

# THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1995

MITA (P) 117/08/95

DISTRIBUTED FREE

### AHEAD TO ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

*by Lee Kip Lee*

**T**his year has been a great success for the Association, with our membership increasing to 550 persons, a year-long programme of events, our quarterly newsletter, and a promise of better things to come. With our new mission statement, members will see greater amount of activities that will keep the Peranakan heritage alive in Singapore.

For this December issue and the advent of Boxing Day, we have gathered a few Peranakan recollections of boxing in the old days, written by members Mrs K.T. Koh and Mrs Teresa Oei. We also have letters from the eminent Professor Tan Chee Beng, a specialist on Baba culture, and reports and photographs of all the activities this quarter. May we also take this opportunity to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous 1996!



**Dr Tony Tan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence,**  
guest-of-honour of the Malam Bunga Peranakan, the 95th  
Anniversary Dinner & Dance, 19 November 1995.

#### FOCUS

## BOXING

### JUST A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

*by K. T. Koh*

**T**wo young boxers, flyweight Roger Espinelli, a Filipino, and a Scottish fighter, James Murray, died within a month of each other around October this year. Was the game dangerous? Were enough precautions taken to ensure the 'sport', boxing, does not unnecessarily expose the participants to fatal injuries? It saddens me that two young, healthy men have died for the sport they chose to dedicate themselves to. Now with more years and more mature thinking, I feel boxing is a brutal and heartless game!

And yet, there was a time when I had enjoyed the fights, more than ever when some blood was drawn from the eyes or mouths of the boxers. My mind now wanders to a similar incident in the 1930s. I was a rather blood-thirsty boxing fan, a teenager who enjoyed a well-matched fight every Friday night when boxing matches were held in an open-air arena, situated between Mackenzie Road and the Selegie Road and Bukit Timah

Road junction. After the 2nd World War, this 'stadium' was replaced by the Rex Theatre.

My elder brother, Hock Chye, was on the committee of the Boxing Board of Control. Thus I always had a ring-side seat. Julian Frankel was the promoter and he imported boxers from the U.S., Philippines, Thailand, Malaya and Burma. The lightweights fought fewer rounds, but the 'big guys', the middleweights, welterweights and heavyweights, fought fifteen rounds of three minutes each. They were good! Some of the names as I recall were Al Rivers, Young Frisco, Nai-Sompong, Joe Diamond, Little Abayan, Boy Wally, Ignacio Fernandez and Thunderface.

The ringside spectators wore evening suits and the ladies often came in their long gowns. Mr Frankel always sat at the entrance to shake hands with these supporters of the game. I do not know the price of the seats, but I guess ringside seats must

**OFFICE BEARERS****PRESIDENT****George Tay****FIRST VICE PRESIDENT****David Ong****SECOND VICE PRESIDENT****Lee Kip Lee****HONORARY SECRETARY****Lim Geok Huay****ASSISTANT HONORARY SECRETARY****Yeo Seok Yan****HONORARY TREASURER****Irene Lim****COMMITTEE MEMBERS****Sally Chan****Alan Koh****Peter Wee****Helen Tan****Thomas Tan****Peter Lee****EDITORIAL COMMITTEE****MANAGING EDITOR****Lee Kip Lee****EDITOR****Peter Lee****CIRCULATION****Lim Geok Huay****CONTRIBUTORS****Kenneth Cheo****William Gwee Thian Hock****Anthony Oei****PUBLISHED BY****The Peranakan Association****Raffles City PO Box 1640****Singapore 9117****PRINTED BY****Three Six Papers Services****31 Minaret Walk****Singapore 467401****Tel: 2546231****MITA (P) 117/08/95**

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have been expensive as only the *ang-mohs*, local managers and *orang kayas* occupied this section. The galleries were always full but these spectators were the real enthusiasts, as they followed the fights closely, cheering when 'their man' won and shouting obscenities when the referee was unfair or their favourite fighter did not win. This was the time when objects were thrown into the ring, and my brother would shout, "Ignatio, take my sister out!" Exciting moments, certainly.

However, one Friday night was tragic. The young Red Indian from the U.S. was scheduled to fight. I do not remember his opponent's name. Thunderface appeared in the costume of a Chief. He was young, handsome and carried himself well in his beautiful chief's regalia, complete with his feather headdress. The crowd clapped and cheered. He was their favourite that evening. He must win! The gong sounded, he had stripped off his finery and now faced his opponent. He fought well! He fought bravely!

