T PERANAKAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION

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NEW MANDATE FOR PRESIDENT LEE KIP LEE

A Report By Anthony Oei



Mr Lee Kip Lee and his new committee: (back row from left) Alan Koh, Peter Wee, Yeo Seok Yan, Ruby Ng-Ong, Peter Lee & Isaac Chan, (front row from left) Ann Chiang, Sally Chan, Lee Kip Lee, Lim Geok Huay & Bebe Seet. (absent — David Ong)

Members unanimously gave President Lee Kip Lee a new mandate to lead The Peranakan Association for another two-year term, when the Annual General Meeting convened at the RELC Building on 21 March.

President Lee will lead largely the same team of office bearers and committee members as in the previous term, which promises continuity of policies and programmes. (See the full list on Page 2)

Accepting members' show of confidence in his office, President Lee gave an inkling of what will be in store for the coming year. The major events will be the Annual Dinner and Dance, and the Baba convention in Malacca. Other programmes will be announced at the appropriate time.

Very heartening for the Peranakan culture, he said, was the growing support by the younger generation of Babas and Nyonyas. The Youth Section is now well-established, with over 160 members and an eight-member committee headed by Isaac Chan.

Indeed, many of these young Peranakans participated at the AGM which saw 54 members altogether, more than last year's total attendance. This augured well for the Association whose membership had exceeded 1,000. Financially, too, we were healthy. Our fund had swelled by the princely sum of \$26,000 raised during the 97th Annual Dinner and Dance at the Hyatt last November.

The period under review was a fruitful year for the Association. Great strides were made to create a spirit of awareness of our Peranakan identity and to foster a desire for camaraderie among members. This was in line with our objectives and mission statement: To preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture and traditions through cultural, social and literary activities.

An example of the awareness-creating programme was the talk by Bebe Seet on *Beaded Beauties - The Kasut Manek*, given in June at the RELC. Another was an art exhibition of works on Peranakan themes by Martin Loh, Desmond Sim, Kenneth Wee and Tung Yue Nang, held during

the Annual Dinner and Dance. Then there were a demonstration of the beading of *kasut manek*, and the sale of all sorts of *ketak ketik Peranakan*, such as *sarong* and *kebaya*, Nyonya *kueh kueh*, books, cards and Tshirts.

In other areas, the Association (through the voluntary contribution of editor Peter Lee) was heavily involved in the production of *Rumah Baba - Life in a Peranakan House*. This is a catalogue of an exhibition of the same name held at the National Museum. The book will be published by the middle of the year.

The Association also supported the development of a website and documentary dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Peranakan culture, when the Lee Foundation made its donation of \$7,500 for the project through us.

Equally encouraging for the Association and the Peranakan culture in Singapore was the record 64 members and their friends supporting the Baba Convention in Penang last December.

President Lee was justified in thanking the members of the General Committee 'whose tireless efforts enabled the Association to achieve another successful year! HONORARY LIFE PRESIDENT TW Ong

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NIGHT OF THE TIGER IN THE TAVERN

The Peranakan Assocation began its programme of events in this Tiger year with a lusty roar — fittingly, at the Tiger Tavern of Asia Pacific Breweries — where else?

It was a truly wet night, indeed, for the drinkers at Tuas that February evening, what with the great variety of beers flowing from the pumps at our disposal, and free of charge, too. The girls behind the bar counter were kept very busy, as orders came pouring in non-stop. At a rough count, only a few of the 100-odd revellers were teetotallers. So one can imagine the demand for alcohol that night.

The more experienced swiggers among us made a beeline for the bar counter immediately they entered the Tavern, and monopolised it throughout the evening. This vantage position gave them easier access to the frothy yellow liquids, naturally. All they had to do was plump their empty glasses on the counter and the bar girls would routinely refill them on the spot, without being asked. Besides, they could have a chat or two with them, while quenching their thirst. The lucky fellows.

But if you think this was an occasion for the men only (who are usually the species most prone to imbibe strong drinks), you are completely dead drunk.

The night revealed that many of our female members were not averse to the hard stuff. It was down the hatch for them as well. In fact, a few were seen gulping large quantities of the restorative, competing with the men it seemed, and relishing every giddy moment of it. And President Lee Kip Lee gave them good company, encouraging them and thoroughly enjoying himself in the process.

