

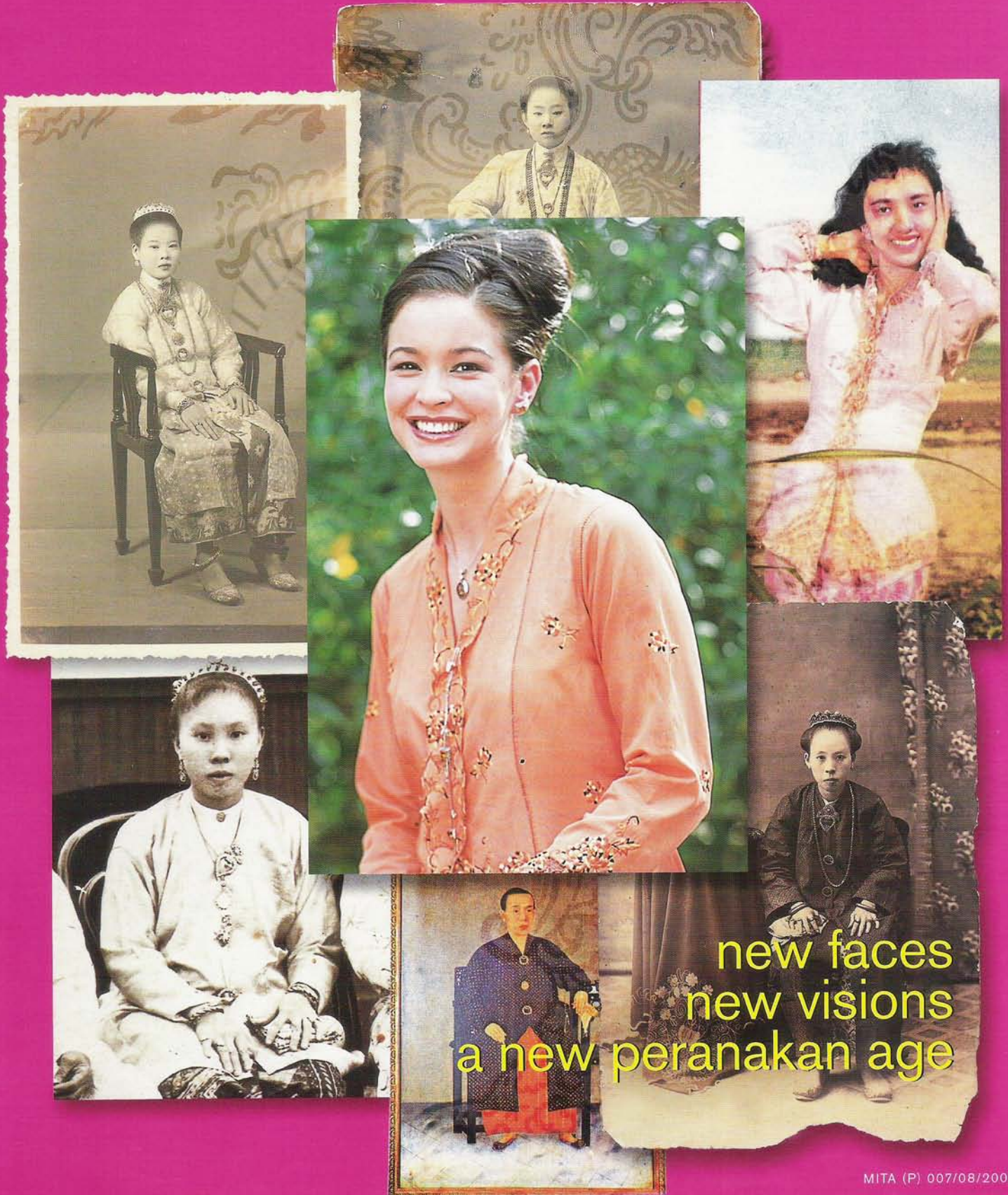


THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

the peranakan

october-december 2000

quarterly newsletter of the peranakan association www.peranakan.org.sg



new faces
new visions
a new peranakan age

EDITORIAL

The Dawn of A New Peranakan Age

BY LEE KIP LEE

As we celebrate the one hundredth year of the founding of our Association our thoughts, at the dawn of a new Peranakan Age, must dwell on the future and on the plans we have to fulfil the objectives of our Mission Statement "to preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture and traditions through cultural, social and literary activities." In that respect, we are gearing ourselves to accommodate the expectations of the young by changing with the times so that they will recognise

The Peranakan Association as being vibrant and relevant to their needs. We are moving in that direction thanks to the efforts of our younger members serving in our main committee and subcommittees and who, being in tune with the requirements of our youth, have succeeded in eliciting greater participation from them. On the cultural side we have drawn up an exciting and ambitious programme of activities for 2001 including our involvement with the Asian Civilisations Museum in connection with the opening of their Peranakan Legacy Exhibition at their New Peranakan Galleries. We have been invited by the Asian Civilisations Museum to take part in the events connected with the opening of their Peranakan Legacy Exhibition at which we shall set up Peranakan food and crafts stalls with entertainment and demonstrations of Peranakan cooking and dressing, culminating in a heritage tour of Malacca. At the same time our Cultural Development Group have plans in March 2001 to stage a Melaka Wayang Peranakan in Singapore with a full cast from Malacca to be followed, at the close of our Centennial Celebrations in August 2001, by a Peranakan Bangsawan.* We also intend to organise, as a community service and also in an endeavour to create a greater awareness of the Peranakan presence in Singapore, "An Introduction to the Peranakans" Roadshows on Educational Tours to schools and other locations. On the literary side we have plans to publish a Peranakan Dictionary as well as a Commemorative Centennial Book. (continued on p.2)

All these activities will give us a good start for the New Millennium which we must sustain by a continuous effort to induce more of the youth to come forward by inviting them to contribute their services. For it is to them that the next century belongs. * Bangsawan was originally the term for Malay opera troupes, of which the Babas and Nyoyas were such avid fans that they eventually formed their own Peranakan Bangsawan

Editorial An indication of the serious interest readers take in any journal is their response to the articles printed in it.

In the early days of "The Peranakan," when it was "The Peranakan Association Newsletter," we were greatly encouraged to have received letters to the editor on diverse matters ranging from "why only a minority of Chinese adopted the local Malay culture" to "dishes of the past and their recipes and how to wear the kain panjang," to suggestions for topics for our dinner talks and tours to neighbouring countries; to an enquiry regarding the possibility of identifying ourselves as "Peranakan" in our Identity Cards; to a discussion of the psychology of "Adat;" and to congratulations and expressions of delight on the quality of the contents of our newsletter. However, because that trickle of letters has dried up, we are now calling upon readers to participate more in the affairs of this Newsletter by writing to the Editor to provide us with your feedback so that we can improve our service as a conduit of information between members and the editorial board. Thus we shall be made aware of your expectations as well as our shortcomings. For example, it would be such an interesting voyage of discovery for all of us if, after reading the article on the history of the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), the descendants or family friends of the former Presidents and office bearers of the SCBA and of the pioneers after whom some of our streets are named, would respond with their own memories of these personalities. Or, look into your old family photo albums and send us photos illustrating your narration of the people in the pictures and the significance of the occasion when the photographs were taken, be they studio portraits or candid camera shots.

