

THE PERANAKAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1998

MITA (P) 017/08/98

DISTRIBUTED FREE

Rasa Peranakan

THE ASSOCIATION'S CHARITY FAIR

14th NOVEMBER 1998

The fifteen members of the Organising Committee are all set and ready to go for the opening of the Fair by Dr Wee Kim Wee on Saturday 14 November 1998 at 12 pm. This fair aims to raise money for the Building Fund of the Apex Harmony Lodge, a home for sufferers of senile dementia.

The committee has planned for you a delectable choice of Peranakan food from twelve stalls which include a Tok Panjang Stall consisting of home-cooked specialties plus a Nyonya Poh Piah stall.

They have arranged for the first time to have under one roof, offerings from four well-known Peranakan Restaurants – The Blue Ginger with their own *durian chendol*, *ice kachang* and *kueh pie ti*, Ivins with their mouth-watering *mee siam*, The Nonya & Baba with their *kueh pisang*, and Chilli Padi with their menu for you to choose from. In addition there will also be stalls selling *otak otak*, *onde onde*, *achar*, *bubor udang*, *mua chee*, rose syrup drinks and your favourite *ice cream potong*.

There will be eight craft stalls showcasing various Peranakan handicrafts, *batik* material, *sarong* and jewellery. Students of Mrs Bebe Seet-Wong will be demonstrating the art of beading *kasut manek* and handbags, whilst Mrs Els Sanders-Fias (a Belgian) will demonstrate the sewing of beaded tassels and decorative fringes.

Not only that! Mr Peter Wee of Katong Antique House will have a Good-As-New Jumble Sale stall where Malacca coffee powder and *kueh-kueh* will also be available.

For entertainment, you can participate in the Musicathon by requesting for songs to be sung by Singapore's most famous Peranakan duo – G T Lye & Sally Gan or have your photographs taken with them.

We would take this opportunity to express our thanks to Singapore Pools and our other sponsors for their kind donations, to Great World City for letting us use their Atrium without charge and to Chilli Padi Restaurant for providing the lunch for our VIPs.

All of us in the Food & Craft Fair Committee have



enjoyed putting this event together for all of you. So, mark the date in your calendars and bring your families to have fun with us at the Fair, which will run till 8 pm.

Shia Ailee

THE NIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

In the past, the Peranakan community, ever mindful of their Chinese ancestry, observed the festivals diligently. The members of our Association may not have celebrated the Mid-Autumn festival as their forefathers did, but on the 4th of October at the Boom Boom Room, they were ready to party!

The event attracted 148 members and their friends, who, upon arrival, were immediately placed into teams with such colourful names as *Bo Kia Si*, *Bo Pian*, *Bo Cheng*, *Bo Tua*, *Bo Suay*.

After the nyonya buffet, while guests munched on mooncakes and pomelo, a pair of professional performers played out a Cantonese opera based on a Chinese legend.

Then the fun and games began.

There was a line-up of best-dressed ladies, picked from the floor by appointed talent-scouts. No gowns and swim-suits for this contest!

Instead, the audience was treated to attractive *sarong kebayas* and *samfoos*.

This parade was followed by another, to pick the Princess for the evening. The teams swung into action, each feverishly dressing up a team member in the outlandish costumes provided by the Boom Boom Room. The result was a hilarious line-up of the (male) Princesses Chichak Puteh, Gerdebak-Gerdebuk, and others with equally enticing names. The men under all that powder and weird headgear took the opportu-

nity to really strut their stuff. The more they hammed it up, the more they simpered and *gelek-ed*, the more the crowd loved it. Team-mates on the sidelines were encouraged to cheer and wolf-whistle. The eventual winner, Princess Kek Sim, had nothing to grieve for; he won a ticket to Bangkok, donated by Newsman Travel.

There were more smiling faces at the lucky draw, as some walked off with attractive porcelain nyonyaware donated by Peter Wee of Katong Antique House. Antiques they may not have been, but they were certainly fine replicas.