A few rounds saw him leading by points, then suddenly, a punch to his face and he fell, knocking his head on the floor. The referee Mr Robinson (not a favourite with gallery fans) started counting. Thunderface was unconscious. Doctors climbed into the ring, examined him and ordered Thunderface to be carried by ambulance to the Singapore General Hospital. The crowd dispersed, disappointed and anxious to know if 'The Chief' would be alright. I was sad too.

Next morning, my brother announced that Thunderface had died without regaining consciousness. After this fatal accident, a canvas was laid over the wooden floor of the ring in the hope of preventing further tragedies.

I must not forget Ignatio Fernandez, a clean Filipino fighter — no clinching, no body-back punches. He always fought like a gentleman. He had even fought in Madison Square Garden against the greats of that time. Me? I stopped going to see boxing. School work, Girls' Life Brigade, Saint John's Ambulance Brigade, occupied my time until the Second World War. Forced to stop teaching, marriage and a baby girl replaced my 'girlish ways'.

When the war was over and life got back to normal, my husband and I and our friends spent Saturday evenings at the movies, after which there was always the supper at Hokkien Street for the famous Hokkien *hay mee* or the 'goodies' at Fatty's in Albert Street.

One night after supper, we were returning to our car, and I spotted Ignatio. I quickly walked up to him and called him by name. He was a *jaga kereta* who opened the car door for you and if lucky received a few cents for this. Every Saturday from that night was always Albert Street for supper. This wonderful man was punch-drunk and a beggar. Later when I missed him, the fruit man told me that he became sick and was taken to the Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor, where he subsequently died. My brother has also since passed away, and I have only the memories of those boxing days.

What price must we pay for fame? Can dangerous games like boxing, horse-racing, polo and rugby be sufficiently controlled to make them a real challenge of grit, strength and skill without the danger to life? Food for thought!



# MY UNCLE, THE PERANAKAN BOXING CHAMPION

by Teresa Oei

We Peranakans are found in all sorts of occupations, making our contributions to society in our own ways. In my family we even had a boxing champion — Tan Teng Kee.

Uncle Teng Kee was the eldest in the Tan family of three boys and a girl comprising, besides himself, sister Pow Neo, and Teng Luan and Teng Ban (my father). Grandfather Tan Seng Kiang was a Chinese *sinseh* who demonstrated his skills to support the family, while grandmother Koo Chai kept house. The boys were educated at St Joseph's Institution. They are all gone now, except Auntie Pow Neo whom we call Mak Ko Pow who is in her nineties.

Uncle Teng Kee, known to his fans by his fighting name Battling Key, was a champion boxer for 14 years from 1921 to 1935. The older generation will no doubt remember him, hopefully with pride. I never knew him as he died in 1935 before I was born.

I found out about him from Mak Ko Pow (who is still alert despite her advanced age) and other living relatives, as well as from an article written about him by a well-known former boxer and sports writer, Lim Kee Chan. Uncle Teng Kee was a very handsome man and although he had a throng of female admirers, he never married.

He loved boxing too much, much to the disapproval of his family and relatives. He summed up his devotion to boxing thus, "I love boxing and I am prepared to die fighting in the ring."

Indeed he was a fighter who never gave up. Strong, stylish and colourful, he took on a string of leading boxers of the day. He fought in Singapore, Malaya, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong. He beat most of them.

One of Battling Key's most memorable bouts took place in Singapore on 4 August 1922. There, he knocked out Johnny Carvalho (the Johore Tiger) in only 95 seconds of their 10-round contest. The victory made him the Lightweight Champion of Malaya, and won him instant fame and fortune. He became the pride of the family.