Will you please set the ball rolling by writing to us at Raffles City P O Box 1640 Singapore 911755? ■

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THE PHOENIX ARISES

a new logo, a new spirit

Although there is much to celebrate in commemorating one hundred years, The Peranakan Association looks into the future with the launch of a brand new logo, expressing the exuberance, optimism and unique cultural heritage of our community.

The old logo, of four linked arms, together with the motto "United Forever", shared the sentiment and style of the early years of Singapore's independence, and perhaps exuded the nationalistic concerns of the Association at that time. More than thirty years have passed since the Association changed its name from the Straits Chinese British Association, and the old logo no longer reflects the concerns of the Peranakan community today.

With the mission statement, "to preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture and traditions through cultural, social and literary activities", the new logo conveys the new cultural aims of the Association. The general committee worked through several months to refine and adopt the new logo. It was firstly agreed that the logo should be a contemporary, dynamic interpretation of a traditional symbol, to express the Association's commitment to the past and to the future.

The phoenix is an imperial symbol favoured by the Peranakans, and together with the peony and qilin, can be

found in the decorative schemes on porcelain, furniture, jewellery, costume, among others. In Chinese mythology the phoenix can symbolise the southern cardinal point; it is also the insignia of the empress. Together with the peony, the phoenix represents romantic love. In the Western tradition,

the phoenix symbolises rebirth and regeneration, being the mythical creature that is reborn from the ashes of a great conflagration. The brief was given to *Equinox Art & Design*, which sponsored the design of the logo, and the company presented several alternatives.

Finally, a dynamic logo in a vibrant red was selected, depicting a soaring phoenix within a lobed, rectangular panel derived from a

motif typically found on carved "brown-and-gold" furniture, its swooping, fluid tail forming an almost circular shape, symbolising continuity and dynamism. Contemporary and dynamic, yet traditional and complex - this symbol will hopefully express the multi-faceted challenges of being Peranakan and Singaporean in the new millennium. ■



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

The Peranakan Association Committee 2000/2001

(front row from left): Lim Geok Huay (Hon. Secretary),
Peter Wee (1st Vice President), Lee Kip Lee (President),
Thomas Tan (2nd Vice President), Ann Chiang (Hon. Treasurer)
(back row from left): Richard Tan (Cultural Development), Bebe
Seet-Wong (Social), Irene Ooi,
Isaac Chan (Youth Group), Maureen Lim (Membership),
Peter Lee (Asst. Hon. Secretary/Research & Information).
Absent: Alan Koh (Centennial Celebrations)





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The Face of the New Peranakan

BY NOREEN CHAN, HEATHER ONG AND PETER LEE

Neo-Peranakan Vivien Tan leads a new breed of bright young Peranakans



Photographed by
Chris Cypert

The image of a languorous woman inviting viewers to “catch me on Showbuzz” fills the television screen several times a week. As host of one of channel five’s most popular entertainment programmes, the effortlessly beautiful Vivien Tan has become a permanent star in Singapore’s media constellation. Her self-confidence, good looks, and natural style give her a relatively brighter sparkle, making her one of the most contemporary, cosmopolitan television personalities in the English-language channels. It may come as a surprise to many that Vivien is a sixth generation Singapore Peranakan.

Her mother is Australian, and her father is a pure Peranakan, who is a descent of Chia Hood Theam (1863–1936).

Vivien spent her childhood in a prewar terrace house on Cairnhill Road. Both her parents are immensely proud of the Peranakan heritage.

“Being raised in Singapore this was the only culture I knew. I probably spoke Malay before English, and grew up with traditional Chinese New Years, and visits to the temples with grandmother,” remembers Vivien.

She left Singapore at age seven and followed her family to Hong Kong where she remained till she moved to Melbourne to study at the RMIT. She then moved to Singapore and became a host of “Showbuzz”. She has also recently started hosting her own radio programme on Power 98 and now flies to Hong Kong once a month to film “The Juice”, an R&B show on Channel V. As to how this fits in with her heritage, she says, “I would like to learn more about the Peranakan culture, and I hope to pass this rich legacy on to the next generation.” The greatest Peranakan influence in Vivien’s life is her grandmother, kebaya-clad Madam Elsie Chia Sek Neo. Left a young widow by the war, she showed a quiet strength of character and gentle nature that Vivien greatly admires. The sprightly 89 year-old has maintained close ties with all her family, and is to this day a hands-on mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. One of the main draws of Singapore is that it is “where grandma is,” the centre of gravity of a large and close-knit extended family that Vivien is proud to be part of. ■



Clockwise:

CNY at
Padang
Terbakar.

Kids on Tiger

Mr & Mrs Tan
Jin Hoe

Macho,
youngest sis
and Mrs Yeo

Family photos
courtesy of
Roy G B Tan

New Expressions

The Future is Culture

The Association's Cultural Groups get ready for tomorrow's challenges. It is the dawn of another Peranakan golden age. Never has such enthusiasm and talent come together at such a high level to create a hive of cultural activity. Growing from strength to strength, The Peranakan Association's Cultural Development Group under the helm of committee member Baba Richard Tan has initiated a record series of happenings for the centennial celebrations. The group has refined the Association's mission statement to create a more focused one of their own:

"To promote the Peranakan Culture and Heritage through the media of music, song and dance. And through innovative drama and other unconventional theatrical expressions, to preserve and rediscover the old traditional values and style; and yet ensuring it's relevance in the age of Information Technology, so as to take the rich culture and heritage into the next Millennium."

Inaugurated in April 2000, it has vibrant and dedicated volunteers who are all committed to work together to revive our colourful heritage and the dynamic determination of our forefathers to live in harmony with all local communities, fostering racial harmony. "It is about going back rediscovering our roots and understanding our past that we can then venture out to take on the challenges as we take on new 'Routes' into the future and the world," says Baba Richard. The group has worked closely to promote Peranakan-themed events with The Singapore



The Young Models and Dance Troupe



History Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum. It is of course also heavily involved in the Association's centennial celebrations. In 2001, the group will be staging more dramatic plays and events with the help of various cultural and heritage organisations. In the pipeline - an educational Peranakan Roadshow that will travel to schools and private organisations interested in our Peranakan culture and lifestyle.

At the Association's Grand Centennial Celebrations, members and their friends can enjoy the exciting contributions of the various new cultural groups.

THE PERANAKAN VOICES The newly formed Peranakan Voices are just over six months old and already they are a unique twenty-strong group, whose number is still increasing by the week. They are an enthusiastic and dedicated group of Babas and Nyonyas who love to sing their hearts out! Under the artistic guidance of Choir Director "Bibik" Babes Conde, they have so far been most selective in their repertoire and style, ensuring high performing standards.

THE YOUNG MODELS AND DANCE TROUPE These are our young, vibrant and dynamic stage performers who are quick at learning fast dance movements and not shy to 'lenggang lenggok' or just to strike an elegant pose on the catwalk! Varying from the youngest four year old performer to teenagers,

and right up to the "young at heart" professionals, this unique combination of talents is set to make waves in all our future performing arts and cultural events.