It was good to see the younger set there as well, although we would welcome more. Members of the Youth group also played their part, helping to serve at dinner and later, mceeing the show.

Music for the evening was provided by a live band, and there was time for the dancers to show off the rhumbas, rock n roll and of course, the joget.

What a way to sweat off their dinner!

I don't think anyone there saw the beautiful full moon that night, but I don't think anyone missed it.

Maureen Lim

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PUBLISHED BY The Peranakan Association
Raffles City PO Box 1640,
Singapore 911755, Telephone: 2550704

PRINTED BY
Chin Long Printing Pte Ltd, 9 Kallang Place, #02-07
Singapore 339154

MITA (P) 017/08/98

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The Winner:
Princess Kek Sim



Talk by Dr Jürgen Rudolph

At a Dinner/Talk on Friday 9th October 1998 Dr Jürgen Rudolph, who is a Research & Programme Officer with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and also the author of *Reconstructing Identities - A Social History of the Babas of Singapore*, recounted how his attention was first drawn to the unique material culture of the Babas when he was shown some items of fine Nyonya porcelain, intricate Peranakan beadwork and Straits Chinese furniture. In the course of his interest in these indigenised 'Chinese' items he discovered that they actually consisted of multiple cultural influences from South China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Great Britain.

To obtain an impression of a total view of these identities Dr Rudolph spoke extensively to people, visited Peranakan architectural heritage sites, participated in Peranakan festivities and attended Baba plays.

His comprehensive book not only provides a clear and complete history of the Singapore Babas but is also a timely guide to young Babas in search of their identity and heritage.

It will be available at a special price to members of The Peranakan Association who may wish to make their reservations with the Hon. Secretary.

Marlene Foo



Rumah Baba : Life in a Peranakan House

Book Launch 29th November 1998

After two years of painstaking research this milestone book, authored by Association members Mr Peter Lee and Miss Jennifer Chen, will be launched at the National Museum on Sunday 29th November 1998 at 10 am.

Peter Lee, as head of the research and information sub-committee volunteered his services to the museum for this project on behalf of the Association, to fulfil our organisation's Mission Statement 'to preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture and traditions through cultural, social and literary activities'. The book launch will be held in conjunction with a Peranakan craft fair at the museum from 11 am to 4 pm. All members are welcome to visit. •

PERANAKAN — The Youth Group — DANCE, DANCE, DANCE



At any Peranakan party, music and dancing are often the highlights of the event. The catchy rhythms never fail to entice Babas and Nyonyas onto the dance floor, where they move gracefully to the beat. These dancers bring a sense of joy and celebration to the occasion, effortlessly switching between *ronggeng*, chacha, waltz and rock n' roll.

Although we admire our parents' grace and style on the dance floor, very few youths are seen joining the elders in this joyous expression. Most of us are not familiar with these dance steps, as we grew up in the 1970s, when Disco fever was at its peak.

In August, the Youth Group, together with Dance Circle Studios, organised a course of 10 lessons to teach popular social dances. Attendance was very encouraging, with a good mix of members, young and old. Everyone enjoyed the lively teaching style of Filipino instructor Jojo, and the rhythmic steps of Dzoel's *ronggeng* class. Mimi, a new member, says, 'These classes have been so much fun! I hope that others will join soon too, in time for the next big party! Do look out for the next dance course!

In addition, a group of us have been practising hard for our dance debut at this November's Dinner & Dance. The youth are exploring the concept of 'fusion' music and dance where movements and sounds from our Asian roots are combined with modern steps, rhythms and stylised costumes into one harmonious piece.

Lending us their choreographic expertise are youth member Richard Tan, together with Richard Chia, and the staff at Dance Circle Studios. To depict the different moods of the choreography, we have learnt to be supple, graceful and sometimes powerful in our movements.

