

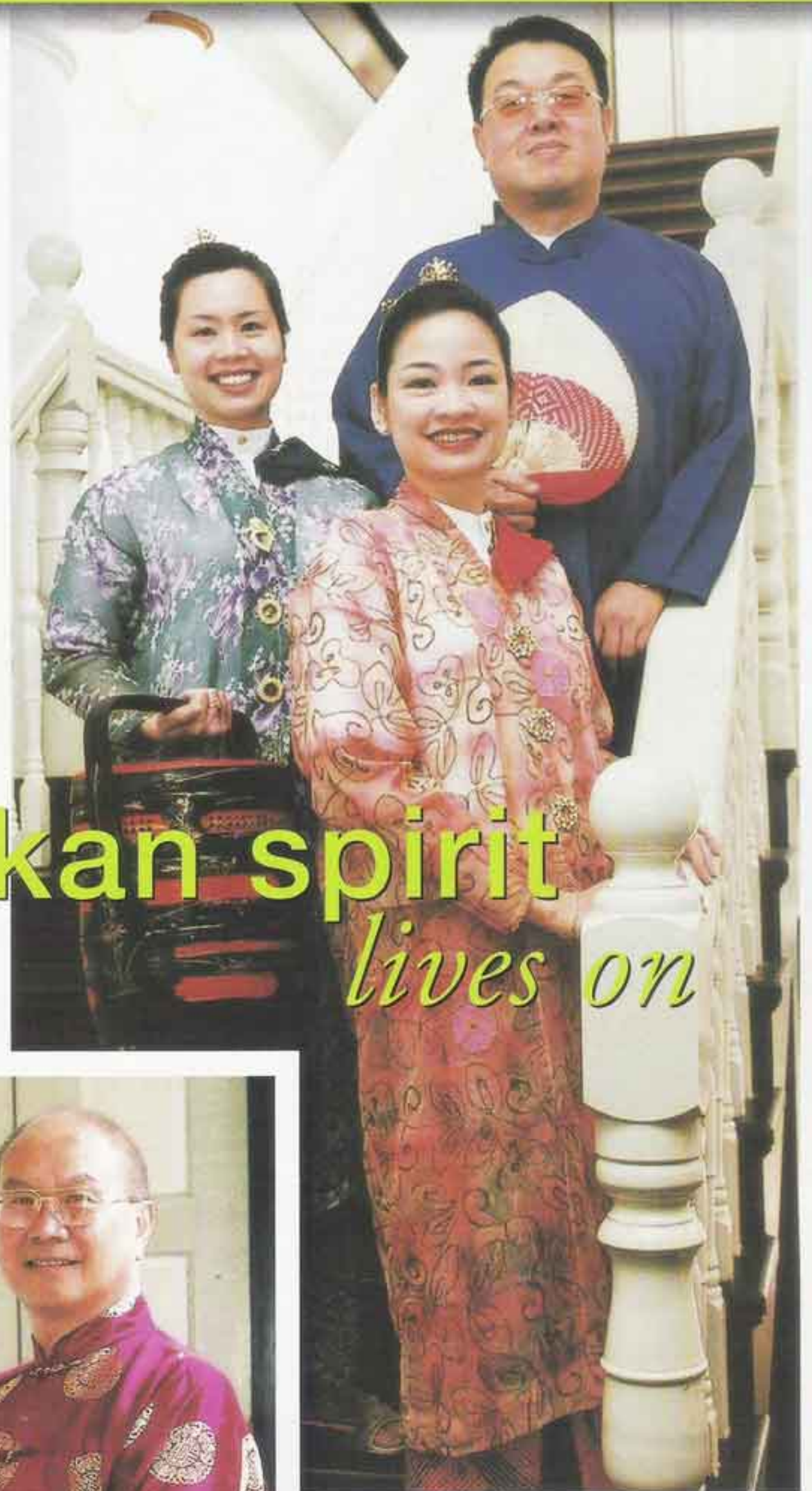
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the peranakan

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



THE
PERANAKAN
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the peranakan spirit
lives on





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The Peranakan spirit lives on

BY ANTHONY OEI

For eons, there has been human migration with restless people abandoning their places of birth for foreign lands, convinced that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Those who found their expected pot of gold at the end of the rainbow stayed on. Those who discovered that they had made a mistake repacked their bags and renewed their quest in other territories, hoping for better luck.

For the Chinese diaspora, Southeast Asia was one of their favourite destinations, most probably because of the geographical proximity to China. Waves of them descended on Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and other regional countries in the past century or so. This explains the proportionately large number of Chinese immigrants in these countries. Some of the earliest immigrants adapted to local conditions very well, learning the customs, dialects and languages, creating their own patois, customs, cuisine and dresses, and even marrying the women. Some became rich and successful, some did not. Their offspring became Peranakans, at least as we term them in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Babas and Nyonyas have added colour and vibrancy to these countries.

The most significant aspect to note is that Peranakans are proud to be so. Our long history of over a century and our continued existence are proof of this. Even those who have resettled in other lands keep their Peranakan spirit alive. Elsewhere in these pages, we carry a story on the Peranakans in Indonesia, and another one giving a fine example of the Peranakan spirit in Australia, to show how our brothers and sisters abroad are doing. The tales are both educational and inspiring.