BABACAPPELLA & THE BABA SHOP QUARTET Babacappella, the first ever Peranakan cappella choir which first performed two years ago at the 98th Anniversary Dinner & Dance, regroups with nine experienced singers who, because of their busy schedules have had limited time to rehearse under the direction of Baba John Lee, who also arranged the songs. An offshoot of Babacappella, and maintaining the same joy of puns, is the Baba Shop Quartet, a Peranakan Barber Shop Quartet, comprising the male members of Babacappella, which will present a series of nostalgic all-time Peranakan sing-along favourites.

THE ANAK WAYANG This is an all-Peranakan-Association-member group, a combination of the young and old, the new and inexperienced together with our seasoned actors and actresses, who are all just waiting in the wings to come out! They are preparing for next year's Wayang Peranakan under the artistic direction of Baba Richard Tan, who is currently planning to stage a new work which Baba William Gwee has been commissioned to write. And with the roles still open for consideration, an audition will be held early next year!

Anyone interested please contact us! We shall be most delighted to meet you. There will also be other short skits and smaller productions to be staged in the near future. So, there is plenty of room for potential actors! Also, look out for information about next year's drama workshops for beginners in our next newsletter. ■



The Anak Wayang



Babacappella & The Baba Shop Quartet



The Peranakan Voices

PEOPLE

A PERANAKAN ABROAD:

Ong Choon Bee: Returns for his 80th Birthday

BY MAUREEN LIM

He shares the same birthday as Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and he jokingly claims that he is the more senior.

On 16th September 1920, Ong Choon Bee was born to Ong Seow Sian and his wife, Chia Siew Lay, youngest daughter of Chia Hood Theam, then compradore of The Mercantile Bank in Singapore. Choon Bee grew up with a host of cousins at "Rosedale" the family home along Killiney Road. There were also sunny seaside days with cousin Chia Chin Siang (on mother's side) at the family bungalow in Pasir Panjang, and days roaming Katong with cousin Ong Chew Bee (on father's side) who lived in St. Patrick's Road. Because his father worked in Sarawak, the boy Choon Bee had his early primary education at St. Thomas School in Kuching and spent intermittent periods in Singapore. His secondary education was

occupation. Once again, his experience with automobiles paid off. Through a friend, Oon Beng Soon, Choon Bee found employment as a lubrications supervisor with Shell Petroleum Company. This meant being in charge of the training programmes at Shell service stations to equip personnel with "hands on" expertise in the repair and maintenance of motorcars, and also having to travel extensively throughout Peninsula Malaya at least once a month.

When liquid petroleum gas entered the market, he was transferred to the retail sector, to supply industrial gas to factories in Jurong. By the time he retired in the 1970s, he had earned the position of senior staff member. His love affair with golf



Right: Ong Chuan Bee with Mrs Wee Kim Wee

Left: Our very own "First Lady", Elizabeth Lee, with the former President of Singapore, Dr Wee Kim Wee and Mrs Wee

completed at Raffles Institution, where he competed in inter-school tennis competitions. His training in motor mechanics stood him in good stead during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. He was able to find employment as a purchasing agent for large motor vehicles. At times, he was required to make trips across the causeway to deal in timber. It was a tumultuous period in our country's history, and, like many civilians at that time, his life was a "pretty dangerous and haphazard affair".

Home was then at grandfather Ong Soon Tee's house in Tong Watt Road. After the Japanese surrender, it was time for a more settled

had begun many years earlier. Now he took the opportunity to surround himself with all things golf; he joined Pan West in Liat Towers as manager. Singapore Island Country Club was his usual "playground", where he participated in competitions. At his best, he had a 7 handicap.

You would expect this senior gentleman to "drive" into his twilight years with few surprises along the way. And you would be wrong. Even he did not expect to find himself on Hawaiian shores. His wife, Margaret Chua Sui Gek, a school teacher, and their only child Alan, played a large part in the move. Alan was with Hyatt Hotel in Oahu when his parents decided to emigrate. Sadly, within a

year of their move, Margaret was diagnosed with cancer and passed away soon after. When Alan opened three Chinese restaurants in Maui, Choon Bee went with him. His culinary skills were limited even then, so he helped as receptionist and cashier. He fondly recalls the elaborate Chinese New Year celebrations at the restaurants, complete with firecrackers and lion dancers. Diners even booked a year ahead for the following New Year. Alan is now back in Asia, in the hotel industry in Kuala Lumpur, but Choon Bee has chosen to continue living in Honolulu because “life is good there”. He has not experienced any social nor racial discrimination. And he is not alone. His grandson, Shang Yi, studying at the University of Honolulu, currently lives with grandpa. His grand-daughter, Michelle, studies in Santa Barbara, and visits when she can. He has seen some changes. Ala Moana Centre, which used to be owned by a Japanese company, now belongs to a mainland group and has expanded. The small, family-owned businesses along the beachfront have been replaced by brand-name boutiques and large hotels. And there seem to be more tourists from Europe.

His daily routine goes something like this. He rises early, around 5 am. At about 6.30 am, he takes a fifteen-minute early morning walk; his apartment is close enough to Waikiki Beach for him to stroll along the tourist strip and have his McDonald's coffee before the tourists emerge. It's back home for breakfast, before venturing out again later in the morning for some shopping, super-marketing and lunch before an afternoon rest. As mentioned earlier, his repertoire as a cook is rather limited, “cook to survive” is how he puts it. But he can produce a mean dish of stir-fried eggplant and chicken with dried chilli, or chicken and beansprouts in Korean chilli sauce. Or, better still, he just pops into his favourite Korean restaurant. (Notice that, like a true *peranakan*, he likes his food pedas.) In the evenings, he reads, preferably not fiction, or enjoys TV. He suffered a mild stroke in October 1998 but has recovered well enough to play 9-hole golf. And he still drives. “The plus

side”, he cheekily says, “is that now I can park in the handicapped lot!” The year 2000 brought a new love into his life – surfing. No, no, not the waves, though Hawaii is known for its surfboarders, but the net, proving once again that it's never too late to learn. He has leapfrogged a generation, joining the ranks of those who have abandoned the snail mail for the e-mail. Since 1992, Choon Bee has been back annually, often competing in and winning golf competitions, veteran class.

Like so many “returnees”, he sources out the unique foods that one can find in few other places – nasi ulam tops the list. Then there is *gerang assam*, *buah keluak*, and the eat-as-much-as-you-want *teochew-moe*y buffet. Needless to say, he finds tremendous changes in Singapore too, but is adept



at finding his way around. In fact, he is so active that it was hard to pin the man down for this interview. In August and September this year, he was back in Singapore to celebrate his 80th birthday. Fifty family members, old friends and close friends gathered at Pin Hsiang Restaurant at RELC to share the happy occasion, among them his only sister Mrs Wee Cheng Neo and her family, former President of Singapore Dr Wee Kim Wee and Mrs Wee, our P.A. President Mr Lee Kip Lee and Mrs Lee, and Mr and Mrs Gordon Seow. He now joins the select ranks of the Association's octogenarians. From us to you, Choon Bee, best wishes, and until your next visit, Aloha. ■

The “Birthday Boy” with his son, Alan, sister and her family Ong Choon Bee's 80th Birthday dinner on 11 Sept 2000.