So, now we know something more about our Nyonyas, not that it is a crime or anything for the fair sex to have a good cheer now and then.

As the evening wore on, you could easily detect the heady effect the alcohol was having on the drinkers, by the higher pitch of their conversations and laughter. Nothing unusual about that, of course. After all, the Tavern is a pub, is it not?

All told, it was a sublime night for all, the drinkers especially, a night made more exhilarating by the rousing ac companying music, like *Limbo Rock*, by Richard Toh and his band.

And kudos to all the imbibers. They behaved themselves well. Despite all that fire water coursing through their blood streams, there were no wild scenes, even if some of them seemed to totter as they exited the Tavern at the end of the stimulating evening.

Anthony Oei



STRIKESON SUNDAY

Twenty members and friends gathered at Jackie's Bowl on Sunday 8 May 1998 for a fun afternoon.

There were numerous strikes and spares, platters of turkeys and just as many gutter balls! Amidst laughter and chatter, there were also moments of concentration and high anxiety. Maryanne Tan and cousin Teng Loong bravely joined the game alongside top scorers Gloria Wee, Ruby Ng and Lawrence Chia. Our Vice-President Thomas Tan did well to finish one ahead of his fourteen-year old son, Benjamin, and two ahead of his eight-year old daughter, Maryanne!

All too soon, our three games were up; a lucky draw was conducted with prizes donated by the Association and Jackie's Bowl. We will bring you another spirited report after the next meet. Do give your support. Join in to make the event an even bigger success.

Alan Koh





New Members

We welcome aboard the following 47 new members whose addition increases our roll to 1018 members.

Ordinary Members

Mr Chan Poh Kim Robert Jr

Mrs Chang Margaret

Mrs Chang Tay Mi Lian Marian

Mrs Cheah Rosalind

Mrs Cheong Doreen

Ms Chew Buay Neo

Mr Chong Poh Yew

Mrs Choo-Cheng Juan Wah Cindy

Mr Choo Chin Siang Burt

Ms Choo Shih Inn Natalie

Ms Choo Shih Lee Valerie

Ms Choo Shih Lin Charity

Ms Choong Hung Leng

Mr Chua Chong Pien Gerald

Mrs Ho Molly

Mrs Hoh Kar Ting Rosa

Mr Huan Chieng Guan Adrian

Mr Iunus Osman Oliver

Mr Khoo Hock Choo

Mr Kweh Dennis

Ms Lau Khan Yen Vida

Ms Law Chin Choo Christine

Mrs Lee-Tan Ah Yeok Doreen

Ms Liew Yuk Kong Iris

Mr Lim Huck See Christopher

Ms Lim Li Fern Jill

Mrs Nielson Lee Kim Neo Bellona

Ms Nielson Nicole Gwendalene Sax

Ms Ng Agnes

Ms Ng Aubrey

Ms Ong Pauline

Ms Png Guat Hoon Faith

Mr Savage Hugo Archibald

Ms Seah Celine

Mrs Seah Nancy

Ms Sim Hwee Ling Elaine

Ms Sim Samantha

Ms Tai Kim Lan

Ms Tan Eng Lian

Mrs Tan Lucy

Ms Tan M L Janet

Mr Teo Soon Huat Patrick

Ms Yeo Ai Lin Jocelyn

Mr Yeo Cheng Ann Alan

Mr Yeo Cheng Guan Andrew

Ms Yew Hwie Tian Flora

Associate Member

Mdm Lip Yoke Peng

website news more on http://www.peranakan.com.sg

WoWW! The wonders of science! Ever since Mr. Ben Lau of Greenhouse Multimedia set up the Peranakan website, there have been responses from The Netherlands to New Zealand, and from America to Australia. Many expressed appreciation of the well-designed pages. Many more were very pleased to know that the colourful culture of a unique group of people will not only be preserved but will be accessible to those who are eager to know our heritage, and what makes us tick. What was most heartening was that young people showed a desire for knowledge. This bodes well for our association's endeavours. But this is only a start. A website is only as good as the quality of its contents - how up-to-date, interesting and informative it is. To this end, we need those who have photos, articles, letters and even music, to help enrich and expand the website with your contributions. Your anecdotes, childhood memories of a Peranakan household, stories your grandfather told you -these embellish a heritage and gives it life. You can play a part towards the success of this project. Do get in touch with Ben Lau or Desmond Sim at greenhse@pacific.net.sg or write him at Green House Multimedia Pte. Ltd., 118B Telok Ayer Street, Fax: 222-6878.