In *A Baba Padang's Diary*, George Gho gives a first-hand account of the history of the Chinese migration to Indonesia, his family and relatives, the sort of life Indonesian Peranakans lead and their future. He says the Chinese there are industrious, moving to places offering the best opportunities for business and a better life. Some even migrated to Singapore, like himself and his family as well as four of his grand-uncles one of whom was the prominent musician, the late Gho Soon Tioe.

Another interesting point George brings up is that the language Padang Peranakans speak is very similar to that spoken in Malacca, which is different from the Peranakan language spoken in Java, for example. He is glad that Peranakans in Indonesia now have more freedom to practise their old Chinese customs again. However, he cannot be certain about their future as conditions there are different from Singapore's.

From Australia, Alfred Chi tells of the Peranakans' desire to retain their identity, despite their small numbers who are scattered over the vast continent. In his *Nyonyas/Babas Down-Under*, he mentions the frequent get-togethers they hold 'where our children can interact and taste a bit of our rich culture.' He reports that a Baba from Malacca, Ee Tiang Heng, has tried to publicise the Peranakan culture by giving cooking demonstrations on Nyonya dishes and lectures on the history of Malacca, the Peranakan culture and cuisine to various clubs and gatherings.

Alfred says distinguished Babas like Tan Kim Seng, Lee Choon Guan and Tan Chay Yan should be remembered for their significant social and economic contributions. He ends his narration with a statement that embodies the Peranakan spirit: 'After reading the biographies of these great Babas, I am sure anyone would be proud to call himself or herself a Peranakan even when one is far away from old Malacca.'

Well said, Alfred. We wish the clan success and happiness wherever they are. We hope that their spirit will continue to burn brightly and that they will contribute to society in whatever way they can, in the true traditions of our forefathers. ■

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symbolise wealth, prosperity, virtue and nobility. The Phoenix, or Feng Huang, is always depicted as a majestic bird with magical qualities. Its body symbolizes the five human qualities: virtue, duty, decorum, humanity and reliability. The Qilin, a creature unique to Asian mythology, is usually described as an animal with the body of a deer, tail of an ox, scales of a fish, cloven toes and two

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symbolise wealth, prosperity, virtue and nobility. The Phoenix, or Feng Huang, is always depicted as a majestic bird with magical qualities. Its body symbolizes the five human qualities: virtue, duty, decorum, humanity and reliability. The Qilin, a creature unique to Asian mythology, is usually described as an animal with the body of a deer, tail of an ox, scales of a fish, cloven toes and two



probably derived from a southern Chinese card game, although up to the early 20th century, the cards, or "kretas cherki", were



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Personalities behind *Peranakan Street* and *Institutional Names* BY LEE KIP LEE



Tan Tock Seng Hospital

The new Tan Tock Seng Hospital complex is situated at Moulmein Road where the main entrance is. Tan Tock Seng was born in Malacca in 1798 and came to Singapore, not long after it was founded in 1819, full of enterprise and thrift. With hardly any capital, he began his career by selling vegetables and poultry until he had saved sufficient money to open a shop by the riverside. His success came when he ventured into some speculative business with J. H. Whitehead. He was the first Asiatic to be made a Justice of The Peace by Governor Butterworth and was constantly occupied with settling disputes among the members of his community and was well-known for his charitable work of providing free burials for poor Chinese.

On 25 May 1844 the Foundation Stone of The Tan Tock Seng Hospital was laid at Pearl's Hill. It was to replace an earlier hospital for the poor Chinese with 'funds furnished by the humane liberality of Tan Tock Seng, Esqr., J.P.' In 1857, during the Indian Mutiny, the building was requisitioned by the military and the hospital moved to swampy ground on Balestier Plain with accommodation consisting of three blocks of concrete buildings.

Facilities continued to improve until 1909 when the expansion at Moulmein Road was completed with generous donations of \$50,000 from Loke Yew and \$4,000 from Wee Boon Teck.

Tan Tock Seng died, at the age of 52, in 1850, leaving three sons, Tan Kim Ching, Tan Teck Guan and Tan Swee Lim. Other prominent members of the family include rubber magnate Tan Chay Yan and Tan Kim Ching's grandson Tan Boo Liat. ■



Keong Saik Road

Keong Saik Road, located in the old red-light section of Chinatown, is off New Bridge Road from where it snakes off past Kreta Ayer Road and Teck Lim Road until it reaches South Bridge Road.

Tan Keong Saik, the son of Tan Choon Sian, was born in Malacca in 1850 and was educated in Penang. His first job when he arrived in Singapore was as a shipping clerk with the firm of Lim Kong Wan & Sons after which he became a storekeeper with The Borneo Co. Eventually his business acumen led him to attain prominence in commercial circles when he became a director of the Straits Steamship Co. Ltd. which was founded by his uncle Tan Choon Bock and Tan Beng Swee (the son of Tan Kim Seng).