Holding the Fort: Our Honorary Secretary – Geok

If you feel things run smoothly with the Association, this is one of the reasons why.



Right: Geok 2000 (third from right) with other nonyas surrounding our president.

left: Geok in her younger days.

Her parents are Mr Sng Kwee Heng and Mdm Tay Sian Lan, both in their seventies. She is elder aunt to nine nephews and nieces, thanks to her sister and her three brothers. After a primary education at Owen School, she attended Upper Serangoon Secondary School. She has been active in the school alumni association from pro-tem committee member to her present position as Executive Secretary, helping to organise bowling tournaments, car rallies and participation in alma mater events for the more than two hundred alumni members. But she says that most of her energy is channeled into work related to The Peranakan Association. She tells me that her parents are traditional folk, rather quiet, very private and hardly socialise. How surprising that their daughter now hobnobs with people who love nothing better than to be jolly and lauiat (well, maybe not all of us, but enough). Fortunately, she enjoys it, and calls it her “stress therapy”. She is comfortable with our patois, manners and dress. You should see her enviable

collection of kebayas and beaded slippers, which she doesn’t just reserve for Baba functions, but “shows off” at wedding dinners and other outings. She was “roped in” as Hon. Assistant Secretary ten years ago, to help in organising the Dinner and Dance in conjunction with the First Baba Convention in Singapore, held in December 1990. (Just as a matter of interest, Penang started the “round” in 1988, followed by Melaka in 1989.) At that time, Mr T.W.Ong was the Association President. Geok went straight to work, with a list of people to contact for the dinner at the Cockpit Hotel. It was a more modest affair then – just thirty tables. Since then, she has worked with three Presidents of The Peranakan Association. From Hon Assistant Secretary, she served as Hon Treasurer before her present position as Hon Secretary for a continuous six years.

She is Lim Geok Huay, the one who knows all and sees all. Thanks to an exceptional memory, she recognises every member by name if not by face. She recalls her work as being much lighter in the early

COMMENTARY

Ask Not What The Association Can Do For You!

BY ANTHONY OEI:

Centre is the business venture that she shares with her husband Lim Hang Kiat, an enthusiastic golfer. Eight years ago, at age 55 years, he retired from Jurong Shipyard and did what many can only dream of – combine business with pleasure. Until then, Geok had been with Alpha Associates, an advertising agency. She decided that as long as she was her husband's life partner, she might as well be his business partner too. Although in school, she played badminton and volleyball, her sport is now golf. (Golfers do that forsaking all others.) With a handicap of 30, she tees off at either Laguna Country Club, Jurong Country Club or Raffles Country Club. Sometimes, it's a trip across the causeway. It used to be a regular 18 holes on Sunday mornings, but lately, "too busy, no time". Sunday afternoons are usually spent at her parents' home, where she gets the chance to practise speaking hokien and teochew, while she "entertains" her mother at the mahjong table. (Her word, not mine.) Holidays are usually tied in with golf fairs and golf exhibitions, which have taken her to Indianapolis, Boston, Toronto, Anaheim and Japan. She has made a few trips to China to visit relatives and to soak in the beauty of the Three Gorges and Beijing. She has very little leisure.

Her time is divided between housework, Peranakan Association work and spiritual pursuits – praying and counseling. She believes in the existence of God, in his power and guidance, but does not worship with any of the traditional religious congregations. She is a firm believer in spiritual healing, using God's energy. "But a person has to also help himself and manage his own life as best he can." One way both she and her husband do this is by keeping themselves healthy through a vegetarian diet. They have maintained this for eighteen years. So it's no use asking her to try your delicious babi pongteh and ayam sioh, no matter how authentic they be. She believes that crystal can promote a sense of well-being. Prominent in her home is a smoky-quartz crystal "pillar", the largest I have ever seen. Chinese paintings hang from every wall. There are obviously not enough walls, as some framed pieces are sitting on the floor. The fact that she has been the Association secretary for so long says something for her efficiency and dedication. At our conventions and other happenings, she is always there very early and very prepared. You will see a well-coiffured, slender figure in kebaya. Her voice may be gentle, but don't be fooled by this. She can be very firm. So who is Geok? Now you know.

Ask not what the Association can do for you "So you are a Baba," my Chinese-Chinese friends would say (somewhat disdainfully) when they discover that I don't know the lingo. Some would even label me "half-past-six Chinese" or "Chinese celup" and laugh loudly. Good thing for them that I can laugh with them. Yes, I am a Baba although that is not the reason why I don't speak Chinese because most Peranakans I know do. The reason is my ethnic origin and the un-Chinese environment in which I grew up. Let me give you the tedious details. I was born in Jakarta. My late father was an English-educated Singapore Baba who worked mostly in Indonesia and who had the spelling of his surname changed from Wee to Oei (now you know why I am not related to the late Indonesian Sugar King Oei Tiong Ham). My late mother hailed from Javanese Chinese parentage from Solo with the surname of Houw. Neither of them knew Chinese nor Peranakan customs and traditions. Indeed, my mother tongue is Sundanese, a Javanese dialect that only a few Indonesians know. But among ourselves, my brothers (I have no sisters) and I and our father rattled in Bahasa Indonesia, before we went to school, that is.

Being a Westernised Baba like many of his contemporaries however, my father gave us only English names and, after moving the family to Singapore after World War II, only English education. So from an Indonesian environment we were transplanted to the Western world, taking us further away from our roots. That is how it is and that is why I now speak, think and dream only in English which I suppose makes me a WOG (westernised oriental gentleman), or a Baba WOG, if you like. I took a stab at learning Hokkien and even Mandarin to prove my Chineseness but soon gave it up because everyone laughed when I opened my mouth. I envy my Singapore Peranakan wife Teresa who is forever boasting that she is 110% Nyonya and crazy about sarong kebaya, kasut manek and all the rest of it. She is a Nyonya WOW (westernised oriental woman) but speaks Hokkien and so is a life-saver when it comes to dealing with say, Chinese shopkeepers and fishmongers. And thanks to Singapore's education system, my three children know Mandarin which is also useful should I need it. At least there is some semblance of Chineseness in my family. Anyway, not knowing Chinese doesn't bother me. I don't hide in the closet in shame or fear. I go about with my life normally. I am

Cont'd from page 11

a Baba. We are in a class of our own with our own character, our own aptitude and our culture. We can hold our own in society, whether we specialise in Chinese or not. Ours is a culture worth preserving.