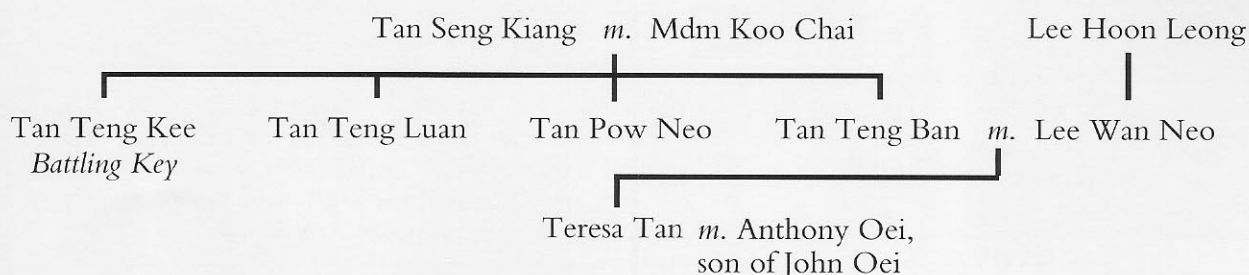


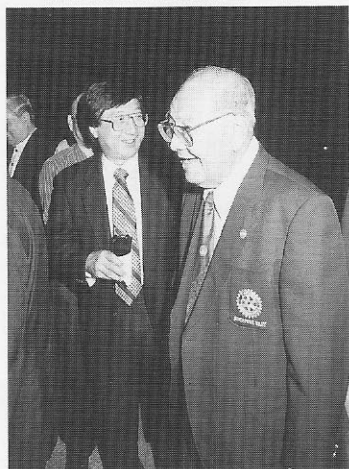
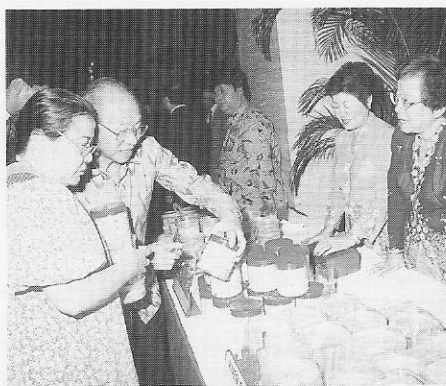
His boxing career ended tragically during his fight with Johnny Nelson in Seremban on 20 March 1935. It happened in the seventh round. He had been knocked down several times in the earlier rounds. As the bell rang for the seventh round, Battling Key struggled to his feet and collapsed. He was rushed to hospital where he died without regaining consciousness. He died fighting in the ring as he had wished. He was 37 years old.

Let me record here two interesting sidelights to this story. Battling Key had a couple of managers during his illustrious career. By a strange coincidence, one of them was John Oei (my late father-in-law). He was a boxing promoter, organising fights in Singapore and Indonesia. He also trained several other Asian boxers into champions like Indonesia's Jackie Njoo and brother Bobby.

The other episode concerns what my grandfather Tan Seng Kiang did, apart from being a *sinseh*. He had clients from many walks of life suffering from muscle aches and pains. Among them was Lee Hoon Leong, a prominent Peranakan businessman, and brother of Singapore's first woman doctor, Dr Lee Choo Neo. As fate would have it, they became personal friends. Before long, they were devising a way of matchmaking their children, as in the old Peranakan tradition. That was how my late father Tan Teng Ban met and married my mother Lee Wan Neo, and how I came into this world.

## GENEALOGY OF TERESA OEI





## Malam Bunga Peranakan 19 November 1995

Photography by Image Presentation Pte Ltd



# MALAM BUNGA PERANAKAN

## 95th ANNIVERSARY

### DINNER & DANCE

by Peter Lee

The *Malam Bunga Peranakan* held on 19 November at the Sheraton Towers Hotel Ballroom was a resounding success with about 450 guests turning up to celebrate the Association's 95th anniversary.

A wonderful display of Peranakan artefacts and flowers at the foyer was a major highlight of the event, comprising a display of *kebaya*s and *kasot manek*, the sale of *nyonya kueh* and books. All sold briskly, and many elegantly dressed ladies were seen carrying plastic bags-full of biscuits and other cakes. As for the books, it was fortuitous that the authors of the three books on sale were at the dinner to autograph copies, namely Maurice Baker (*A Time of Wild Guavas and Fireflies*), Ong Poh Neo (*Brown and Gold*) and Lee Kip Lee (*Amber Sands*). Next to the books was a stand of Peranakan-inspired stationery and gifts from Memories of the East run by Peranakan Laura Hwang. Paintings by Association members Martin Loh and Desmond Sim were also on view, and the artists received many interested enquiries.

The foyer was also brimming with flowers sponsored by Christanio de Florist, owned by member Christopher Lim, whose company was recently awarded the American Express Service Excellency Award for the third year. A wonderful altar display, set up by Katong Antique House, was greatly admired by all who attended. The floral scents from the large platter of *bunga rampay* on the table permeated the entire foyer and gave it a special elegance that characterised the evening.

Guests began streaming in from 6.45 and within half-an-hour the foyer was full of people and the lights and cameras of a TCS crew as well as those of the *The Straits Times* and Lianhe Zaobao. By 7.30 most of the invited guests had arrived, namely the Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Emam Mohammad Haniff and his wife, the Brunei High Commissioner Pehin Dato Haji Hussin Haji Sulaiman and his wife, the President of the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Penang Datuk Khoo Keat Siew and Datin Khoo, Mr Charles Koh, President of the Gunong Sayang Association, and Mr Lee Seng Gee, Chairman of the Lee Foundation, and Mrs Lee. At 7.45 guests of honour Dr Tony Tan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, and Mrs Tan, arrived and were shown round the displays at the foyer before being led to their seats.