A man of good education and sound views, Tan Keong Saik played a leading part in the social and intellectual life of the Chinese community. He was a member of the Chinese Advisory Board and director of the Singapore Slipway Co. Ltd. and the Tanjong Pagar Dock Co. Ltd. He was also one of the early advocates of education for Chinese girls in non-Christian homes and in 1885 arranged for Miss Sophia Blackmore of the Methodist Mission to give lessons in English at his home to his daughters. He participated actively in public life until ill-health compelled him to live in retirement at his seaside bungalow in Changi until his death in 1909.

Tan Keong Saik was the great-grandfather of our First Vice-President Peter Wee (whose mother Josephine was the daughter of Tan Cheng Kee, the eldest son of Tan Keong Saik). Tan Cheng Kee's sister was Tan Teck Neo, otherwise known as Mrs Lee Choon Guan, and his cousin was Tun Tan Cheng Lock. ■

Ah Hood Road

Ah Hood Road begins at Balestier Road and ends at Jalan Rajah which also leads to Balestier Road.

Wee Ah Hood was born in 1828 and began life as an assistant in a cloth-dealer's shop in Telok Ayer Street where by dint of diligence and hard work he was promoted to be manager. He expanded into his own business and became one of the biggest gambier and pepper merchants of his time. He died in 1875 in his residence in Hill Street which was later occupied by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. His son was Wee Kim Yam. ■



Kim Yam Road



Kim Yam Road, off River Valley Road, is diagonally opposite to the AA Centre, and, after passing Tong Watt Road, ends up by joining Mohamed Sultan Road.

Wee Kim Yam, the eldest son of Wee Ah Hood, was born in 1855. By the time he was 31 years old he had become one of the leading opium and spirit farmers in Singapore.

He took an active part in public affairs, was appointed a Justice of the Peace and served zealously on the Chinese Advisory Board, the Committees of the Po Leung Kuk Orphanage, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Straits Chinese British Association. His son, Wee Hean Boon, was a strong supporter of Dr. Lim Boon Keng who advocated the teaching of the Mandarin dialect to the Straits Chinese. ■