However, please be reminded that the website was created by Greenhouse Multimedia for SingaporeOne It is not an Association website. (details can be found on the website).

For those who still think that the mouse is a singular mice, here are some of the responses.

Isaac Chan: Great effort ..we cannot exist forever... but we can make our existence last longer!

Anne Pakir: A very nice site which is clearly well-designed (with care and love). I enjoyed the interview on 8 Oct. 1997

Erwin Lauw: I must applaud this home page...it is extremely good that you guys are doing something to save the culture from extinction.

As an 18-year old, sixth-generation Peranakan, I have just discovered my roots and am extremely interested in things Peranakan, from its culture to its food. It is very sad to know that such an intricate and unique culture could just reach extinction even when its people are still living. I have been reading numerous books on the golden age of the Peranakans and was hoping that something would be done to revive this delicate culture...

Lim Tao Hua: I am an 18-year old kid in Malaysiamy grandma who just passed away was a nonya....What is the difference between Baba/Nonya and Peranakan? And is a Nonya part Malay or 100% Chinese but born in Malaya?

Lee Yu Yoong: Hi! I myself am a Baba Melaka. I am absolutely delighted that somebody has taken the early initiative to save the Peranakan heritage.

Keep it up and hope to hear from you guys! ...I do intend to create a Baba & Nonya site for Malaysia and I hope we can work together......

Michelle Ong: I am a Peranakan and would very much

like to be involved in the Baba & Nonya activities. How do I enrol in the association?

Stuart Lee: I am presently studying in America and I am part of an Inter-Cultural Club. ... I want to share my unique heritage with the people over hereTherefore, maybe if you could point me in the right direction, or supply me with more material, I would be extremely grateful.

Christo pher Ng: Great work and at last something devoted to the Baba Peranakans. Certainly heartwarming to find this webpage by chance in this cold evening in Amsterdam.... keep up the good work!!!

Great place to live and the Dutch are generally amiable. I am in an internal MBA programme....miss Peranakan food quite a lot. I can make laksa here but it takes too much time and work...also hampered by the lack of *daon kesom*.

Michelle Liu: Hi I need some help on Peranakan architecture. I'm wondering if there is such a thing as 'batwing ventilator' style for tiles on Peranakan houses.

Sue Ling Ng: Hi. I am a fourth-year Chinese Studies student at the University of Durham, England...am researching 'The Chinese in Singapore' as a topic for my dissertation ...including a substantial chapter on the Peranakan Chinese from early times to today. Wondering if you could help?

Jacqueline Tan: I am currently doing an assignment on the cultural phenomenon of my society in Malacca. I have chosen to do a study on the Baba wedding....

Khoo Si Ning: I'm the representative of a group of students from CHIJ St. Nicholas Girls School. We are now working on an Audio-visual project entitled *The Heritage*. We have decided to work on the Peranakans ...not sure where to start....

Joanna Tointon: About the newsletter, I liked the article on street names. It's interesting and historical. I also liked the recipes. How about arranging for cooking demonstrations?

Rodney Tan: Glad to know that this website exists...Would you welcome material from the Malaccan Peranakans?

Baba Chan Leong Hin of Malacca: I personally believe that Peranakans can survive the test of time...what it needs is a goal to achieve. I love my country, my people and my family, but above all I love my culture and its community. So while both the young and older generations are still around to facilitate the culture, let us start to do the things we need to do...(This was part of a long email).

E.L. Lim: Congratulations on forming a Youth Section in your association.

Chris Griffiths: My wife is a a Peranakan from Singapore (I used to work in S'pore) and my elder daughter, 5 years old, is ready to learn about her mother's culture.

Marcus Boehm: I live in Perth. My great grandmother was a nonya. We don't know much about her. But I have been intrigued by her life and have wanted to know more about her father and mother.

Maureen Lim

perANAKan The Youth Group

After the success of the youth-oriented gathering at Mr Lee Kip Lee's house last July, a committee was formed to look into the interests of our young members.

'Young members' are loosely defined as those who are aged 40 and below, and there are approximately 160 of us. Most are working adults, from all walks of life. We have amongst us teachers, bankers, doctors and members who work in the creative arts, the service line, and the leisure industry. Besides pure Peranakans, we also have members of mixed descent, and non-Peranakans who are interested in our culture. Several members are from Malaysia and one is from Japan.