The evening was well supported by the attendance of prominent members of the business and professional communities. At the same time, many members bought tables and invited their friends and relations, giving the evening an atmosphere of importance as well as informal elegance. As one guest recalling the evening had put it, "It was like being at a wonderful wedding, formal yet filled with the joviality of a happy family gathering!"

Dinner commenced quickly and the audience was treated to entertainment by Kumpulan Walter Koh who performed many

golden favourites and *keronchong*. A delightful skit by G.T. Lye and Sally Gan, *Bunga Kretas*, had the audience in stitches while an impromptu appearance by Boom Boom Room star Leena who sang a few jazz standards added another interesting dimension to the evening's events.

The greatest moment came after dinner when Dr Tan made an impromptu speech congratulating the committee and the Association's efforts to keep heritage alive, emphasising the importance of remembering our past as Singapore forges ahead into the future. "I strongly support activities which call up people's memories of the past...I think these give our children roots in Singapore and make this place home," he said. These remarks were reported the next day in *The Straits Times*. Dr Tan also proposed a toast to the Association.

Two special incidents won the hearts of all the guests. Before leaving the ballroom, Dr Tan specially walked over to greet his mother, Mdm Lim Neo Swee, an Association member, who was seated at another table. Many also admired the fact that Association member Dr Lee Suan Yew had brought his father Mr Lee Chin Koon, who is over 90 years old and still as sprightly as ever, to the dinner. Mr Lee was attended to by his two grandsons who never left his side. These expressions of great filial piety were edifying and proud moments for the Peranakan community.

The evening ended by midnight after much happy dancing and friendly *togok* rounds by many die-hard guests who enjoyed the evening up to the last moment. *Malam Bunga Peranakan*, a Peranakan event in all senses of the word.

## SEPTEMBER SOCIAL

More than sixty people turned up for our September Social at Chocho's Restaurant at Albert Court on 22 September. It was an excellent opportunity for members to meet each other and the Association committee members. Many new members were also recruited at the dinner, which was a buffet feast of fine Peranakan delicacies. Edwin Tay, a member of the Association, is the owner of the restaurant, and he has offered a special 10% discount to all members.



Patient buffet queue (top)  
Happy diners (right)

## KEEPING THE BABA CULTURE ALIVE

### THE 8th BABA CONVENTION MALACCA, NOVEMBER 1995

by Anthony Oei

**T**raditional Baba entertainment at its best, a journey into the past and legendary hospitality. Where else can you find these qualities but in Malacca? After all, the Malaysian state is the cradle of Baba culture.

At Air Keroh d'Village, host Malacca brought on stage the Baba fashions of yore, skits, songs, dances and of course, the inimitable Kenny Chan and Chee Hood Siong for the 8th Baba Convention on 24 - 26 November 1995.

None of the delegates — 50 from The Peranakan Association of Singapore, 30 from the Gunong Sayang Association and over 30 from the Persatuan Peranakan Cina of Penang — could fault the entertainment. The Singapore delegates were also proud that G.T. Lye had a big hand in coaching the Malacca Youth Dondang Sayang Group for the occasion.

The visits to the clubhouse of our Malacca host and to the Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum at Jonker Street evoked memories of our ancestors. Indeed, many of the Singapore delegates had their origins in Malacca and still have relatives there.

#### ASSOCIATIONS: ACTIVE FOR THE YEAR

But the convention, which bore the theme "The Babas and Nyonyas of Today", had an important purpose. "The cultural shows are, among other things, aimed at making our culture and traditions known to the younger generation so that our rich Baba heritage will be carried on and not forgotten with time," said Jimmy Khoo, President of the Persatuan Peranakan Cina of Malacca, who was the first of the presidents to present their reports.

The Malacca association organised a host of events like talks in schools, parties, dancing, singing and other programmes. It gave scholarship loans to children of members. It had even compiled a set of rules for *chongkak*. Recently it helped a Norwegian writer in his research on Baba culture.

"In Malacca, the Baba culture is still strong, and the youth section is very active, as reflected in the cultural shows they put up. Our aim is to make ourselves a vibrant force in our multi-racial society," Mr Khoo said.

The Persatuan Peranakan Cina of Penang was similarly active in promoting the culture with talks, visits to other countries, among other recreational activities.

The President, Datuk Khoo Keat Siew, brought up an important point when he said, "It is necessary for us to take an introspective look at ourselves from time to time. The present generation of babas and nyonyas must realise that unless they take pride in their Baba ancestry, their heritage will be lost with the passage of time."

"Not many Babas today practise their customs and traditions. The greatest challenge facing the Baba community today is whether they will be able to retain their own identity during the next century."

