcement in the papers. What can we do? One thing we are empowered to do is to give our dearly departed a refuge in an untouchable place, deep within our memories. We can, and we *must*, refuse to forget. ❖

'Show me the wonder of your love'
Psalm 31:21

'Keep me as the apple of your eye'
Deuteronomy 32:10



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CULTURAL COLOURS

Vivid childhood memories coupled with a passion for painting have resulted in a delightful collection of watercolours by Malaysian artist Sherin Ng

“My passion for Peranakan culture started in my childhood. I spent a lot of time with my granny, Siew Kim. She was always in sarong kebaya. I was fascinated with the beautiful fabric and embroidered lacework, and would try to look inside her wardrobe whenever possible. I remember glimpsing a pile of sarongs, silver belts and *kasot manek*. These were her treasured possessions, and she kept them under lock and key. She was also a consummate cook, and spent her days in the kitchen turning out an endless variety of delicious nyonya dishes. In the afternoons, there would be time to engage in some beadwork as well.”

These are the memories of Nyonya Sherin Ng, who is in the process of putting together her first solo art exhibition, which she hopes to hold at the end of this year. The self-taught artist shared that she has long had a passion for painting, and the subject matter came naturally from her recollections of growing up.

Sherin recently showcased some of her works at the *Baba Nyonya Kebudayaan Peranakan*, a part of the Kuala Lumpur International

Batik (KLIB) 2011 event held last December at KL Convention Centre where she met our president, Baba Peter Wee. At the same exhibition, a group of children were entranced by the paintings’ vibrant colours.

When she disclosed that she was the artist, they got her to share aspects of Peranakan culture with them. Such encounters have also given her much encouragement and affirmation. Sherin hopes that her artwork will go beyond serving a decorative



Left: Mother's Love.



Far left: Sherin's grandmother, Siew Kim, at left, with a friend.



Left: Baba Peter Wee with Sherin and her painting, Nyonya Beauties.

function to serve as constant reminders of their eventual owners' heritage and past. ❖

Follow Sherin on facebook by searching "Sherinloveart" She can also be reached directly via email at sherinloveart@yahoo.com.



EVENTS

WANGKANG WONDERLAND

Spirits set alight in Malacca's spectacular festival, Baba Cedric Tan reports.

Early in the morning of 6 February 2012, the sleepy streets of Malacca awoke to the hustle and bustle of the rambunctious Wangkang Festival. It was the 15th day of the first month of the Lunar New Year, when the grand 12-hour religious procession began at 7.00 am and culminated in a fiery conclusion 12 hours later. Devotees took to the streets to 'round up' evil spirits behind all epidemics, scourges and anarchies, incarcerating all in a wangkang (royal barge) that was set ablaze to 'ship' them onto the Unknown (For the history of the Festival, read Issue 1, 2012, The Peranakan, pages 12-14).

On 5 February, 2012, the eve of the Wangkang procession, the inner sanctum of the Yong Chuan Tian Temple in Bandar Hilir glows richly with elaborate offerings made to Taoist deities. The offerings include 13 bowls of *kueh ee* – one for each month of the leap year – plus crabs, fish, duck, chicken, roast pork, vegetarian dishes, fruits and cakes. *Saikong*, or Taoist priests, lead the *poh oon* or luck enhancement ceremony. A paper 'pagoda' representing heaven is readied to be set ablaze the next day as a dedication to the Jade Emperor.

Several ceremonies are held, including the *tiam gan* or *bukak mata* (opening the eyes) ceremony, where the *saikong* dab fowl blood onto the eyes of the barge and 'invite' the five *ong yah* (princes) deities to 'reside' in their respective paper effigies. Other deities present include the three grand officials of Heaven, Earth and Water. Devotees throng the temple to worship the deities.

At daybreak, the procession around Malacca town begins with mediums (*tangchee*) going into a trance to communicate with the spirits. Drummers and cymbal players have their arms pierced with

skewers of coloured heads representing each of the five deities, to give them strength for the arduous day ahead.