At most Peranakan Association activities, there is a conspicuous absence of young members. Our President and Mr Alan Koh expressed concern about the future of the Association if the trend continued. The wheels were thus set in motion for the establishment of "perANAKan" --- The Youth Group.

Our objectives are:

- 1. To encourage existing young members to participate in events organised by the Association,
- 2. To create an awareness of the Peranakan culture,
- 3. To recruit new members and,
- 4. To foster a sense of identity with other members of the Peranakan Association.

Among the many excuses for non-participation that we heard, the most common were "I don't know anyone", "There are no young people attending" and "I am not interested in these activities". Well, if this is the way you feel, then the newly formed Youth Group is just the thing for you. Come and join us as we take the first steps in achieving our objectives.

Our coming agenda includes cultural activities like heritage tours to Katong, and introductions to Peranakan *patois*, Peranakan cooking and crafts. Our *makan* sessions will delight your cosmopolitan palates too. There will also be social activities like sports, dance classes and short trips to neighbouring countries.

If you have any ideas for activities, any comment, or if you'd like to be on our next event.

Please contact Isaac at 731 4502 (O)

9642 7769 (HP)

Isaac's e-mail: anakbaba@mbox3.singnet.com.sg Dennis' e-mail: kwehsh@mbox2.singnet.com.sg

BOOM BABA BOOM

Come join us for a fun-filled time and discover the young Peranakan in you!

There will be games, beginners' *joget* and *ronggeng* lessons, music, dancing and a delicious Peranakan buffet.

DATE: Sunday, 7th June 1998

TIME: 4:00pm to 10:00 pm

VENUE: Boom Boom Room 3, New Bugis Street

#02-04, Bugis Village

PRICE: \$19.98 (Members)

\$25.00 (Non-members)

For more information, please contact Isaac Chan at 7314502(O)



The Curtain Rises On

G. T. Lye

he man is less known than the character he plays. For who can ignore the larger-than-life bibik who sends theatre audiences into peals of laughter with her melata and her colourful observations on life, habits and behavior? But behind the baju panjang and the glittering kerosang is the soft-spoken man who prefers to be known by his stage name, G.T. Lye.

Born in late 1939, he spent his childhood with two Peranakan families. Up to the age of ten, he lived with a foster family in Katong, surrounded by bibiks of various ages. This gave him the opportunity to study and absorb their speech and behavior patterns, which would stand him in good stead years later when his stage career began. He was an observant child and even then, loved watching these genuine nyonyas how they spoke, gambled, did their hair and took great pains to behave and dress appropriately for the occasion, from wedding to funeral. GT. also fondly remembers the many fruit trees in the compound - buah nam nam, jering, jambu bol and mangosteen, just to name a few. Going to school meant Tanjong Katong English School.

Life changed dramatically when he was ten years old. He returned to live with his own family - a large one. This meant adjustment to a different lifestyle and a different school - Bartley Secondary School. All this while, he could not speak a word of any Chinese dialect. It was only in 1961, when he decided to live on his own in Kampong Bahru, that he learnt how to speak Chinese. In the years that followed, he did not return to his old haunts in Katong. So you can imagine his surprise on the day he arrived at the Geylang Serai bus terminal to find familiar places replaced by blocks of flats. Indeed, the house where he had spent his childhood had burnt down

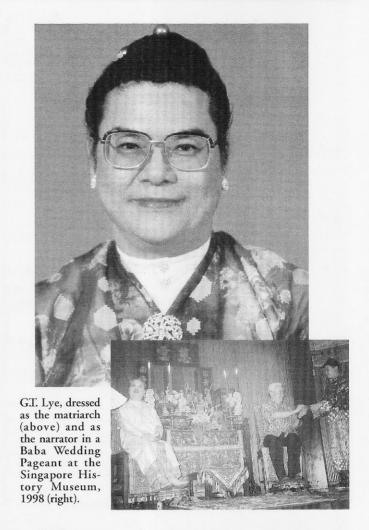
I was keen to learn more about his career and the mores of Peranakan culture, and G. T. had much to share.