"We should also seek every opportunity to make ourselves known to the general public by jointly organising a major event, like a charity project. The 10th Baba Convention in 1997, for example, could be made into a grand public affair, with Kuala Lumpur as the venue. We should prove that we are still a vibrant community."

Reporting on behalf of President Dr George Tay who was unable to attend the convention, Vice President Lee Kip Lee said The Peranakan Association of Singapore was playing its part through cultural, social and literary activities with regular dinner talks and the annual dinner and dance. The last two dinner talks drew record attendances. One lecture was on "Brown and Gold Furniture" by Madam Ong Poh Neo. The other was on "Straits Chinese Porcelain — a Collector's Experience" by Professor Cheah Jin Seng.

Further reflecting the vigour of the Association, a community service project was organised in which the Association raised \$7,260 through the sale of tickets for a Gunong Sayang Association play staged in aid of the National Kidney Foundation.

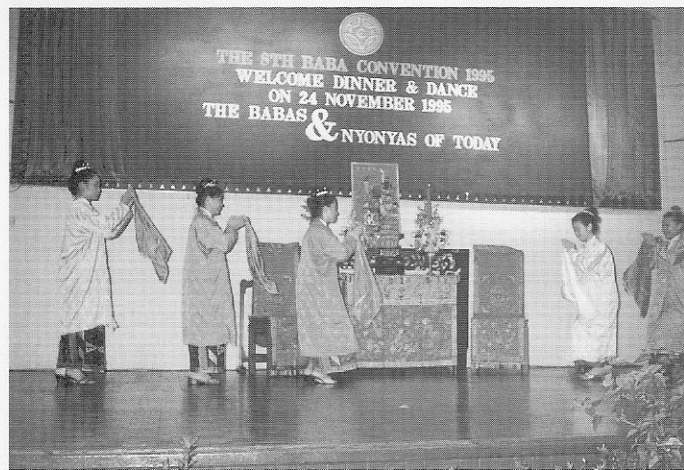
The Association also increased its membership to 550 members with about 112 new members for the year compared to 74 in 1994. Among them were 11 associate members from Johore and Malacca and even one from Melbourne.

"What is significant is that the majority of the new members are actively participating in our programme. We are constantly seeking to ascertain the needs of the young people and what they expect of the Association," Mr Lee said. Towards this end, younger new faces were elected to the 12-member General Committee at the Annual General Meeting held on 25 March 1995 to inject fresh ideas into the Association.

Thanking the Persatuan Peranakan Cina of Malacca for their hospitality, Lee Kip Lee warmly welcomed all to the 9th Baba Convention to be held in Singapore next year.







## MEDIA



## DOCUMENTARY ON BABAS AIRED ON CHANNEL 8

A special documentary on the Peranakans was aired on Channel 8's *Tuesday Report*, a weekly Chinese programme. It examined the subject from a very fresh perspective, and portrayed a new generation of Peranakans who were trying to keep important aspects of the tradition alive.

The opening sequence showed The Peranakan Association's 95th Anniversary Dinner and Dance, and featured all the artworks and flowers on display.

The short half-hour programme focused on six individuals. Professor Tan Chee Beng of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Malaya discussed the challenges facing the Peranakan community especially in finding ways to make itself relevant to modern Singapore. Tan Eng Hiam, a 38 year-old man who, following family wishes, had a traditional Baba wedding about ten years ago. Video clips of the wedding showed what was probably the last traditional Baba wedding in this country.

Food-writer Violet Oon was also featured and expressed the need for the next generation to be more creative in their approach to the culture. She also said that food was probably one of the more enduring elements of Baba culture, and showed how she was adapting the food to modern Singaporean tastes. Yeo Sing Guat, a professional *kasot manek* maker discussed his craft and how he was keeping the art alive in his shop on Jonker Street, Malacca.

Also interviewed was Mdm Christina Chan, the consultant chef of the famous Sunday Nyonya Buffet at Lion City Hotel, whose touching story about the death of her daughter was shown on *Extraordinary People* recently. Peter Lee, a committee member of The Peranakan Association was also interviewed on his research into his family's history, which he traced back to the 16th century, and followed up to his ancestor's arrival in Malacca and the family's emigration to Singapore.

An interesting programme which showed how Peranakans were making efforts to preserve aspects of Chinese culture lost in other Chinese communities. The show ended with a wonderful *dondang sayang* sung by William Tan of the Gunong Sayang Association.