As they wind through the gaily decorated Jonker Street, they take a lunch break at the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple and pass by the A-Famosa gate. Bamboo amulets are placed at more than 10 spots along the route to provide protection against evil forces that lurk in the vicinity. The deities are tossed in their sedan chairs in jubilation as they make brief stops at the entrance of all participating temples in Jonker Street and at the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple. In the evening, back at the Yong Chuan Tian Temple, the *wangkang* departed for the final leg of the procession setting towards Pulau Melaka.

The mood is festive just before the *wangkang* is set ablaze at Pulau Melaka. The barge is loaded up with cooking oil, salt, rice, sugar, tea and bundles of incense paper offered by devotees along the procession. The night is ablaze with fireworks to celebrate the grand send-off. The devotees are reminded not to look back after walking away. ❖

Photographs
by Cedric Tan,
Aurelia Kopp
and Lee Yuen
Thien.



The saikong performing the ceremonies.



Yong Chuan Tian temple aglow.



The 'pagoda'.



The bukak mata ceremony.



The barge 'eyes' dotted with fowl's blood.



Pierced for strength.



A medium in a trance.



The fiery send-off.



Tossing the ong yah.



An ong yah flanked by two 'assistants'.



The grand procession.

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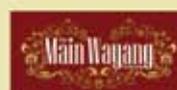
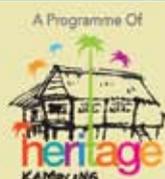
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 [heritagekampung](https://www.facebook.com/heritagekampung)

CONTACT : 8430 4148



EVENTS

FABULOUSLY BROADWAY

Our baba and nyonya theatre practitioners get caged

Singapore theatre is set take a spin on the *pink* side with the musical *La Cage Aux Folles*, to be mounted by our very own Babas Ivan Heng (as Albin), and Glen Goei in the director's seat. The veteran cast also includes prominent Peranakan actors Karen Tan, Tan Kheng Hua and Hossan Leong. Other headlining Singaporean cast members comprise Darius Tan, Judee Tan and Brendon Fernandez.

Longtime male partners George and Albin are sent into a tizzy when George's son, Jean-Michel announces his intention to marry the daughter of Mr D D Tan, Chairman of the Tradition, Family and Morality Party. What drama will ensue when Jean-Michel brings his fiancée's conservative parents to meet their rather, erm, colourful potential in-laws?

This American musical features the hit song *I Am What I Am* and has won six Tony



awards including Best Musical. It has now been specially adapted for Singapore complete with an outlandish chorus line of showgirls to titillate your senses – *kus semangat!* Don't miss this opportunity to catch the musical theatre event of the year. ❖

La Cage Aux Folles runs from 20 July to 4 August at the Esplanade Theatre. Tickets from SISTIC.

From left: Actors Tony Eusoff (from Malaysia), Ivan Heng, Darius Tan, Karen Tan, Hossan Leong and Tan Kheng Hua share the limelight in the Tony Award-winning musical.

ACTIVITIES GALORE DOWN UNDER

Nyonya Ivy Lee reports from the Peranakan community in Melbourne

The first quarter of 2012 has been a busy time for the Peranakan Association Australia Inc. (PAA). On 4 February, we celebrated the Year of the Dragon with a grand eight-course Chinese dinner at the Emperor Court Restaurant in Mitcham, Victoria. The dinner drew a record of 188 attendees made up of PAA members, their families and friends.

The programme included a lucky draw, an auction of a porcelain *kamcheng*, entertainment by the Melbourne Peranakan Chorus (the PAA's very own choir and dance group) as well as a Peranakan trivia quiz.

On 4 March, our Chorus performed at the Knox City Multicultural Festival at Wally Tew Ferntree Gully, Victoria. We presented a medley of six songs, consisting of Peranakan favourites together with popular hits like *The Happy Wanderer*. The choral performance was followed by a dance item to the cha-cha beat of *O Pochok*, *Kus S'mangat*. It was the second consecutive time that

the Melbourne Peranakan Chorus performed at this annual cultural festival.