I believe every Baba and Nyonya can play a part by joining and helping The Peranakan Association in its mission to protect and advance our rich heritage, not by asking what the Association can do for us as many do when invited to come aboard. Unity is strength, as they say, so the more the merrier. The Association is in good trim with a strong leadership at the helm and doing sterling

economic, social and political fields. They went regionally in business and pushed for better living conditions, the study of Mandarin in school, independence and other weighty national affairs, long before these became hot topics in Singapore. They were men of industry, courage and vision. There is much to be proud about a culture that has survived for centuries, some say 600 years. It is a living culture and gaining more disciples. We can see this in the Association's healthy membership of more than 1,500, about half of whom enrolled in the past two to three years. And

*I believe every Baba and Nyonya can play a part
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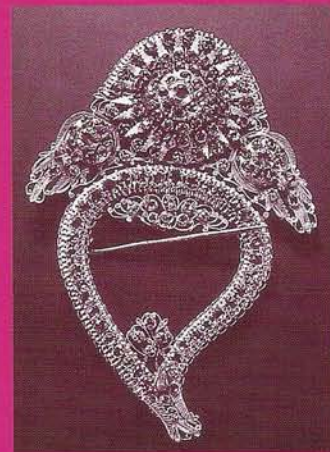
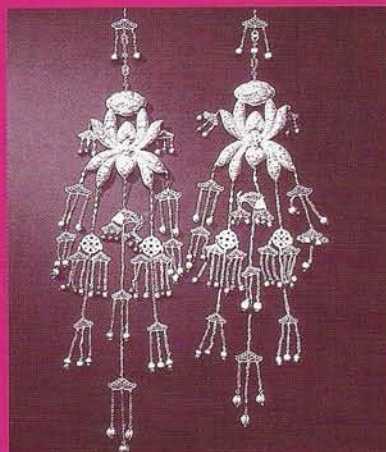
work. It commands a large following with volunteers willing to serve in the management committee and sub-committees to manage the assorted business. They sacrifice their time and leisure without hoping for anything in return, all for the love of the cause.

There is much to be proud about belonging to an organisation that has withstood the test of time for 100 years and whose centenary we are now triumphantly celebrating. That is a long time by any measure. Hardiness, my 110% Nyonya wife says proudly. Yes, hardiness under the waves of the economic, social and political changes rolling relentlessly through Singapore in the past century. There is much to be proud about belonging to a clan which has contributed immensely, and which continues to do so, to the building of Singapore into what it is today. I have read about the exploits of the Babas of yore. They were trail-blazers in the

I see within the fold a growing population of young Babas and Nyonyas. They are the new generation of Peranakans bolstering the Association's strength and offering hope for the future. It says much about a culture that is pulling in the young hitherto caught up in the whirlpool of Western fads. We can see how fascinated they are by their lineage, customs and traditions, and how enchanted they are by the exotic cuisine, attire, footwear, music, furniture and so on. The Youth Group they have formed is a testimony to their burning enthusiasm. The renaissance is refreshing. I am sure that our culture will continue to survive if we stop asking what the Association can do for us and instead, rally round the flag and help the Association to make it happen. This is the thought of a Baba for this centennial year as we begin our journey into the new century to preserve our age-old cultural legacy for posterity. ■

THE PERANAKAN RECOMMENDS

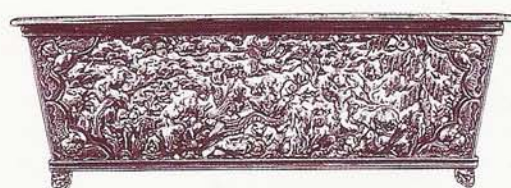
The Peranakan Legacy



*New Peranakan galleries open in December at the Asian Civilisations Museum. The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) at Armenian Street will be launching its new permanent display of Peranakan material culture, *The Peranakan Legacy*, on Wednesday 6th December 2000 at which our President Mr Lee Kip Lee will be the Guest-of-Honour. Covering four out of the eleven galleries of the Tao Nan Building, this display will include a wide selection of Peranakan Chinese artefacts not only from this side of the Straits, but also from Indonesia.*

It marks the ACM's transformation into a boutique museum focusing on two main subjects: Peranakan culture and Chinese connoisseurship. Peranakan porcelain, silver and jewellery from the Mariette Collection will be featured alongside some of the best pieces from the Museum's own collection. The Mariettes have one of the more significant local collections of Peranakan material and we are proud that the generous loan of this collection is made by one of our members, Mrs Betty Mariette.

The museum displays will be structured around several important themes – Peranakan society, Peranakan women and their craft (costume, beadwork and embroidery), the religion, customs and rituals of the Peranakans (including a fabulous altar belonging to the family of Tan Kim



Seng, and a sumptuous bridal chamber display), and finally the rich material legacy of porcelain, silver and the paraphernalia of sreh consumption. In connection with *The Peranakan Legacy* exhibition, The Peranakan Association will be participating in a Peranakan Festival at the ACM where food and craft stalls will be set up and where entertainment will be provided from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday 10 December 2000. For 2001, a programme of cultural activities has been planned culminating in a bus trip to Malacca in June 2001. Details of the calendar of events will be announced in due course.



Museum operation hours are Tuesday to Sunday 9am to 6pm, Fridays from 9am to 9pm (Free admission from 6pm). Normal Museum Admission charges: \$3/adult and \$1.50/student and senior citizen.

EVENTS

Malam Tua Seh Jit – *Malacca Association Celebrates its 100th Anniversary*

The Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka celebrated its 100th Anniversary on 12 August 2000 with a grand dinner and dance at the Renaissance Melaka Hotel Ballroom. More than 50 of our members led by President Lee Kip Lee joined in their Centenary Celebration which was indeed a joyous and auspicious occasion. Besides the sumptuous dinner it was also an evening of great nostalgia and scintillating entertainment provided by the Brigade Seni Melaka Dancers, the BANYAS CHOIR and the MELODIANS comprising the Baba and Nyonya members and musicians from the Association. But the highlight of the evening belonged to the YOUNG BANYAS, in their attractive sarong kebayas and elegant baju panjang and baju lok chuan, who sang and danced into the hearts of all the guests. These singers were children aged 12 years and below who were specially selected and trained in Peranakan

music, song and dance. When the time arrived for the cake-cutting ceremony the organisers sprang a pleasant surprise on us by bringing into the ballroom the 100th Anniversary Cake on a sedan chair in a procession very much reminiscent of a Peranakan wedding complete with seronee music and all. It was truly a memorable MALAM TUA SEH JIT! And to commemorate this milestone in its history the Association has produced a set of four publications on Peranakan Legacy, customs and beliefs, pantuns and a historical journey of a 100 years. ■



Here's to the next hundred *Our Association launches its Centennial Celebrations*

BY MAUREEN LIM

The year was 1900. The date was 17 August. The event was the official founding of the Straits Chinese British Association. Fast forward 100 years. The year is 2000. The date is 16 August. The event: The Centennial Celebration of the same association, renamed The Peranakan Association. But what a metamorphosis has taken place. That small nucleus of Chinese gentlemen in sombre Oriental garb has been replaced by a band of 260 gaily-attired men and women from eight to eighty, ready to party! The notice had specified kebaya or baju panjang for the nonyas (of course, with sarongs) and baju lok-chuan or batik for the babas, and many had obliged.

The evening at the Far East Square Pavilion

kicked off our year-long celebrations. The guests were Ms Nancy Tan of Far East Organisation, Mrs Goh Kian Lay, CEO of RISIS Pte. Ltd. and two representatives from RISIS, and Mrs T.W. Ong, widow of the Association's Honorary Life President.