Jocelyne, one of our dancers, remarked, 'I was initially very *kaku*, but with great motivation from our instructors, I am now more *lembut*. I never dreamed I would be doing these graceful dance movements!'

Richard Tan ends with these encouraging words: 'The Youth Group has the potential to take our roots to new routes, while retaining our Peranakan heritage. All forms of artistic expression start from a bold first step. To all our youth: *jangan segan, toksa malu-malu*. This is the time for us to come forward, to unite in music and dance. Let's grow together, and usher our Peranakan heritage into the new millenium!'

Heather Ong

Lee Kip Lee — 76 golden years

'Looking back over the years, I can honestly say that I have no regrets.'

This enviable sentiment was expressed by Mr Lee Kip Lee. In an interview at his home in Binjai Rise, accounts of his youth and family life fleshed out the man we know as the President of The Peranakan Association.

He attributes his very happy life to his wife, Elizabeth. It's a tale right out of the pages of a romantic novel. Not for him the age-old tradition of a matched marriage. Theirs was a patient-nurse romance, a whirlwind courtship and a marriage all within 8 months! In December 1954, when he underwent an operation, little could he know then that the silver lining was the young Elizabeth Hong, a nurse in the hospital. We can presume that the recuperation must have been swift and pleasant, culminating in their wedding in August 1955. 'The bonus was that my wife had a close relationship with my mother, and she has contributed greatly to my happiness by her love and care for the children and for my parents.'

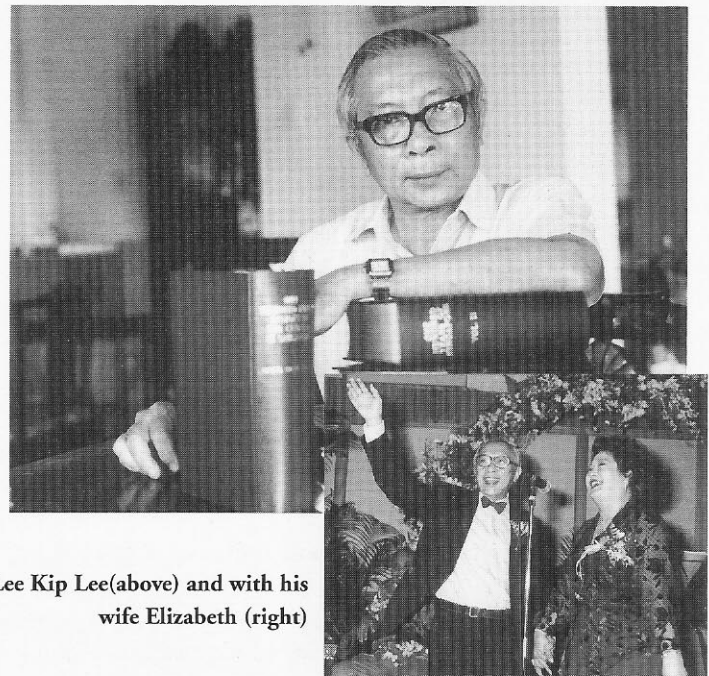
But to go back to the very beginning, we will need to look at the privileged family of Lee Chim Huk and his wife Tan Guat Poh, from a well-established Malacca family. (Her brother was Tun Tan Cheng Lock)

Kip Lee was their elder son and the second of five children. He studied in the Anglo-Chinese School, first at Coleman Street, then at Cairnhill Road. His early childhood was spent in an Emerald Hill house, with a host of relatives and friends; at thirteen, he moved into a seaside bungalow in Amber Road. Those were lazy, hazy days at the beach, learning to catch worms for fishing and playing with the kampong boys from across the road. He remembers drives along the Siglap/Bedok coastal roads in the family car, and going every month to the Padang to watch the very colonial Beating of the Retreat by the British Military Regiments, complete with a bugle call at the close.