We also held our first Peranakan Culinary Group event for 2012 – a cooking demonstration on 18 March. May Soh, author of several cookbooks, showcased the art of preparing stuffed chicken wings to the 32 participants. What a way to start the year! ❖



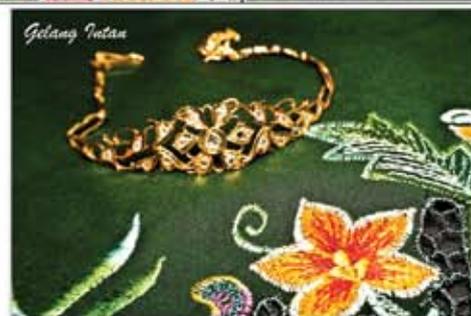
Melbourne association President Alfred Chi, in his opening address.

The Melbourne Peranakan Chorus performing at the Knox Multicultural Festival.



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EVENTS

CHETTI CHEER

The irrepressible Chettis celebrate their association's fifth year



Anak itek jalan meniti,
Daun gelanggan di tepi paya.
Chantek chantek gadis Chetti,
Jalan berlelgang berbaju kebaya.

Top: GSA's Bibik Singers performing at the dinner.

Left: Guest-of-Honour, MP Baba Charles Chong sitting to the left of Chetti Melaka President, Baba P. Kalastree.

Interested in the history of the Chettis?
Do check out this website by Gerald Pillay:
<http://chettymalacca.wordpress.com/>.

'Unity in Culture' was the theme of the Association of Chetti Melaka's fifth anniversary dinner, presented together with the GOPIO - Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin. It was indeed a night of unique cultural moments!

Guest-of-Honour and MP for Joo Chiat Constituency, Baba Charles Chong (yes, he is a Peranakan) noted the importance of promoting greater cultural awareness so that our children would carry with them a true sense of belonging to Singapore.

Doyenne G T Lye was in his element as a vivacious co-host, hopping on and off the stage to introduce the many performances, which continued unabated throughout the evening. An instrumental recital of traditional songs was given by an ensemble that included tabla and accordion players, while dance items ran the gamut from classical Indian to modern. The Peranakan Voices again proved a delight with their toe-tapping numbers. The Bibik Singers from Gunong Sayang Association also charmed all present with their songs.

President of the Chetti Melaka Association, Baba P. Kalastree, happily shared his belief that the Indian Peranakans' identity and sense of being true Singaporeans were secure. He recited the following *panton*, composed just for the occasion:



NOTICEBOARD

IN WITH THE NEW!

Baba Emeric Lau joins in to welcome some 'fresh blood' to the Association

Top right: MP Charles Chong, Peter Wee, Bebe Seet and Joo Chiat CC representative, James Chow.

Bottom right: Baba Peter Wee welcomes our new members.

Naturally vivacious, us Peranakans like nothing more than meeting people and making new friends, especially like-minded folk. True to form, our casual weekend sessions to meet new TPAS members, hosted by President Baba Peter Wee, have proved most engaging affairs.

In early February, we welcomed new member and MP for Joo Chiat, Baba Charles Chong.

A Peranakan from both paternal lines, Charles is also the adviser to the Joo Chiat Community Club (CC). TPAS hopes that we can engage the Joo Chiat community in more collaborative projects. Peter also expressed his thanks to Charles for securing a donation to the Association from the Tua Pek Kong temple.

I dropped in on Sunday, 25 February, and was heartened to see everyone present bonding over their love for the culture.

New members and cousins Peggy and Rosie

Lee were already docents (volunteer guides) at the Peranakan Museum when they decided to "take the next step in growing our passion for the culture" by becoming TPAS Life Members. Docents lead museum visitors on guided tours and share knowledge about the artefacts on display. "It's great to meet others who also love all things Peranakan, and we look forward to participating in association events."