The First Act:

The curtain first rose on G.T. Lye, the actor, in 1984, when Pileh Menantu, written by Felix Chia, was staged in the Arts Festival organised by the Ministry of Culture. He played the role of the father. The following year, Gunong Sayang Association produced Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih. He recounts how he auditioned for the matriarch's part, and performed so convincingly that Mr Kwek Choon Chuan, then President of GSA, insisted that G.T. should have the role. The rest, as they say, is history.

Acting and the stage:

With a chuckle, he remembers the first time his matriarchal character blurted out her first melata. It certainly was not in the script of Manis Manis Pait, and came out quite unexpectedly when someone gave him a jab in the side. But it went down so well with the audience that since then, a melata or two has featured in most plays. After years on stage, he can see changes in the themes, the action and the audience. Where



the old themes centred on domestic events, there are now plays dealing with the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, young people studying abroad, and other modern issues. The actor's movements are different, and touching and kissing are allowed on stage! 'In earlier plays, lovers only held hands and sang to each other. Very daring now!' exclaims G.T. 'But we are in the nineties and should accept these changes! The audience is changing too - made up of more young people, although G.T. feels that many do not fully understand the patois, especially the idiomatic phrases. That is why translations in English are displayed on large boards beside the stage.

Performances:

Besides acting in productions of the Gunong Sayang Association, G.T. Lye performs in skits with long-time 'partner' Ms Sally Gan. Together, they have become a famous pair with such good rapport that they often only need one rehearsal before a show. G.T. usually writes the script and the funny lines. Their two-man acts have become a tradition at The Peranakan Association Annual Dinner and Dance, and they are extremely popular at private functions, even taking their skits to Malaysia and Indonesia. But when he has to perform at old folk's homes, G.T. says that it always leaves him a little sedeh (sad).

As to whether he will consider grooming' a possible 'successor', he is quick to assure me that retirement is not in the picture just yet. He enjoys acting too much to give it up to anyone waiting in the wings. At one time, he feared that he would be less popular with the younger audiences - 'tak gitu

laku' — but lately, many young people have come up after the shows to tell him how crazy' they were over his role and how much they loved his acting. 'This has been very encouraging. So I will only retire when the audience doesn't want me anymore. Besides, it is not easy to groom someone for the matriarch's role; one's movements must be as natural as breathing, and is possible only if the actor has had the opportunity to study the gestures and speech of genuine nyonyas. Even the walk and the way one sits, must be natural. The voice too, must be convincing, and not forced. I am lucky; I can change my voice easily to suit the part. In fact, some people still can't believe that my character is played by a man!'

The hairstyle:

An old nyonya taught the child GT. how to style the proper sanggol nyonya, a skill that he is proud to have today. For how many of us even know that there are five parts to a well-constructed sanggol? First, there is the outer layer called lekar (part of the coconut husk. The hair takes on the curved shape, hence the name). Then there is the anak lekar (the smaller section), the tombong, the anak tombong, and finally, the buntut belankas (tail of a king crab). The hair at the two sides are swept from the front to form the ayam mengeram (spread out like a hen's wings when she sits on her eggs). Only in Malacca and Singapore do bibiks wear the tiga tiang (set of three hairpins).

If flowers are to be added, there are dos and don'ts to observe. Young girls will wear a circlet of flowers around the chignon; married women wear them on two sides, while widows should have flowers only on one side of the *sanggol*. During the mourning period, a widow should wear her hair low in a *sanggol siput*, with silver hairpins, not gold. To signal the end of her mourning period, she would wear red *bunga siantan* (ixora) in her hair.

The dress:

The baju panjang is rarely seen nowadays, and even the modern kebaya is used only for special occasions. The way the kerosangs are fixed is also different from the traditional style of pinning them along the side of the front opening. Many ladies now pin them so that they lie facing the front. As for the sarongs, more and more take the 'short cut' by having them sewn as skirts rather than folded in the traditional method. 'It's a waste, you know. If you put on weight, you can't use them any more! The batik prints and floral motifs were quite different in the old days, but they seem to be coming back again.

Quo Vadis?