Many more such memories are recounted vividly and with gentle nostalgia in his book *Amber Sands — A Boyhood Memoir*, commissioned and published in 1995 as part of the Heritage series for secondary school students.

In Raffles College, he chose to read Economics, thinking that it would be useful in the family stevedoring business, operating since the 1920s. At the same time, he did not discount journalism as a possible career. He kept a diary to record his thoughts and activities. His uncle, Lee Chim Tuan, a founder-director of The Malayan Tribune, had plans to have his nephew work in the paper. But in his third year of college, his studies were disrupted by the Japanese invasion of Singapore.

After the war, in 1945 and at the age of 23 years old, he joined his father in managing the family business. That put an end to his earlier aspirations of becoming a journalist. Says Kip Lee, 'My father had great trust and confidence in me and entrusted me with the running of the business. As private secretary to my uncle, I also learnt how to deal with trustees and lawyers.'



Lee Kip Lee (above) and with his wife Elizabeth (right)

In 1988, he decided to call it a day, and wound up the company.

Asked if he found himself at a loose end after retirement, he was quick to assure me that he had prepared himself for that. With a little smile, he said that he had had a trustworthy manager, and so 'I did not miss the office at all!'

Brought up by a father who believed that exercise was important to good health, the boy Kip Lee often went swimming. Later he played tennis at Raffles College and then at Farrer Park or the Ceylon Sports Club. But he always resisted golf, despite the fact that he had ample opportunity, his father being a founder member of Singapore Island Country Club. Says he, 'To me, golf was a glorified form of billiards; and I knew how one could get addicted and have no time for the family.'

Today, his regular form of exercise is to take 45-minute walks daily, except on Sundays, in the Botanical Gardens. These walks have turned up some regular *kakis* (no pun intended) with interests in common.

Other leisure activities include writing letters to friends all over the world and listening to music. 'I like jazz, both traditional and swing, especially the Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington and Count Basie Orchestras. My favourite singers are The Andrew Sisters, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. I have a limited love of classical music, and can appreciate it better if there is a melody. And the only opera I enjoy is *The Mikado*; I like the songs and the lyrics. It was also my father's favourite.'

But his major pleasure comes from reading. His well-stocked library with its floor-to-ceiling shelves (complete with sliding ladder!) gives testimony to this. He attributes his addiction to the written word to childhood influences. His father was also a reader. 'He literally read the dictionary every morning!' His mother, educated in the Malacca Convent,

ordered books from England to supplement the meagre choice available in the local bookshops in pre-war days. Offhand, he rattled off the names of those establishments: Ensign, Mohammad Dulfakir and Peter Chong. (Remember them? Then you certainly qualify as a senior citizen.)

Accounts of World War II are his particular interest, and he collects books on the history of Singapore and Malaysia. He has three versions of the battle in Singapore — British, Australian and Japanese. This does not mean that he is not abreast of current issues; often, his views can be found in the Forum pages of the local daily.

'My love of poetry and English Literature was encouraged by my English teachers in school, and a lecturer at Raffles College, Mr Graham Hough.

I occasionally still read poetry and Shakespeare's plays. As for performance art, I enjoy local plays very much — local themes by local playwrights. I don't like anything too abstract.

As for Peranakan plays, I am glad to see changes in both the content and presentation. In a recent Singapore production, English words were interspersed with patois, costumes were modern, events did not just take place in the drawing room and Iskandar Ismail composed music especially for the play.

The man admits to being a thoroughly-spoilt Baba in the area of cooking and housekeeping. He recalls with amusement that 'when the family stayed in England, everyone got so mad with me because immediately after dinner, I would *angkat kaki* and settle down in the sitting room without lending a hand in the clearing-up!'