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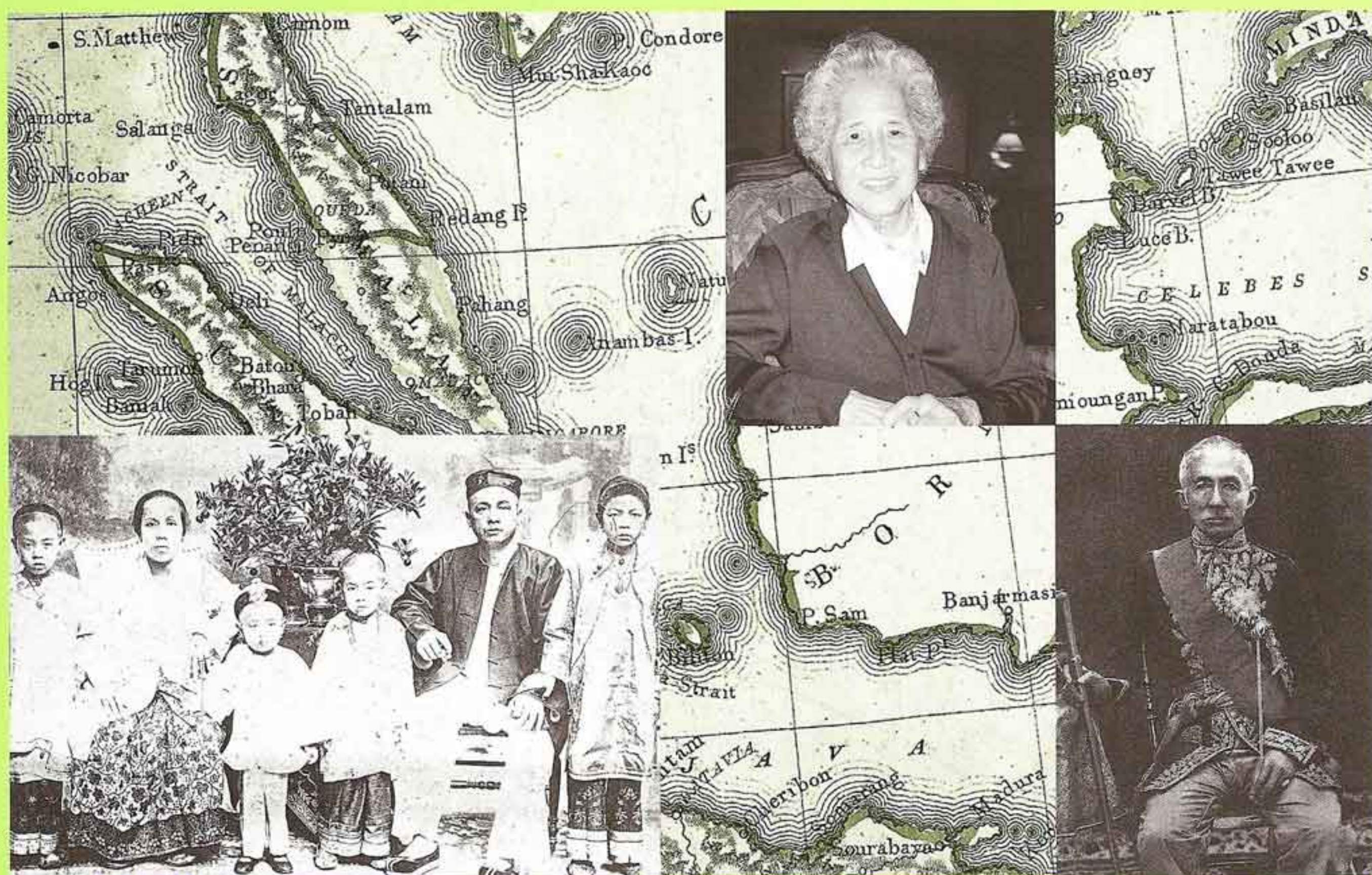
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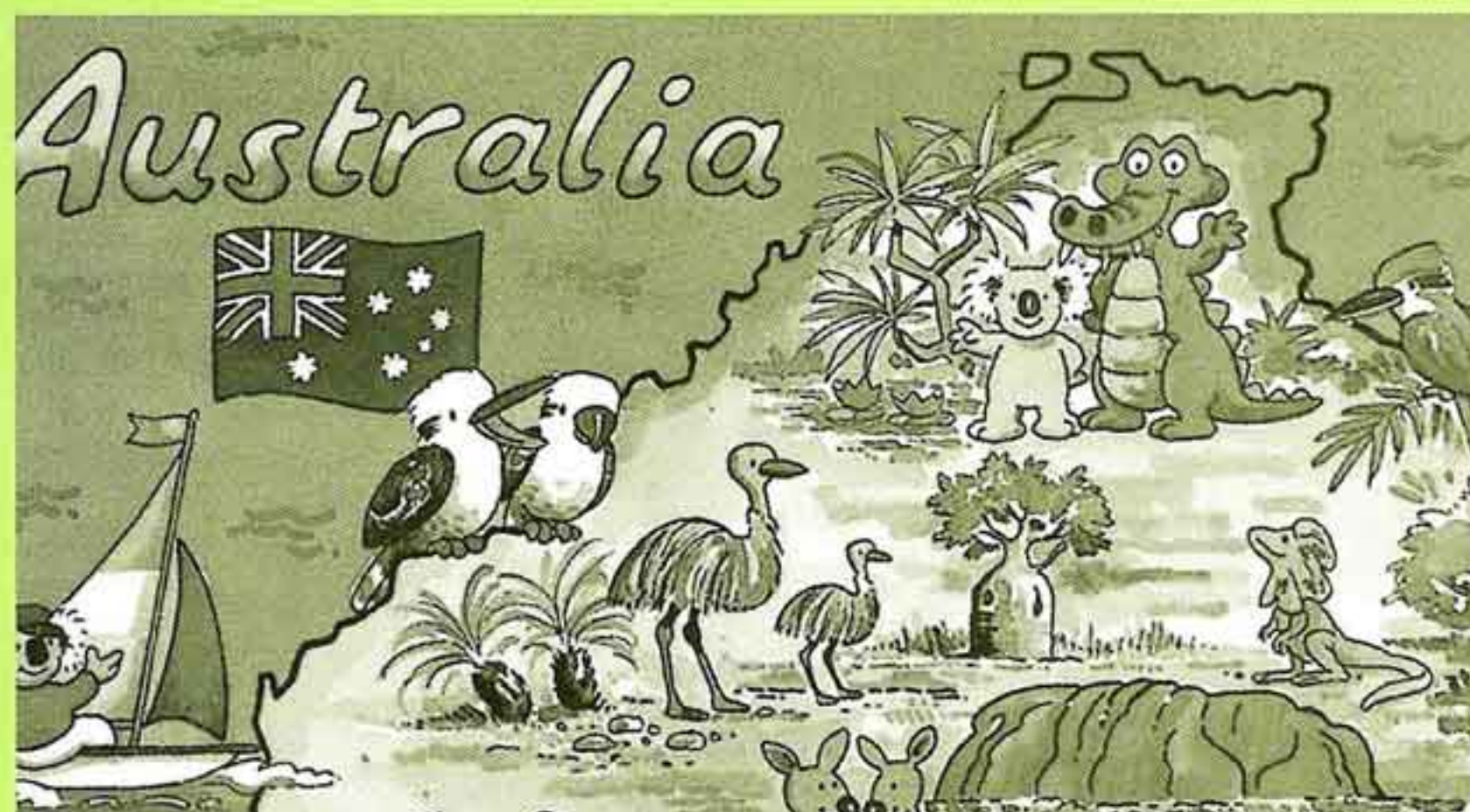
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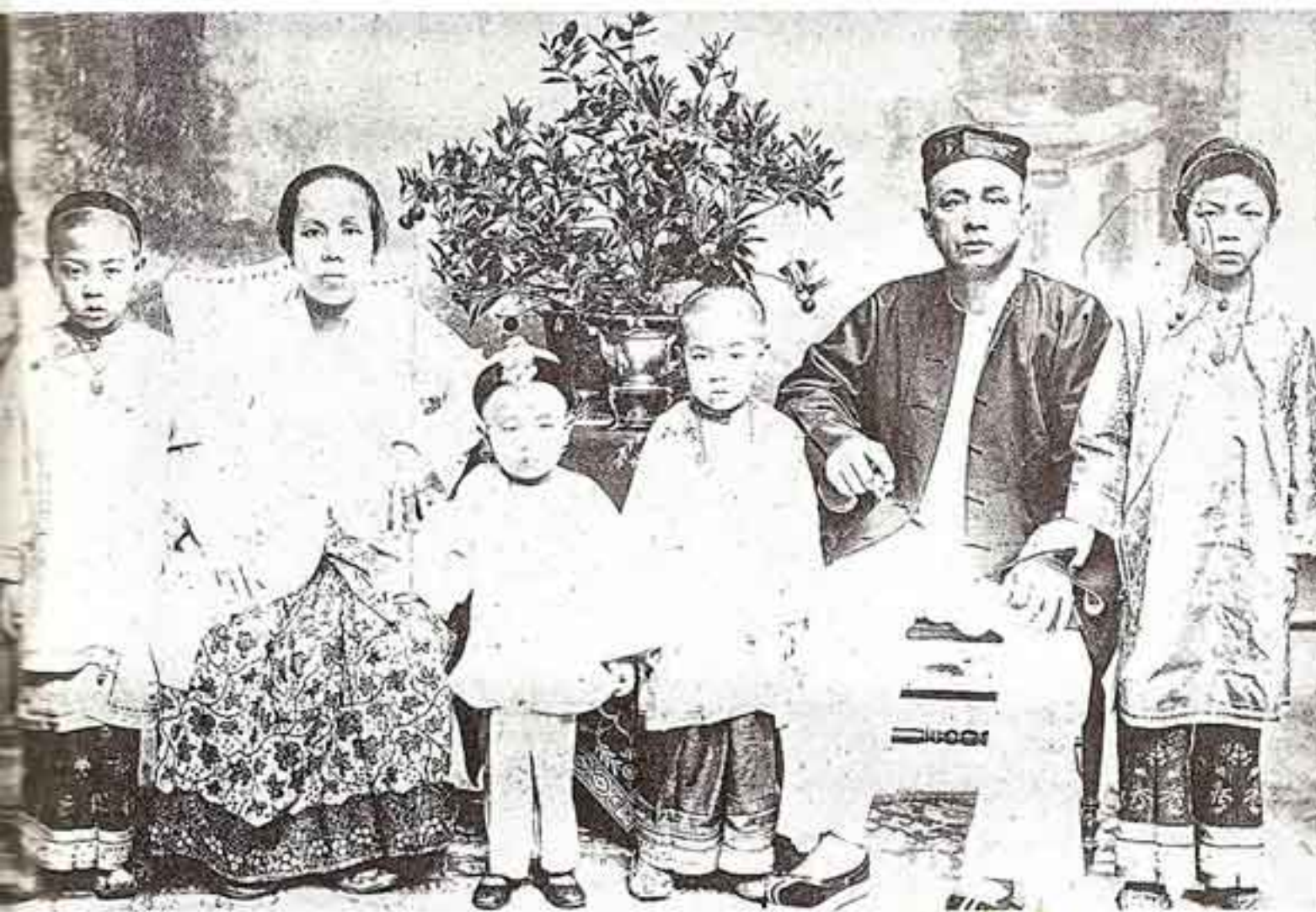