Does he think enough is being done to keep the Peranakan culture alive? He tells me that he believes effort is being made, 'but the results are not that good. People do not want the old ways any more! Still, all is not doom and gloom. GT. still sees room for growth and expansion in Peranakan theatre. 'I will not be satisfied until there is a performing troupe — not necessarily a large one — to take shows to countries in this region! This is his 'fervent hope! As Singaporeans, he believes we can be genuinely cross-cultural and be successful in Malaysia and Indonesia. Maureen Lim

PERANAKAN STREET NAMES

Lee Kip Lee

Cheng Yan Place

Cheng Yan Place, between Queen Street and Victoria Street and not far from the Boom Boom Room, was named after a prominent merchant Lee Cheng Yan who came from Malacca where he was born in 1841. His firm, Lee Cheng Yan & Co. (Chop Chin Joo), commenced business in 1858 as commission agents and general traders in Telok Ayer Street. In ten years' time, Lee Cheng Yan & Co, became one of the leading Chinese companies dealing with Europeans.

Lee Cheng Yan took a great interest in all matters concerning the Chinese, and was on the Committee of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the Hong Joo Chinese Free School in Serangoon Road, the Gan Eng Seng Free School, the Toh Lam Chinese School in Armenian Street, the Chinese Advisory Board and the Po Leong Kuk Girls' Home. He was also a Justice of The Peace.

In 1883, on a trip to Glasgow and Birmingham with Tay Geok Teat, they became 'the first British-born Chinese from the Straits who had visited the British Isles for commercial reasons.' He lived with his extended family in Magenta Cottage at 153 Killiney Road which was the last house on the left at the River Valley Road end of Killiney Road. After he died in 1911, his son Lee Choon Guan became the sole proprietor of Lee Cheng Yan & Co.

Choon Guan Street

Choon Guan Street, near the Tanjong Pagar MRT Station and situated between Peck Seah Street and Maxwell Road, was named after Lee Choon Guan who was born in 1868 and was educated privately. He began his career as an assistant in his father's business of Lee Cheng Yan & Co where he acquired his training as a merchant and financier.

Following in his father's footsteps, 'he took a great interest in public affairs and in all movements for the social and educational advancement of the Straits Chinese community.'

Besides accepting appointments as a member of the Legislative Council and as a Justice of The Peace, he was also elected as a Municipal Commissioner in 1900. He served as a member of the Chinese Advisory Board and the Singapore Housing Commission among others. He was also the Chairman of the Chinese Commercial Bank, a Director of the Straits Steamship Co. and the South British Insurance Co. and the President of the Weekly Entertainment Club in Ann Siang Hill, whose members were composed of the elite of the Straits Chinese society. Many charitable and educational institutions also benefitted from Lee Choon Guan's generosity.

He lived in the splendour of his seaside mansion Mandalay Villa at 29 Amber Road where he frequently entertained the leading citizens of colonial Singapore. He died in 1924. Two of his grandsons, Lee Hood Yew and Lim Eng Kwan, and his great-grandson Alvin Lim, are members of our Association.

(Source: One Hundred Years History Of The Chinese In Singapore by Song Ong Siang, John Murray, London, 1923.)

NOTICEBOARD

DINNER TALK - FRIDAY 15 MAY 1998

Ms Lee Chor Lin, Senior Curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum, will give a talk on *Indonesian Batik*. She is the Curator in charge of the Southeast Asian Textile Collection of the Asian Civilisation Museum. She is also the author of *Batik* — *Creating an Identity*, a catalogue of the Batik Collection of the Museum.

The Dinner Talk will be held on Friday 15 May 1998 at the Pin Hsiang Restaurant, RELC Building, 30 Orange Grove Road. The prices are \$25 for Member and \$30 for Guest. Please complete the enclosed Reservation Form and return it to the Hon Secretary by 5 May 1998.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF 1995, 1996 & 1997 ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE

Photographs taken at the 1995, 1996 & 1997 Annual Dinner & Dance will be on display outside the Pin Hsiang Restaurant on 15 May 1998 for you to place your orders.

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in a nostalgic journey into
the rich material culture
of the Peranakans

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> Els Sanders-Fias Telephone No. 835 4158

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BAJU KEBAYA

FOR EMBROIDERED KEBAYA AND MODERN CHEONGSAM PLEASE CONTACT:

STEVEN ONG TELEPHONE: 03-775 0892 email: sjbong@hotmail.com

NOTICEBOARD (continued)

INCREASE IN LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEE TO \$150-00 WITH EFFECT FROM 1 SEPTEMBER 1998

In view of our increased activities and the consequent rise in the Association's administration costs the Committee has decided that the unrealistic Life Membership Fee of \$5000 will be revised upwards to \$150-00 with effect from 1st September 1998.