

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

David Ong, Lee Kip Lee
Helen Tan, Lim Geok Huay

For Members Only

DINNER & DANCE ON SUNDAY 27 NOVEMBER

If as many members as possible make strenuous efforts to attend the forthcoming 94th Annual Dinner & Dance to be held on Sunday 27 November 1994 we shall then have succeeded in our endeavours to offer them the occasion not only to celebrate an auspicious event but also to socialise and get to know more of each other.

Towards that end, the programme has been planned to begin earlier at 7 p.m. so that, instead of marching straightaway to the cloistered exclusivity of their own tables, there will be the opportunity, during the thirty minutes or so of a "cocktail hour", for members and their guests to mingle with the crowd.

This will be an excellent time to seek familiar faces, make new friends and generally to get to know your fellow Peranakans better by exchanging telephone numbers and addresses with the intention of meeting them again.

In the course of the evening do break the ice with those at adjoining tables and those on the joget floor. Please also introduce yourselves to the Committee

Members, who will have name tags on, to enable them to develop a rapport with you. Jangan segan, lah. Let it be a memorable night of fellowship and enjoyment!

Details of the Dinner & Dance to be held at the Sheraton Towers Hotel in Scotts Road have already been circulated to members.

At the foyer of the ballroom, Mr. Peter Wee of the Katong Antique House will set up a display of Baba artifacts such as sarong and kebaya, kasot manek, Straits Chinese silver and gold antique jewellery, a collection of enamel tiffin carriers (tengkat), antique Peranakan photographs, and a mock-up of a photo studio equipped with Peranakan setting for you to pose in before a professional photographer.

Another section will have for sale food items like gula melaka, Melaka Belachan, kueh bolu, kueh bangkit, kueh koya and pineapple tarts.

Mr. William Gwee Thian Hock's book MAS SEPULOH will also be on sale there.

Bottles of liquor can be brought along free of corkage.

So, if you have not already done so, please make your reservations now.

'MAS SEPULOH' A LITERARY GEM

A Review by Lee Kip Lee

MAS SEPULOH, written by Mr. William Gwee Thian Hock, is a compendium of Baba conversational phrases the compilation of which must have been a labour of love for the author who is the doyen of those who speak with authority on Baba matters.

It is a reference book to be treasured and kept in every Baba household to refresh our memories of long-forgotten expressions presented for our literary delectation.

Mr. Gwee has taken great pains to arrange the format of his entries so that each Baba phrase is accompanied either by its original version or, where Hokkien words have crept in, by their written Chinese equivalent. This, in turn, is followed by the Baba definition of the phrase, by an example of its Baba usage, and by its English interpretation.

He has also provided a useful guide to pronunciation and spelling as well as an Introduction to The Baba Language, of which, he would wish to point out, the list of words, phrases and idioms appearing in the book is by no means exhaustive.

In his foreword, Associate Professor Tan Chee Beng, of the Dept. of Anthropology & Sociology, University of Malaya, commended Mr. Gwee for his "contribution to an important heritage of Singapore and, in fact, Malaysia too."

A Nonya who is also a member of our Association - Dr. Anne Pakir, Senior Lecturer & Asst. Head of the Department of English Language & Literature, National University of Singapore - has added to our knowledge of our culture in her erudite chapter on "The Linguistic Heritage of The Peranakans."

After going through the above preamble to the main content of the book readers can then sit back, relax and at their leisure turn the pages redolent of picturesque and nostalgic phrases such as:

Masok angin kuluair asap - come to naught (Dia chakap sedap, barang takleh jadi, nanti masok angin kuluair asap - It is easy for him to have high hopes, but his plans are not going to be successful and will come to naught.)

Taik idong asin - miserly. (Dia taik idong asin jarang makan kat luar - He is miserly and rarely eats out.)

Pantat panjang - to overstay a visit. (Dia pantat panjang, bila datang dia misti dudok berjam-jam - Whenever she comes for a visit, she will overstay for hours.)

Gedebak gedebuk - to perform a task in a heavy-handed manner. (Dia bikin kreja gedebak gedebuk - He works in a rough and heavy-handed manner.)

Mungka idong dia tak nampak - not a glimpse of the person. (Bila dia ada kemoan baru dia datang, kalu ta'ah mungka idong dia tak nampak - He will only make an appearance if he wants something. Otherwise you will not catch a glimpse of him.)