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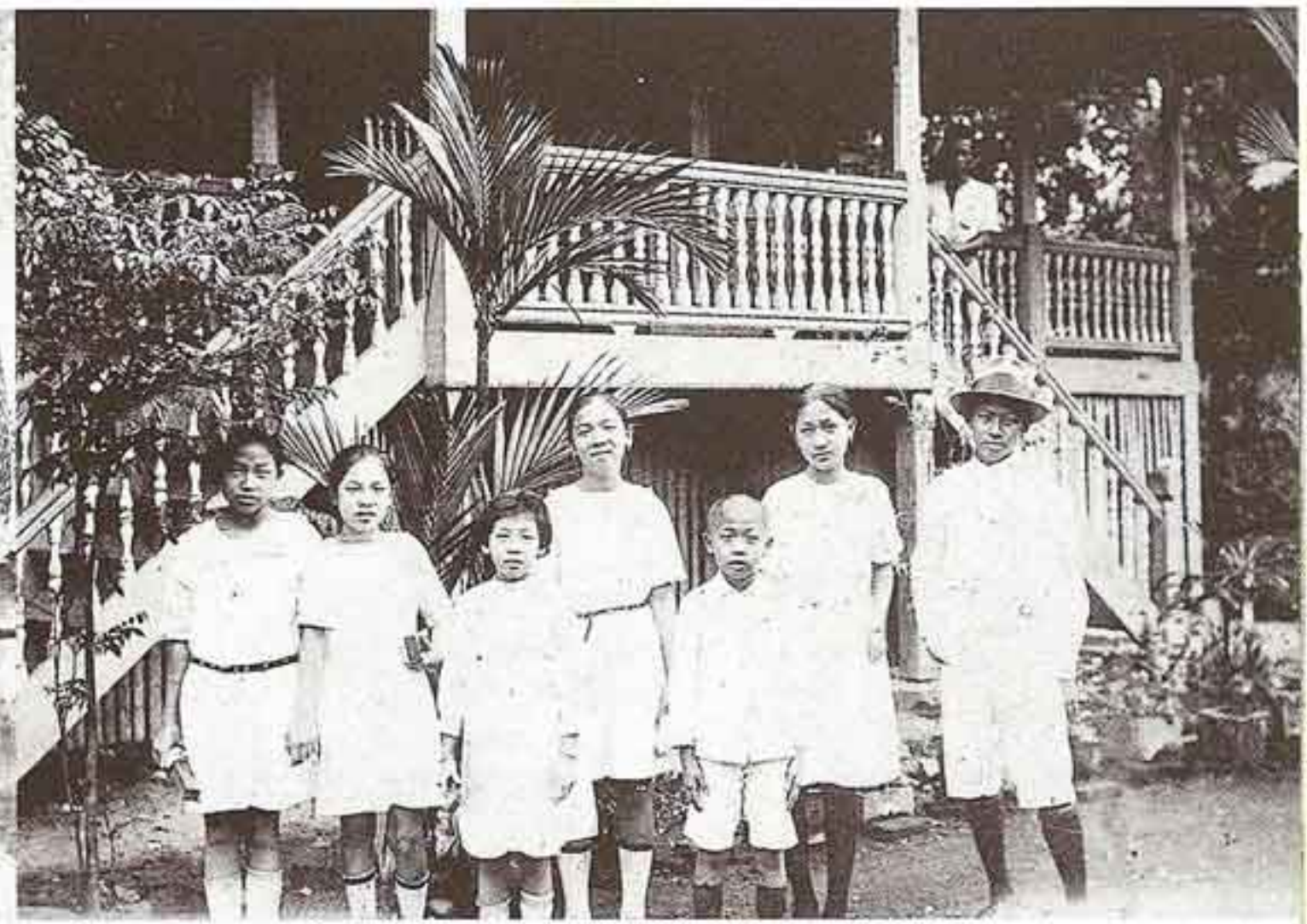
Peranakans Abroad