It was appropriate that our guest-list should also include members who were 80 years old and above; those who were able to attend were Mrs Sylvia Ong, Mdm Josephine Tan, Mdm Mabel Chia, Mdm Ong Guat Ong, Mdm Nancy Oon Kim Lian, Mdm Tan Guat Teong, Mr Chia Chin

Siang and Mr Ong Choon Bee, who was on a holiday from his home in Hawaii. There was time for a getting-to-know-you at the reception area

EVENTS

Here's to the next hundred – Cont'd from page 14

before the start of the dinner. True to our Chinese roots, and befitting the auspicious occasion, the clash of drums and cymbals heralded the start of the evening. Two golden "lions" pranced and leapt in the fountain courtyard as our Association President and his First (and only) Lady walked under a fringed umbrella, leading the parade of invited guests into the hall and down the red carpet to their tables.

In view of the fact that The Peranakan Association membership has more than trebled in the last few years, it was fitting that our President's address should outline the early start and objectives. He then went on to give a "sneak preview" of the coming attractions planned for the year. On behalf of the Association, he accepted a framed 24K gold-dipped pillow-end from a representative of Risis, our first corporate sponsor. The company chose our "birthday party" to launch its newest collection of Peranakan jewellery – brooches and kerosang – and a collectible box especially to hold cherki cards. Although none was available for immediate sale, the ladies were quick to put in their advance orders. Then it was time for the makan besar in tok panjang style. The two long table-settings offered a rich selection of lip-

smacking traditional favourites. No Peranakan birthday celebration is complete without ang ku kueh. And so when the diners were invited to, as one, uncover the red "bundle" on each table, it was to discover the traditional dessert for chuchi mulot. It was time for entertainment by our Association's newly-formed choir, about twenty strong, with two songs – an old favourite, "Sapu Tangan", and Dick Lee's "Bunga Sayang". Exit the choir and enter the models, Association members Bebe Seet, Marlene Foo, Rita Bertrand-Tan and K.T., to show the changes in the nonya dress, from the early baju panjang to traditional pieces used innovatively to complement modern dress. And there was still more to come. K.T. and Lee Yong Ming raised laughs allround with their lively skit. Then it was time for everyone to get involved. And did they get going! Ebony or ivory-haired, they bridged the gap between the traditional and the modern, the old and the new. To the joget rhythms provided by Los Tropikatos, there was a fair amount of gelek-gelek going on, followed by the kick in stomp of line dancing. When it was time to call it a night, it was clear that for some, the night was just beginning. ■

Peranakan Food & Craft Fair

abuzz with crowds on a 'makan' outing

BY MARLENE FOO

It was easy and smooth sailing for Baba Peter Wee and his committee members who organised, for the third consecutive year, the Peranakan Food & Craft Fair held, in conjunction with the Singapore History Museum, at the museum Courtyard and Rotunda on 10 September 2000. One of the attractions was a tour of the Rumah Baba Exhibition personally conducted by Baba Peter Wee. The scene was abuzz with activity from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the eager crowd to shop for Peranakan artefacts at the 14 handicraft stalls offering for sale

such wares as kasut manek, beaded bags and imported beads in various colours and sizes, beautiful and intricate kebayas, handprinted and silk sarongs and rare silver items.

Those intent on whetting their appetites had a choice of 16 food stalls providing such Peranakan favourites as mee siam, buah keluak, chap chye, nyonya porridge, nyonya mee, nasi ulam, pohpiah and even ice-cream potong. For aspiring chefs there was a demonstration of how to cook ayam buah keluak by Nyonya Shirley Kua who treated the spectators with a taste of her culinary skill. A band which rendered joget music and songs of yesteryears brought much fun to the bibiks and little children as they danced and sang along whilst the rest of the family spent an enjoyable day walking through the historical halls of the museum lined with exquisite Peranakan artwork. All that experience left them with a yearning for a bigger and better Fair next year. ■

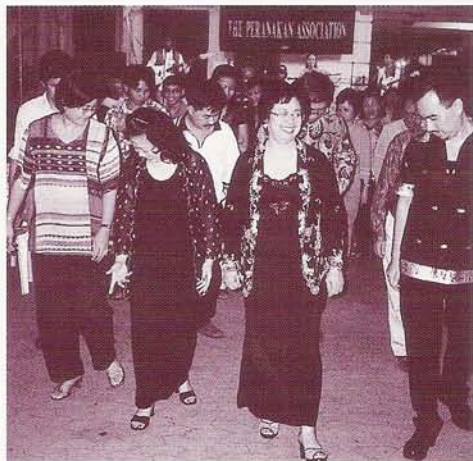


EVENTS

“Malam Jolly”

Ringling Down the Curtain on the Peranakan Heritage Week

BY MARLENE FOO



To mark the closing of the Peranakan Heritage Week, the Singapore History Museum together with The Peranakan Association organised a Malam Jolly on 16 September 2000 at the Courtyard of the Museum. One hundred members and friends, including President Lee Kip Lee and Mrs Elizabeth Lee, attended the informal dinner which commenced with a Nyonya buffet followed by entertainment, dancing and singing by the Peranakan Rhythms. Nyonya Shirley Tay and friends put up an impromptu skit which brought much laughter to the guests. A fashion show produced by Nyonya Rita Bertrand-Tan marked the grand finale to an enriching and memorable week. ■

INTERNATIONALLY SEEN

Nyonyas in Hanover

Making Waves at the Expo 2000

BY CHRISTINA ONG

Coinciding with the memorable Centennial celebration of our PA, our Peranakan Culture was showcased at the Singapore Pavilion at Expo 2000, from 26 August to 5 September. The Singapore Tourism Board aroused the visitors' curiosity by adding our culture as a historically important part of Singapore's cultural diversity in its Events Programme. The three of us, Bebe Seet-Wong, Rita Bertrand-Tan and myself, did our bit in demonstrating the intricate handicraft of beadwork, the art of donning the beautiful sarong/kebaya and baju panjang and the fun of doing the “joget and ronggeng” dance.

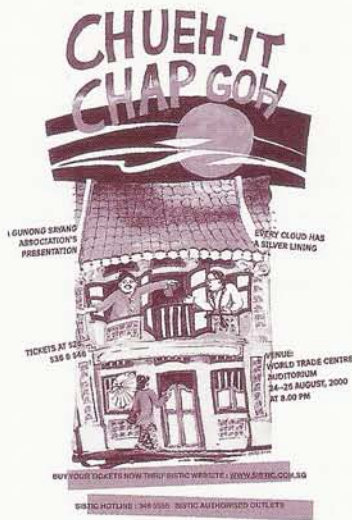
The visitors (mainly German-speaking) were fascinated and intrigued by our interesting and unique culture. They unhesitatingly participated in wearing the sarong/kebaya and dancing. They especially went “ga-ga” when Rita teased them affectionately with her handkerchief during the popular photo-taking sessions. Although an “eye opener” for the visitors, we felt proud doing our bit for Singapore and our Peranakan society. Quite appropriately, one side of the Singapore pavilion had a historic facade of



the traditional Peranakan house.