## NEW MEMBERS

The recruitment drive for this quarter has been very successful and The Peranakan Association is very proud to welcome the following **forty** new members:

### LIFE MEMBERS

Ms Alicia Ang Kim Neo  
 Mr Chan Poh Tien  
 Ms Irene Chan Siew Geok  
 Mr Cheng Siang Pang  
 Mr Kenneth Cheo Kim Ban  
 Mr Aloysius Chew  
 Mr Georgie Chia Wong Chye  
 Mdm Barbara Chong  
 Miss Chong Lee Ting  
 Mr Michael Goh Kia Chiang  
 Mrs Jek-Huang Kek Chee  
 Miss Anne Lee May Pin  
 Mrs Elizabeth Lee Kip Lee  
 Miss Jennifer Lee  
 Mr Jerry Lee  
 Mrs Margaret Lee  
 Dr Lim Joo Lee  
 Mr Terry Lim Boon Keng  
 Mr Martin Loh Mun Loong  
 Mrs Patricia Moreira  
 Mdm Ruby Ong Bee Neo  
 Miss Ong Hwee Cheng  
 Mdm Rosanna Ong Swee Neo  
 Mrs Irene Ooi  
 Mrs Jane Seah  
 Ms Ilsa Marie Sharp  
 Mr Desmond Sim Kim Jin  
 Ms Helen Sugiono Sim  
 Mr Tan Hean Teck  
 Mr Anthony Yeow Seong  
 Mrs Vivian Tan  
 Mrs Lili Wong Lin Ken  
 Mdm Yeo Poh Khim  
 Dr Yeoh Swee Choo

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ms Chan Hong Lian  
 Ms Ivy Chi Boey Lin  
 Mr Eddie Chi Swee Guan  
 Mdm Ong Guat Ong  
 Mr Mohd Noor Bin Hassan  
 Mr Wong Khong Chin

## CONGRATULATIONS TO AN AWARD-WINNING VOLUNTEER

On 7 October, Association member Mdm Chua Kim Neo, a 90 year old retired midwife, received a special award from the Singapore Children's Society for her voluntary services. She was roped in by a friend to help the Society cut used stamps from envelopes to raise funds, at their Tiong Bahru office. She continues to perform this service once or twice a week.

"I was very happy to receive the award," said Mdm Chua, who has been a member of The Peranakan Association for the last five years. Her award was featured in a Straits Times report on 26 September. The Peranakan Association would like to extend its heartiest congratulations to Mdm Chua.

## CONDOLENCES

The Association would like to extend their deepest sympathies to the families of the following:

### Mr William Chee Tiang Chin

Mr Chee, a scion of the illustrious Chee family of Heeren Street, Malacca, was a former committee member of The Peranakan Association.

### Mr Lucky Low Hock Kee

Mr Low, 79, was a former committee member of The Peranakan Association. He was a branch representative of Pearl & Dean in Kuala Lumpur for many years before retiring early in his fifties. He was a son of Peranakan artist Low Kway Song, whose brother Low Kway Soo was an equally well-known artist. His son Richard Low recalled, "He was meant to take over painting from my grandfather but chose another career. When I asked him why he said that it was because at that time artists were not highly regarded." Mr Low passed away on 2 December.

### Puan Sri Helene Tan

Puan Sri Helene Tan, the wife of Tan Sri Tan Chin Tuan, passed away in December, after a short illness. Tan Sri Tan was the president of The Peranakan Association (then known as the Straits Chinese British Association) before Mr T.W. Ong took over the position.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

Interested to have a chat with someone from a bygone era? Interested to brush up on your use of the Peranakan patois, most of which has gone *karot*?

A random survey conducted among several homes for the aged has indicated that there are quite a few elderly bibiks and babas among the residents. Many of these people are destitutes, living on public assistance, *kesian sekali*!

If you would like to commit yourself to personally visiting one or several of these elderly bibiks and babas on a regular basis, please contact Mr Lee Kip Lee, Tel: 4693662.



## LETTERS

### A SPECIALIST'S APPROVAL

I must congratulate you and your colleagues at The Peranakan Association for publishing a newsletter. It provides news for members and interested people, and it is a good forum for discussing issues of Peranakan interests. I trust members will and they should contribute news and especially articles to the newsletter. The Association has particular interest in the Baba, and there are so many individuals out there who know something about Baba culture and history. With the cooperation of members, I am sure The Peranakan Association will be able to promote a better understanding of Baba culture and history in Singapore.

Mr David Ong's *A Short History of Peranakan Katong* is very useful, so is K.T. Koh's *My Memories of the Peranakan Bangsawan Theatre*. Their papers show how one can contribute to an understanding of the past by writing in the newsletter. For those who are interested in knowing more about *bangsawan* in this region, I recommend Tan Sooi Beng's *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera* (see September's newsletter). However, we still need more information on the Baba contribution to *bangsawan*, and in this regard, KT Koh's contribution is most welcome.