It is well-known that there are Peranakan communities in many countries outside Singapore and Malaysia. In this issue, we present stories about Indonesia, Australia and Thailand.





My maternal great-grandparents' family in Padang, 1890: Njoo Thiam Po, Lie Keng Nio and their children.



My father Gho Gim Tiong with his brother and sisters in Padang, 1922.

West Sumatra is an agricultural land with little resources and because it is outside the trading route of the Straits of Malacca, there are not many trading activities. Thus, many younger-generation Peranakans migrate to Medan on the east coast, or Java or even Singapore and other countries. My grandfather himself and his family had moved out to Tanjung Balai (Asahan) in the early years to set up a sawmill which was looked after by my father Gho Gim Tiong. He was nicknamed 'Baba Padang' because most of the ethnic Chinese in this small town are called *totoks* or *sinkeks*. At that time, they spoke only Chinese (Hokkien) among themselves and a little Malay with the other races. Although as a Peranakan family we spoke Malay at home, we had to learn Hokkien so that we could communicate with the other Chinese and avoid being called a *bak tau kak*, a derisive term for Chinese who are unable to speak Chinese. The term has an interesting history. In the old days Peranakans in the town would go to the market and if they were trying to buy a pig's head, would ask for a *bak*

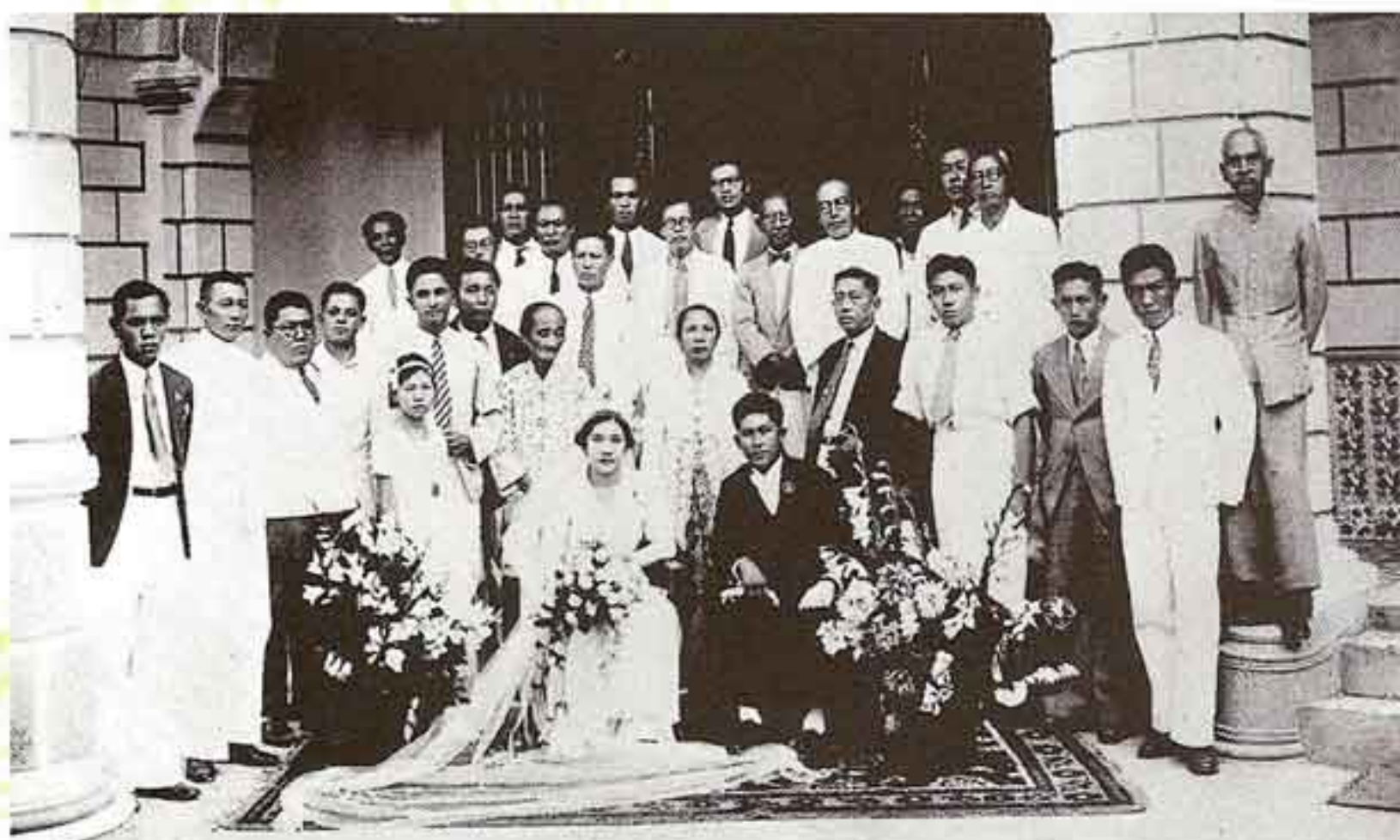
tau kak ('meat head') instead of the proper Hokkien term, *tu tau*. This caused much hilarity among the *totok* community.