Over 180 countries took part in Expo 2000. Lasting impressions were gained on the way of life and cultural identities of other countries and peoples. It was a good exposure and experience for us to participate in such a mega event. It was like walking the world in miniature or a single visit to a “One World” and at the same time our culture made some waves at Hanover. ■

D R A M A



A Peranakan Wayang Review – *Chuen-It, Chap Goh*

BY RICHARD TAN

“Sekejap sair kita kelip mata, satu taon sudah lepas, and then it was that time of the year again!” Where all this buzz in our community about another wayang peranakan spread like wild fire? “

Quick! Must beli ticket! Kalu tak, nanti sold out loh!” And true to this statement, all tickets were snapped up even weeks before the play opened. The fascination with the annual staging of Gunong Sayang’s Wayang Peranakan over these years, have garnered a strong following for a once a year event where friends and relatives meet in the festive foyer of the WTC Auditorium celebrating one of the high points of the Peranakan performing arts.

And this year, GSA unveiled another brand new production - ‘Chueh-It, Chap Goh’ under the artistic direction of the ‘Grande Dame’ of Wayang Peranakan, GT Lye. And this is his first time at script writing too! But he so humbly added that his initial script had been further fine-tuned, as rehearsals picked up, with feedback and contributions from the cast members. But oh so charming and convincing were the dramatis personae with their eloquent patois that there were truly magical moments reflective of our rich language and culture. One can’t help but overhear the folks in the auditorium reacting instantaneously to the events that unfold before them and whispering their little comments to their relatives in the next seat, or just laughing ‘sampey geli hati!’

This unique winning stage formula, which never fails to win over the Bibiks, Babas and Nyonyas young and old, is what makes our Wayang Peranakan distinctively different from other plays. Every actor is so involved, taking his part to heart!

It is a play with moral values, and more. For example, it brings to the stage the rarely - performed ‘Meratap’ (mourning) scene, where family members openly weep and cry out loud over their grief and loss of their beloved one. The experienced and quick thinking cast not only deliver their lines with gusto and conviction, but also ‘tambah’ and ‘double dare’ their lines by creatively improvising on the spur of the moment, just to further goad the interest of the audience. This is an art form that few dare to venture into without risking going out of context. But, in this instance, the actors make it all so ‘lemak!’

And that is the sheer reason why every performance is never quite the same! New faces like Frederick Soh, Christina Soh and Alvin Teo, all equally ‘at home’ on stage with the other seasoned cast, are definitely most promising and are destined to ‘carry on’ the Wayang Peranakan tradition to the next millennium. At the end of the day, the veteran actors and actresses are the important links and soul of the play. GT Lye, Cynthia Lee, Mabel Lee, Sally Gan, Terry Lim and KT have over these years never failed to repeat these roles that they are all, oh, so familiar with. A strange phenomena that kita orang Peranakan never tire to see on stage is either a family feud or the tyrant matriach’s supremacy. Sometimes, we wonder if we are too frequently reliving the past (on stage) or are we running out of ideas to present a play? Are there and will there be new and innovative ways to stage a Wayang Peranakan? How about some new modern plays with modern Peranakan themes? And if so, how relevant is this going to be? Are there any suggestions? But once again, kam siah-lah to GSA for keeping our traditional Wayang Peranakan alive! I am sure we all look forward to the next

perANAKan The Youth Group

YOUTH ON THE NET

a new egroup is set up after a gastronomic gathering

BY HEATHER ONG

On 16 September, the youth group had its biannual new members get-together. We chose Casa Bom Vento, an eatery at Joo Chiat Road. The 18 of us had an enjoyable time sampling the unusual Eurasian dishes, which left us fully satiated. After the good meal at a wonderful price, we joined other members of the Peranakan Association at the National Museum courtyard for some after-dinner dancing and entertainment. Soon after the outing, some net-savvy members proposed starting a mailing group called peranakan@egroups.com as a way of keeping in touch. By October, we had more than 60 members in our list. With our group in place, we hope to link up many Peranakans of all ages, not only in Singapore but across the globe.

What is eGroups? Well, it is a free email group service that allows us to connect with other Babas and Nonyas, or others who share the same interests and ideas. When you send an email to the group peranakan@egroups.com, it will be forwarded to all the members in the list. A member can choose to get these mails directly in their own email mailbox or they can have a daily summary of all emails sent for that day. There is also an option for

members to read the mail directly from the Web. We use this egroup to post Peranakan Association Events and youth activities. We will also use this egroup to plan our makan gatherings, seek and share advice on where to get stuff like kasut manek or even trade long-lost recipes. eGroups was also chosen because all mail sent can be stored in the archives. This means that we can create a repository for Peranakan information that can be accessed by members who join us later. To get this group in full swing, members should actively post in bits and pieces of Peranakan gems that can be stored and shared.

This group is for you, and we hope that you will have fun using it to share information, and to keep in touch with one another in our community.



If you are interested email us at :
peranakan-subscribe@egroups.com
peranakanowner@egroups.com
 Or you can also apply directly at
www.egroups.com/group/peranakan

Letter to The Editor

I read with great interest the July-September 2000 issue. I must congratulate the editors who did a good job in presenting to us the well-known Senior Citizens (Peranakans) of Singapore. I believe we should have more publicity in your magazine of other Babas and Bibiks. In this way we will encourage our younger generation to be proud of their Peranakan heritage and society. Could you also try to include more pages of Singapore's Who's Who - whose ancestors were prominent men and women in their days? Keep up the good work!

LONG LIVE THE PERANAKANS!

Chew Chin Nam

NOTICEBOARD

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome aboard the following 36 new members whose addition increases our roll to 1557 members:

Ordinary Members

Ms Boey Poh Geok
Mr Chan Seng Heng Christopher
Mr Chew Beow Chin
Mr Chia Kim Sun Richard
Mr Ching Phillip Reginald
Mr Chua Chye Hong
Ms Goh Hui Imm
Mr Heng Ivan
Ms Kang Su Ling Nadia
Ms Koh Puay Eng Molly
Mr Lauw Boon Chuan Ronnie
Ms Lee Doris
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Ms Tan G J Beverly
Mdm Tan Gek Suan
Mdm Tay Swee Pheng Sophia
Ms Wang Angiel
Ms Wee Eng Hwa
Mr Wijatno Sastro
Mr Wong Peng Weng
Mr Wong Teck Hai Jeffrey
Mdm Yeo Choon Kim Daisy
Ms Yeo Poh Choo Annette
Mr Yeo Soon Lye

OBITUARY

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of

Mr Tann Yean

Mr Yeo Joo Lim

On their recent bereavement.

Mr Tann Yean was a well-known figure in Singapore's theatrical world and had leading parts in "Pileh Menantu" (the first production to be staged in the revival of Peranakan plays), the musical "Beauty World" and the title role in "Ah Kong's Birthday Party."

13th BABA CONVENTION

24-26 November, 2000
Friday till Sunday, Penang
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505 Jalan Tanjung Bungah,
Penang

24 November, Friday

2.30 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.
Registration of delegates

8 p.m.
Bangsawan Play
"Sam Pek Eng Tai" at
Dewan Sri Pinang,
Light Street
*Either preceded or followed by
buffet dinner*

25 November, Saturday

9.30 a.m.
**Official Opening of
Convention Rafflesia
Ballroom,**
Level 6 Paradise Hotel

10.30 a.m.
**Official Opening of
Peranakan Art Exhibition**
11.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m.
Seminar with lunch and tea
breaks

7.30 p.m.
**13th Baba Convention
Dinner & Dance**
Rafflesia Ballroom,
Level 6 Paradise Hotel.