I fully support David Ong's suggestion to set up a Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum and Centre. I had also made this call at the Baba Convention in Singapore in 1990 (see page 55 of my little book *Chinese Peranakan Heritage in Malaysia and Singapore*, published in 1993).

Mr Gwee Thian Hock's *Comments on Terms Used by Babas and Non-Babas* is yet another kind of important contribution. It is very good that we can learn from one another, and in this respect all professional comments should be welcome. I would like to add a note on the term *Baba Chinese*. It is certainly not used by the Baba nor by the non-Baba Chinese. However, I myself have used *Baba Chinese* in the context of differentiating various types of Chinese, such as *Hokkien Chinese*, *Hakka Chinese*, and so *Baba Chinese*. It is purely used in analysis, not as a people's label, although in addressing a Malaysian/Singaporean audience, Hokkien, Hakka, Baba, etc. will do. Similarly the term *non-Baba Chinese* is not a label, merely a descriptive term to avoid, for instance, having to use *Pure Chinese* which is even more misleading. Some writers have used the term *Chinese Baba*. I think this is associated with the Chinese only, and so *Chinese Baba* is misleading. There is, for instance, no Indian Baba — the Chitty do not call themselves Baba.

Overall, I am impressed with the wide range of coverage in the newsletter — not forgetting the recipes too. Perhaps the editors may want to consider publishing some humour in Baba style Malay, or some wise sayings. *Bintang Peranakan* and *Sri Peranakan* of the 1930s have these features. Of course you already have *pantun*. I trust with the publication of this newsletter and the

organisation of some relevant activities, more young people will be attracted to the Association and learn about Peranakan culture and history. Mr Gwee Thian Hock has made an important point about the need to attract young people.

I feel very sad to learn about the death of Ms Aileen Lau. We met once and I believe it was at the 1990 convention in Singapore. It will be nice to look at her thesis on the Baba to see if it can be published in her honour.

Professor Tan Chee Beng  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

### PANTUN TEASER

#### Rimau

Poser:

Me-metek limau pagi hari,  
Di-taroh mari dalam dulang.  
Rimau tuan tiada bergigi,  
Apa di-takut sunggoh pun garang.

Reply:

Limau pun bentok-nya bersigi,  
Muat berisi suatu tanggok.  
Di-kata tuan tidak bergigi,  
Chuba tuan mengutor-kan tengok.

#### Kaseh

Poser:

Anak Aceh bersampang panjang,  
Hendak berlayar ke-lautan China.  
Bukan ku tak mahu berchinta sayang,  
Di-takut tak boleh berkaseh lama.

Reply:

Di-minta Tuhan Shukor-I-Rahmat,  
Ke-atas mulimin serta muslimat.  
Dengan berkat tujuh keramat,  
Berkaseh sayang tetap selamat.

The above are two posers/replies composed by the late Grand Master of pantun Gwee Peng Kwee. I unearthed the transcript of my interview with him in the early 1980s while I was doing personal research on Peranakan culture.

The interview covered a range of subjects from the performing arts of the Babas to the origin of *dondang sayang* in the 16th century and the declining state of *pantun* reciting. I hope to extract part of the interview for the newsletter in the future. In the meantime, I hope that you can make use of these two *pantun* as a teaser to your readers. It will be interesting to find out which *enchik* or *bibik* can furnish us with the inuendos and meanings behind the charming verses.

Mrs Cynthia Wee-Hoefler  
Singapore



# CHRISTIE'S

## FORTHCOMING AUCTION

Singapore 30 March 1996

### STRAITS CHINESE CERAMICS, GOLD & SILVER, BEADWORK & EMBROIDERY, AND FURNITURE

Christie's is inviting entries for the above sale from now till 12 January 1996



A very rare famille rose lavender-ground 'in and out' bowl (5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. diam.)  
sold in these Rooms, 30 September 1995, lot 73, for S\$10,350

## ENTRIES NOW INVITED

### ENQUIRIES

Christopher Ng      Tel: (65) 235 3828      Fax: (65) 733 0389

**Christie's International Singapore Pte Ltd**  
Unit 3 Parklane, Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Road, Singapore 228221



## ART

# HOW TO *SELL* AT AUCTION A GUIDE TO THE CHRISTIE'S SALES

by Peter Lee

To many members of the public, Christie's is still a remote and rarefied world where extremely expensive art is bought and sold. Although that may be the case, at their auction houses throughout the world, a very wide range of artworks are sold, and not everything commands the prices of those multimillion dollar Van Gogh paintings.