Four of my grand-uncles also migrated to Singapore where one of them became a coffee merchant, another set up a car workshop and the youngest was the well-known musician and music teacher, Gho Soon Tioe.

MY RELATIVES THE TOTOKS

My paternal and maternal grandfathers and grandmothers were locally born Peranakans. Both my grandmothers wore *sarong kebaya* and spoke only Malay at home. Many of my uncles and aunts married *totoks* and followed their lifestyles. They learnt to speak Hokkien and sent their children to Chinese schools. Some even moved to Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In 1965, the Indonesian Government started asking the Chinese to have an Indonesian identity by changing their names, closing Chinese schools and forbidding Chinese cultural performances and literature. So most Chinese children



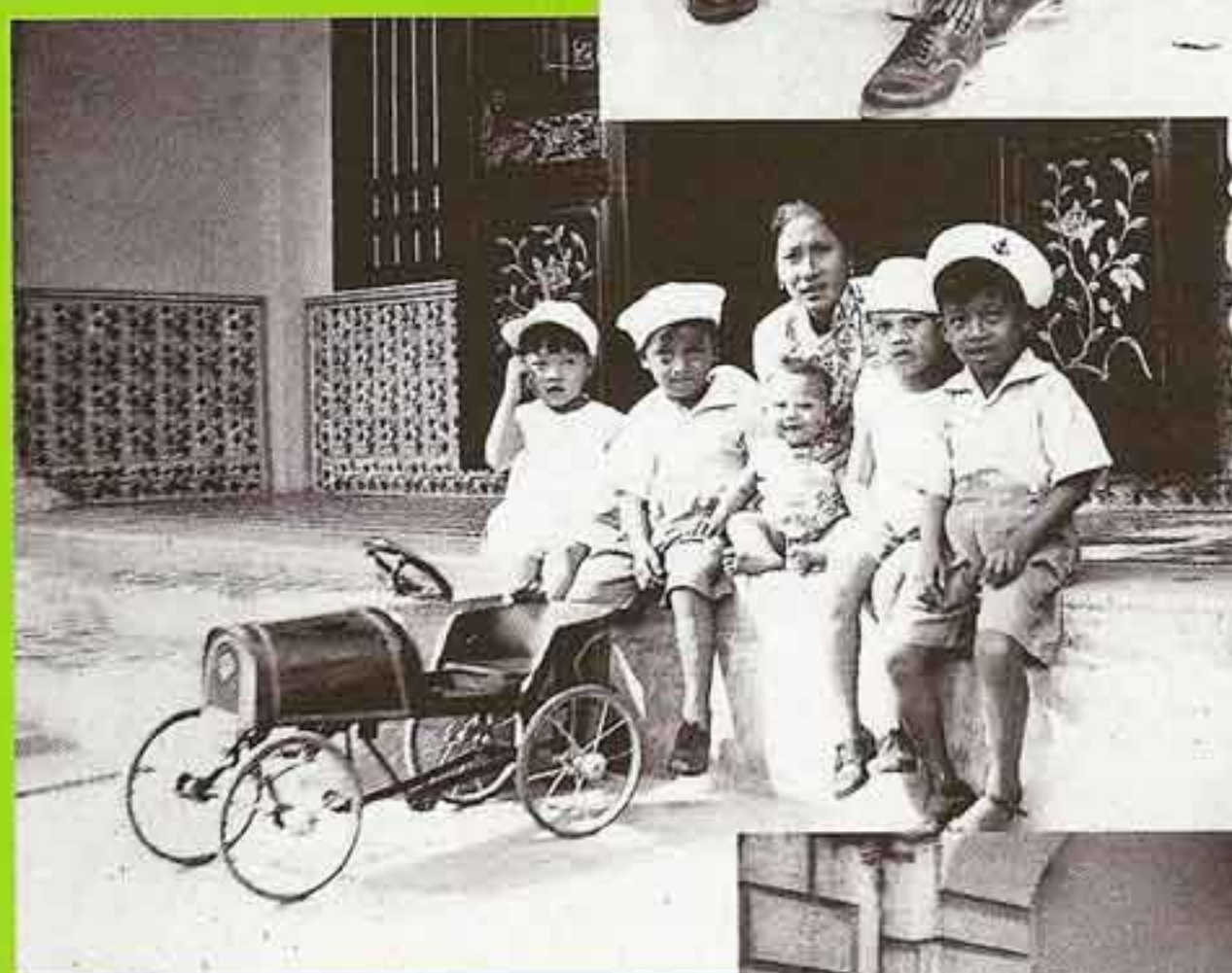
My parents' wedding picture in front of Grandpa's house in Tanjung Balai, 1938.