26 November Sunday

12.30 p.m.
**Farewell lunch at State
Chinese (Penang)
Association**
13 Jalan Perak

A Package Offer is available including a return economy class ticket on MAS, 3 days/2 nights stay at the Paradise Hotel with two buffet breakfasts, and attendances at all the above Convention functions.

Price -

**Twin Sharing S\$428.00
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**Single Room S\$478.00
per person**

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*Hon Secretary,
Mrs Lim Geok Huay
Tel: 2550704*

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6 December 2000, Wednesday
7 p.m. - Opening Ceremony
*Guest of Honour -
Mr Lee Kip Lee President,
The Peranakan Association.*

PERANAKAN FOOD & CRAFT

10 December 2000, Sunday
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.
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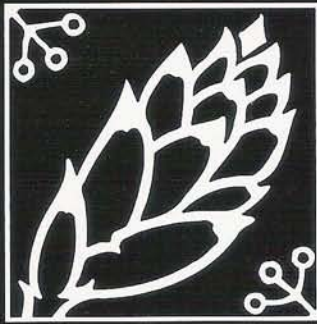
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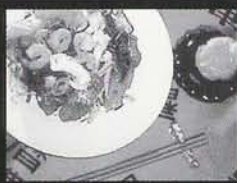
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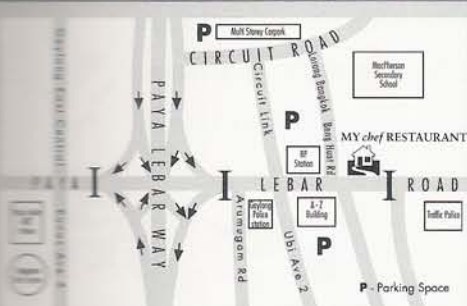
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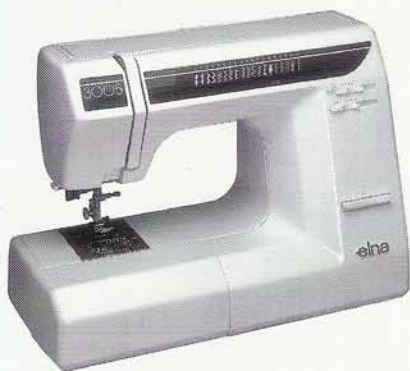
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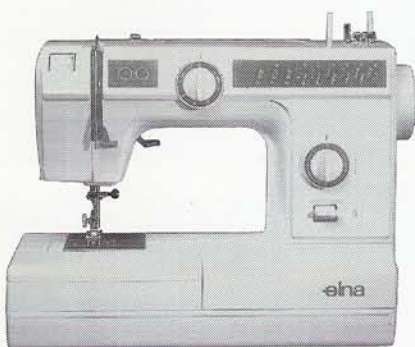
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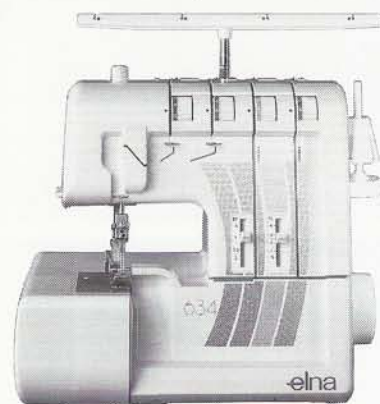
elna 6003Q Computerized, 42 Stitches



elna 3005 19 Stitches



elna 1010 11 Stitches

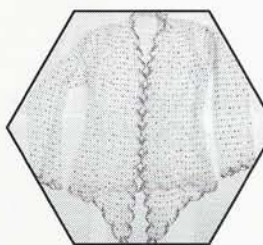


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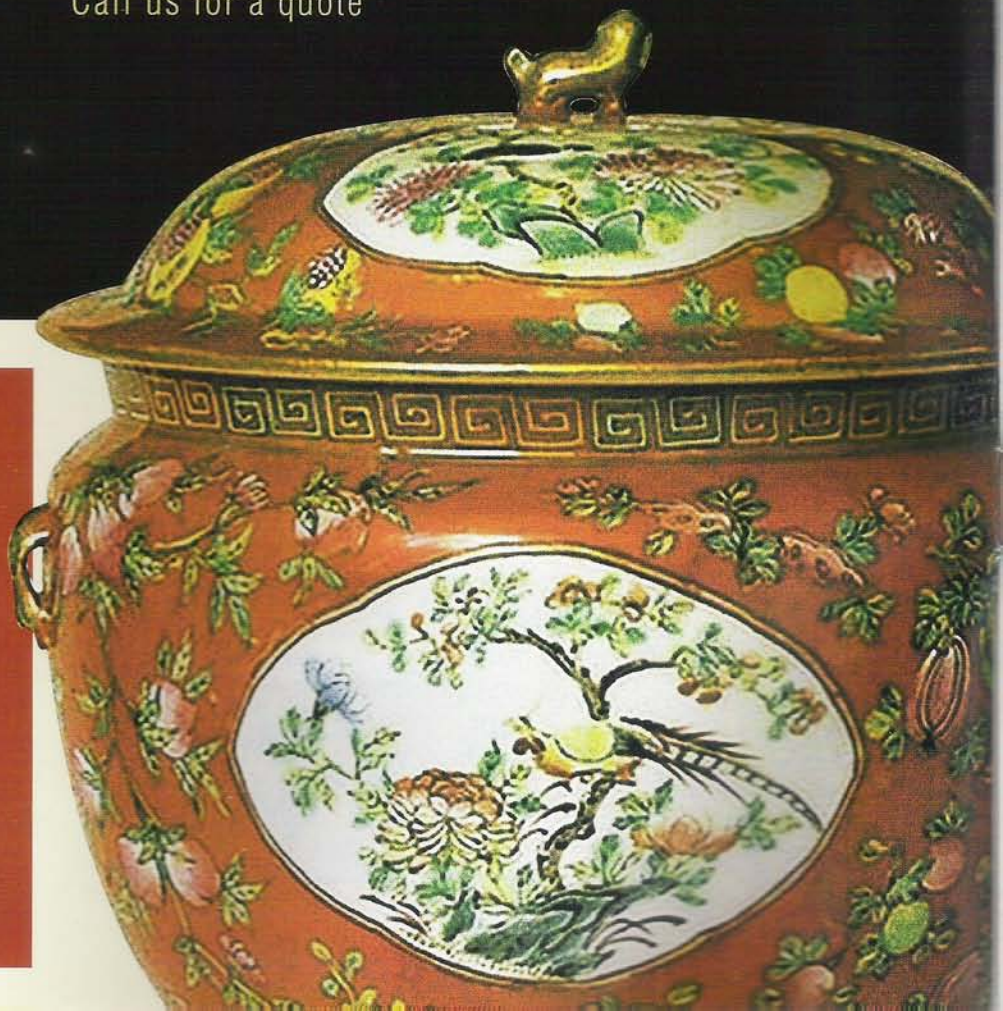
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