Here in Singapore, Christie's holds several auctions at their twice-yearly sale seasons (March and September). The company was the first to hold an auction of Peranakan ceramics and jewellery, with estimated prices of between about \$1,000 and \$90,000. Record prices were achieved for many fine pieces, and generally there was great excitement in Singapore and Malaysia as Peranakan antiques were finally claiming their place on the international art market, and being recognised as Art, with a value on it. Although this is not necessarily good news to new collectors, it is certainly welcomed by old collectors and families with heirloom collections.

But how does one approach the auction house? "People shouldn't be daunted by us," says Christopher Ng of Christie's, "We are very friendly actually. People can call and talk to us to get a free valuation of their artworks. They can either bring down the item or send us a photograph." Based on the valuation, the company will recommend if it is suitable for auction or not.

There have been a few happy surprises. "Someone brought in a *kwa chee* box for the sale in March this year, and was very pleased when it was estimated at between \$7,000 and \$10,000. It finally sold for about \$26,000! Another time an old lady brought in some things she thought were not really that valuable but was quite shocked to find out they were worth so much. However there are also those who think their things are worth much more and get quite upset when they are told of their real value."

What are the advantages of selling at Christie's as opposed to giving it to the neighbourhood *karang-guni* man? "We offer a great package deal, first we have the expertise to properly value the piece, then for a commission, we market and advertise the piece very well. It is marketed throughout the world through our international offices, and is also catalogued and exhibited. The piece therefore gets greater exposure, especially to our important clientele."

Commission is 15% for items sold below the hammer price of \$6,000. For items above that, the commission is 10%. Payment is usually within 35 days.

A brochure, *The Art of Selling at Christie's*, is available from Christie's. For all further enquiries, please call Christopher Ng, an Association member, at Christie's, Tel. 235 3828.

## EDUCATION

# LAUNCH OF TAN CHENG LOCK SCHOLARSHIP FUND

On 29 November at the Raffles Hotel, the Tun Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan Trust Scholarships Fund was launched by the two surviving daughters of Tun Tan Cheng Lock — Alice Scott Ross and Agnes Tan — together with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). This \$16 million trust fund, managed by the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank Trustees, was bequeathed by the late Nellie Wee, another daughter of Tun Tan's, and provides about \$100,000 a year towards scholarships for post-graduate studies in a wide range of subjects.

At the launch, Agnes Tan explained that her father did not have the opportunity to further his studies due to the lack of funds, and that this scholarship was set up in his honour to ensure that it would always be possible for Singaporean students to pursue the post-graduate course of their choice. Chan Heng Chee, the head of the Institute, thanked and accepted the donation for ISEAS.

Mrs Scott Ross is a member of The Peranakan Association, and the actions of herself and her sister continue the Peranakan tradition of supporting educational advancement, which had been spearheaded by leaders such as Tan Jiak Kim and Gan Eng Seng among others.



Presentation of the donation (top)  
Ms Agnes Tan and Mrs Alice Scott-Ross (bottom)

## MISSION STATEMENT

**"To preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture and traditions through cultural, social and literary activities."**

The Peranakan Association has formulated a new mission statement that more concisely outlines the aims of the Association, and the direction of the present committee.

## PROMOTIONS

***Discounts for members***, on presentation of membership cards, are available in the following shops and restaurants:

### Canterbury of New Zealand

160 Orchard Road  
#02-16 Orchard Point  
Singapore 238842  
Tel: 7329489

Discount of 15% for Canterbury of New Zealand's full range of authentic rugbywear, fashion jerseys and accessories. The shop is the sole distributor of this high-quality sportswear. Also, a 10% discount for Kasco products, a complete line of top quality golf equipment and accessories. Business Hours are from 11.30 am to 8.00 pm daily.

### Image Presentation

Blk 1093 Lower Delta Road  
#06-13 Tiong Bahru Industrial Estate  
Singapore 169204  
Tel: 2761778

10% discount for individual or family portraits. Please call to make an appointment. Image Presentation was the official photographer for the Malam Bunga Peranakan. They have their own laboratories and studio and provide a wide range of photography services.

### Chocho's

180 Albert Street  
#01-23 Albert Court  
Singapore 18  
Tel: 3373283

10% discount to all members. Chocho's Edwin Tay, an Association member, named the restaurant in honour of his great-grandmother (*chocho*) whose wonderful recipes include jantung pisang, ayam buah keluak, hee peow soup, papaya titek, nanka lemak and ayam alia.

### Fairway Garden

300 Orchard Road  
Eatz Food Court, #B2-01  
The Promenade  
Singapore 238861  
3 Telok Kurau Road  
Singapore 423757  
Tel: 3486669

10% discount for food purchases above \$25. Fairway Garden, the best of healthy wholesome, home-style vegetarian food, available at The Promenade and Telok Kurau.

**More outlets will be announced in the next newsletter!**