MAS SEPULOH (Continued)

Chekek telampong senang - Nothing better to do. (Dia chekek telampong senang kasi budak tu nangis - He has nothing better to do than to make the child cry.)

Kus semangat - Cry to summon spirit of life; expression of surprise - e.g. Goodness me! (Kus semangaat, ada ka lu boleh chakap sampay ni macham - Goodness me! How can you bring yourself to say such a thing?)

Copies of MAS SEPULOH will be on sale at our Annual Dinner & Dance on Sunday 27 November 1994.

'MASTERS OF THE SEA' A COMMENT ON THE PERANAKAN SEGMENT

by

Kenneth Cheo Kim Ban

(Our contributor is a Baba and a well-respected authority on Baba matters having written A BABA WEDDING and co-authored BABA FOLK BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS. He was born and raised in the Baba heartland of Malacca, has been a teacher and publishers' representative and was with a merchant bank until his retirement in 1981.)

It is quite apparent that one of the aspects of this television production is its disregard for authenticity in Peranakan costume and language.

The picture that was painted of an

elderly woman in our community (a Bibik or a Wak-Wak) who was not only wacky but also weirdly-dressed made her, in consequence, neither fish nor fowl.

The "sanggul" adorning the head of the Bibik was the top-knot of old ladies of Imperial China seen in Hong Kong-produced series. However, TCS did better. They stuck hairpins galore into the "sanggul," but with the pin heads turned upside down - "macham hujan balek ke-langit."

To improve the image of the character they made her wear dangling earrings which only young nonyas put on. She also wore a dazzling red baju which was neither a kebaya nor a baju panjang but a Malay "kebaya laboh" sometimes worn by Malay singers and dancers.

Not content with that and to complete the bizarre concept there was a scene in which the old dowager decorated her neck with a choker and her feet with high-heeled shoes!

And the dialogue! Goodness knows who coached her to address her darling grandson as "bijik mata chuchu" instead of "bijik mata mak!"

(In support of the above sentiment we would recommend to the Television Corporation of Singapore to remedy these glaring defects by sending their costume and set designers to the Heritage Day Exhibition now on at the National Museum to study the excellent display of 300 photographs of family groups and social events, genealogy records and artefacts of our various communities - Editor)

MORE DETAILS OF PENANG BABA CONVENTION

On 1st December delegates will be invited to a welcome dinner hosted by the State Government of Penang.

The Convention will be officially declared open on 2nd December by Dato Sabbaruddin Chik, the Minister of Culture, Arts & Tourism after speeches by Dato Khoo Keat Siew and Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, the Chief Minister of Penang. After lunch there will be a debate organised by the Penang Toastmaster's Club with Dr. Choong Sim Poey as Chairman.

The Seminar at the Universiti Sains Malaysia on 3rd December will be addressed by two speakers:-

1. Mr. Haidar bin Kassim, Lecturer, School of Architecture, USM, on PERANAKAN ARCHITECTURE
2. Mr. Kenneth Cheo, writer and author of "The Baba Wedding," on BABA BELIEFS & SUPERSTITIONS

That evening, at the Penang Association's 74th Anniversary Dinner, the guests of honour will be the Governor of Penang Tun Dato Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir and Datin Seri Hajjah Siti Zainab. Finally, there will be a farewell dinner at the Tanjung Country Club on 4th December before delegates depart after breakfast on 5th December.

For more information please contact our Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Lim Geok Huay
- Tel.2550704.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome into our midst the following new members:-

Mr. Robert Yeo Cheng Chuan
Ms Kang Chin Ling
Ms Chew Gek Khim
Ms Jo-Ann Yeow
Mrs. Nancy Lim
Ms Jocelyn Toh
Mdm. Rosalind Lee Choo Neo
Mr. Spencer Chan
Mr. Maurice Wee
Mr. Tan Keng Jin

Membership has increased by 77 between March 1993 and February 1994, and by 39 from then to October 1994, making a total of 116 new members for the period.

CONDOLENCES

It is with great sorrow that we record the death of Mr. Charles William Bennett, a much-loved member of our Association.

With his dignified bearing and majestic height he was a familiar fond figure at our gatherings which he always graced, without fail and with great enthusiasm, with his presence. We shall sadly miss him. We extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Ida Bennett in her irreplaceable loss and share her grief with her.