Baba Peter Wee delivered a brief history of the Peranakans and the culture's origins. First Vice-President Baba Alan Koh then led a discussion on how TPAS could make membership a more rewarding experience. New member Christopher Bek who is also from the Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) said that we should look into greater resource sharing among all the associations,



and was pleased to note that TPAS has been instrumental in setting up the newly-formed Federation of Peranakan Associations.

The group was also happy to welcome a relatively younger face in new member Ignatius Lok: "Part of my family is from Penang, so I joined to learn more about my own heritage." Indeed, there should be much for everyone to learn and engage with – watch out for regular notices in our magazine, on the website and facebook, and also circulated by email from our secretariat about all the latest Peranakan happenings around town and further afield! ❖

Check out our website www.peranakan.org.sg.
Join us on facebook www.facebook.com/theperanakanassociationsingapore.



New member Ignatius Lok.

WELCOME

A big welcome to our new members:

1. Ms Beverly Low Pei Lin
2. Ms Susan Tan
3. Mr Gregory Loh Meng Huat
4. Mr David Ang Hiong Wah
5. Ms Lisa Ang Li Yin
6. Mr Andrew Tan Chee Khoon
7. Mr James Lam Chin Loi

OBITUARY

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

1. Mr James Yeo Kian Hock
2. Mdm Betty Ong Cheng Seng
3. Mrs Molly Ong Swee Law
4. Mr Peter Khoo Boon Inn
5. Mr Lim Sean Teck

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

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

PERANAKAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE REGION

SINGAPORE

The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS)

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Gunong Sayang Association (GSA)

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Fax: 65 6441 1569
Website: gunongsayang.org

Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indians) Singapore

5001 Beach Road #08-09
Golden Mile Complex
Singapore 199588
Contact: Mr Pono Kalastree
Office: 6297 1229
Mobile: 9678 1767

MALAYSIA

MALACCA

Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM)
149, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (Heeren Street), 75200 Melaka
Contact: Ms Chin Siok Hoon, PJK (Hon Secretary)
Email: admin@ppcm-melaka.org
Website: www.ppcm-melaka.org
Tel: 012 6218 909
Fax: 06 2837 215
To contact the President, Datuk Phua Jin Hock, please email phuaajh@gmail.com.

PENANG

State Chinese (Penang) Association / Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang

13, Perak Road
President: Datuk Tan Gin Soon
Contact: 0162050517
Email: ginsoon@hotmail.com

KUALA LUMPUR & SELANGOR

Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor (PPBNKLS)

63 Jalan Telawi, Bangsar Baru, 59100, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
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Tel: 03 2287 1613
Fax: 03 2287 3613
Website: peranakan-kl.org

To contact the President, Dr Lee Su Kim, please email sukim25@yahoo.com.

KELANTAN

Association of Peranakan Chinese, Kelantan

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Email: law_awang@yahoo.com

THAILAND

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THE PERANAKAN GUIDE • SINGAPORE

MUSEUMS

Peranakan Museum.

See the world's first national Peranakan Museum with the most comprehensive and finest collection of Peranakan artefacts. The boutique museum examines the centres of Peranakan culture in Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and traces its links to as far as Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand. Peranakan Museum, 39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941. website:www.peranakanmuseum.sg Email: nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg Tel: 6332 7591.



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

Capturing the Straits: Painting and Postcard Views from the 19th and Early 20th Centuries. The exhibition brings together the work of Charles Dyce, who lived in Singapore in the 1840s and made



fine sketches of the island, and postcard views of Malacca from the early 20th century. From 9 February - 31 July 2012. Please call to arrange visits.

Asian Civilisations Museum. The first museum in the region to display a wide range of artefacts from across Asia, the ACM not surprisingly has some important Peranakan treasures. The Mary and Philbert Chin Gallery has some lavish examples of gold jewellery, 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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