And like the typical Baba, he also knows what he enjoys eating. Without hesitation, he rattles off his favourite mouth-watering dishes — *ikan goreng chili* and *ayam goreng chili*, an unusual dish called *ayam mkabo*, *babi chingchang* in *tow-yu* gravy, and what he had a lot of during the Occupation years — a simple fried egg with black *tow-yu* and green chili on rice. How fortunate for him that wife Elizabeth 'is an excellent cook' and is able to satisfy his tastebuds. She also learnt two exotic dishes from his aunt — Nyonya *popiah* and *nasi ulam*. However, being Cantonese herself, the family has its fair share of Cantonese cuisine.

Kip Lee says he has a good relationship with his children, although he thinks their mother has wielded the strongest influence in their lives. 'She was first to support them in whatever they did, although in the end, both of us supported them in their career choices! All four sons have chosen to live with their parents, although Dick is often abroad and Andrew is based in USA. John and Peter work in Singapore; Peter is a committee member in The Peranakan Association and an editor of the quarterly newsletter. 'He is part of the new scene wherein the younger members have been very supportive. In fact, I was reluctant to take over the helm from George Tay in March 1996 because I felt that one old man should not be succeeded by another old man, but I accepted the position when I persuaded some younger members to form the committee.

During my term as President, I am happy to see achievement and progress. We are able to get advertisements in the newsletter, and our annual Dinner-and-Dance is increasingly successful. At this event, I am particularly pleased to see the ladies wearing their traditional *kebaya*s. It is a great pleasure

to note that we are catering to different groups in the association. For example, those who attend the social events are not the same ones who support the dinner talks.

I look upon the Association as a heritage association. It is heartening to know that our culture is still of interest to the young; many are choosing aspects of it for their academic exercises or study projects. As long as young Peranakans are still interested in their culture, there is hope that it will survive!

Maureen Lim

We have had a good start with the Youth Group and I would like to see our young members more forthcoming and becoming more active. In time to come, they will run the association better than I can because they will be more in tune with what is required of the Association.

I believe my family is the first Peranakan family to have traced its roots in China, thanks to the efforts of my son, Peter. While studying in Beijing, (a Peranakan lad who is also a Chinese scholar!) he went to Amoy armed only with a family document from me. Coincidentally, the hotel he stayed in had a desk to help overseas Chinese searching for their ancestry. He located the old family house; its authenticity was confirmed by the family register of births. But it was only ten years later that he led a group of family members to visit the site. Of five Lee brothers from the Eng Choon district of Hokkien province, only one sailed to Malacca, thus beginning our branch of the family. From Lee Kan came Lee Chan Bee, then Lee Quee Lim, my grandfather Lee Keng Kiat, and my father Lee Chim Huk. This makes me a sixth-generation Baba!

Well-heeled Nyonyas

A fashion-minded nyonya can put a dainty foot forward with a new range of genuine, hand-sewn beaded sandals. Gino Singh, the quick-stepping owner of 'shoetique' Ricci No, has gone to the heart of Malacca to get the *manek-manek* fronts with typical Peranakan motifs for an appealing collection of high-heeled mules and sling-back sandals.

To the discerning bibik, the *manek-manek* beads are not as *halus* (refined) or *potong* (faceted) as they should be. But the texture of beaded embroidery, the artistic colour schemes and the floral or geometric patterns will win the hearts of many. Yes, those famous seven dwarfs are also included in Ricci No's album of shoe-fronts.

What set the nyonya beading apart from the array of Indian or Chinese beading is the sophistication, sometimes the whimsy, of generations of cross-culturalisation of the Peranakans. I find the components — the shapely stiletto heels, the quaint platform sole, the variety of leather, shades and binding — especially suited to modern taste.

The important aspect is that a demand for the shoes will sustain the tradition of beading. As it stands, the small fragile glass beads originally from Bohemia are expensive and hard to find. Even the canvas and frame for doing the embroidery are disappearing from haberdashery shops and

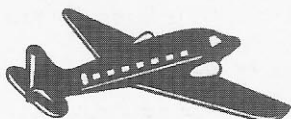
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Peranakan homes. A pair of shoe fronts in Singapore is said to cost as much as \$500. Ricci No's completed shoes cost between \$250-\$350.