We also regret to announce the death of Mrs. Maude Tan and wish to convey our condolences to her family in their bereavement.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR MY GRANDMOTHER'S RECIPE FOR SAMBAL TOMATO

by

Victor Charles Gabriel

I thoroughly enjoy our Peranakan Association Newsletter and always find the articles informative and interesting.

I would like to share with readers a recipe from my grandmother, Madam Cheong Chwee Neo, for Sambal Tomato, which I hope they will find delicious and simple:-

INGREDIENTS

5 sliced tomatoes

3 tbs sugar

1 tbs sambal belachan

2 stalks of lemongrass chopped in large chunks.

METHOD

Fry the tomatoes in a wok without oil on a very low flame.

Add sugar, sambal belachan and lemongrass to the tomatoes.

Fry until sugar has melted and the ingredients well-blended.

When cool, put in the refrigerator. Serve cool.

Thank you very much and keep up the good work.

(Thank you for your encouraging support. Will other readers please give us their comments and feedback? - Editor)

GUNONG SAYANG ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

The Association will represent the Peranakan community when it participates in the Chingay Procession to be held along Orchard Road on 5th February next year. Members interested in joining the procession under the banner of the GSA may contact Mr. Victor Goh - Tel. 3441275 - as practices have already commenced at the Geylang Serai Community Centre.

In May 1995 the Association will stage a Peranakan play written by Mr. William Gwee Thian Hock.

ADIEU JURGEN RUDOLPH, OUR GERMAN PERANAKAN

Jurgen Rudolph, who has endeared himself to those of us whom he consulted in the course of his academic research, left Singapore in October for his home in Nuremberg.

Jurgen spent 2 1/2 years at the National University of Singapore on a scholarship awarded by the German Academic Exchange Service to write his Ph. D. dissertation on Reconstructing Identities - A Social History of the Babas in Singapore. At the 1993 Baba Convention held in Singapore he delivered a talk on The Other Languages of the Babas - A Description of the Linguistic Spectrum of the Singapore Babas in History.

He had also contributed an article to Commentary, the journal of the National University of Singapore Society, on the subject of The Speak Mandarin Campaign of the Babas.

A SHORT HISTORY OF PERANAKAN KATONG (PART 2)

by
David Ong

Although Katong no longer has an overwhelmingly large number of Peranakans living there, the district has still been able to preserve its strong Peranakan flavour.

This is manifested in the number of Peranakan restaurants and food outlets and retail and antique shops in the East Coast Road/Joo Chiat Road vicinity with the hub of Peranakan social activities centred around the churches previously mentioned, the Gunong Sayang Association and The Katong Antique House.

In addition thereto, the YWCA at Marine Parade is also a focal meeting point for Peranakan women in Katong.

Baba/Nonya Heritage Museum and Centre

Anything that is unique to Singapore is worth preserving and displaying. Such is the case of our culture which was born of the interplay of various influences, including Chinese, Malay and Western (English, Portuguese and Dutch), which gave rise to a unique blend of terms of language, customs, costume, jewellery, cuisine, crockery, entertainment and architecture.

Unfortunately, with progress and the passage of time, our culture is fast disap-

pearing, and Katong is remembered as a Peranakan enclave within the memory of our older generation only. Sadly, we have no icons or memorials to commemorate its past except for the few makan places, the two churches, the YWCA and Peter Wee's Katong Antique House where some of us congregate.

Therefore, the best way of preventing the total disappearance of our culture would be for the authorities to consider the setting up of a Baba/Nonya Heritage Museum and Centre.

Some of the features and activities which could be displayed and held in the Museum would include the following:

- (a) Displays of Baba furniture, costumes, books, musical instruments, photographs, jewellery and "fashion" accessories.
- (b) Storytelling sessions when listeners could hear of tales from Chinese literature read from books written in Baba Malay in the late 19th/early 20th century.
- (c) Demonstrations of Nonya crafts - e.g. cooking, sewing of beaded slippers, embroidery of kebayas, etc.

It would be ideal, in terms of premises, if the Museum could be situated in a 1920's vintage 2-storey detached house in the East Coast Road/Joo Chiat Road/Koon Seng Road vicinity, of sufficient size to enable cultural activities to be carried out as well, and, hopefully, also to serve as a club house for our Association and our sister Association, the Gunong Sayang Association.