Gino, who has been following the search for the Singapore Dress over the last decade, believes that the nyonya beaded sandal will compliment the elegant look of the latest Miss Joaquim orchid motif in clothes (to be featured at this year's annual dinner and dance).

Several enterprising nyonys have started workshops for traditional beading. Miss Therese Thompson of Successful Gift Ideas is conducting free classes on traditional beaded footwear, purses, end-plates for pillows and bolsters, and all things decorative. She also supplies the original *manek potong* in more than 50 new colours, fabric frames, needles, thread, wax, and easy-to-follow designs in computerised form.

You can create your colour schemes and motifs or borrow unusual embroidery or tapestry designs that can be scanned by computer into a pattern for effortless sewing. Page her at 92027701 or e-mail: sgideas@mbox3.singnet.com.sg

Mrs Bebe Seet-Wong of The Craft Cottage is also conducting nyonya beadwork classes for beginners to advanced students. Her workshop provides the new and antique beads and the accompanying essentials for sewing. Her telephone numbers are: 7743652/98162177/7747206.

Once you have accomplished sewing your shoe fronts, track down to Ricci No and have shoes made in your choice of leather and heels. That's chic to the point! (Ricci No is at #03-11 in Orchard Plaza. Opening hours are 11am-7.30pm)

Cynthia Wee-Hoefer



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Thomas Tan

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 Mr Ang Tai Wee David
 Mrs Ang Theresa
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 Ms Chen Pee She Patsy
 Mrs Cheong Madeleine
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 Mr Chua Alan
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 Ms Chua Poh Choo Lucy
 Mr Ee Chin Hock
 Ms Gan Poh Choo
 Ms Goh Gaik Choo Peggy
 Ms Goh Su Lin
 Mr Goh Tony
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 Ms Koh Beng Neo Ivy
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 Mr Tan Siew Lee Bob
 Mr Tan Sim Jin Arthur
 Ms Tan Suyin Christina
 Mr Tan Tee Suan Derek
 Mr Tan Teow Beng
 Ms Tan Yak Kiang Corrine
 Mr Tan Yan Oh Tony
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 Mrs Tay Rosalind
 Mr Teo Kwang Chwee Billy
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 Mr Wong Soong Chee Mark
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday 14th November

Rasa Peranakan Musicathon, Food & Craft Fair

Great World City Atrium, 12 pm to 8 pm

In aid of the Apex Harmony Lodge Building Fund

Saturday 21st November

Sulam-sulam Peranakan

98th Anniversary & Annual Dinner & Dance

Grand Hyatt Hotel, 715 pm

Sunday 29th November

Launch of Rumah Baba : Life in a Peranakan House

A book project by the Singapore History Museum,
The Peranakan Association and Hitachi.

National Museum, 10 am

A Peranakan Food & Craft Fair and Cultural Performances
will also be held, 11 am to 4 pm

Friday 4th December to Sunday 6th December

11th Baba Convention, Malacca

Registration Forms are available from The Hon. Secretary,
Tel 2550704. Package deal: Single \$198, Twin \$128/pax,
Triple \$118/pax, includes return transfers by VIP Coach,
breakfast and 2 nights at City Bayview Hotel. Convention
Registration Fee RM250 (pay in Malacca) includes
Opening Dinner, Seminar with Lunch and Tea,
Convention Dinner, and Farewell Lunch.

Congratulations

We extend our congratulations to our member and
former Hon. Secretary Mrs Anamah Tan on her being awarded
The Public Service Star and on her appointment as a Justice
of The Peace.

Life Membership Fee

In response to numerous requests from our members,
the Management Committee has agreed to defer the
implementation of the increased Life Membership Fee of \$150
to a later date. The matter will be reviewed at the end of
December 1998.

Memories of the East

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