SPECIAL FEATURE | *Peranakans Abroad*



My father Gho Gim Tiong
with friends in Padang, 1930.

My father Gho Gim Tiong
in Tanjung Balai, 1930.

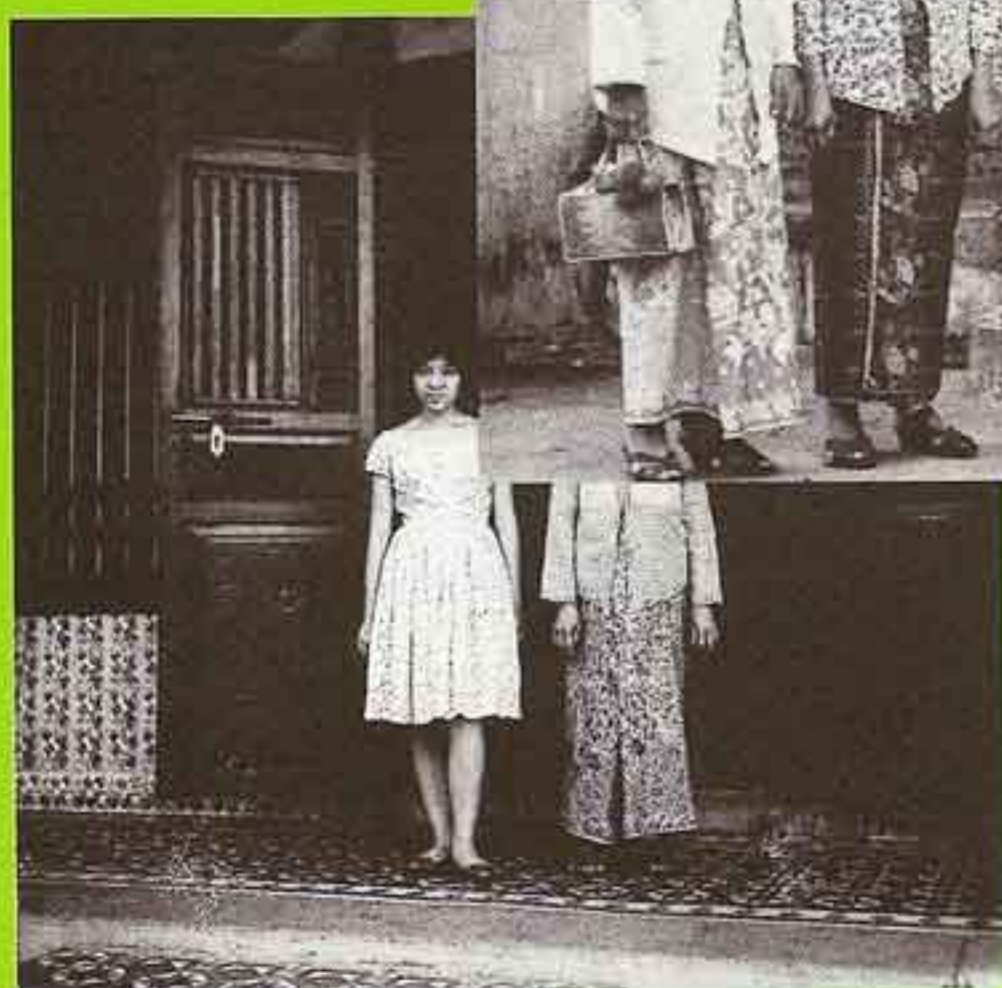


My aunt and cousins in Grandpa's house
in Tanjung Balai, 1936.

A grandaunt (Gho Soon Tong's wife)
from Penang visits Grandma in Tanjung
Balai, 1952. (Both are in sarong kebaya).



Grandma with cousin
Gho Tjeng Hong in
Tanjung Balai, 1960.





My wife Jacinta visiting aunts in my great-granduncle's house in Padang, Sept 2001.



Worship Hall of the Ho Teck Tong association in Padang, Sept 2001.

had to attend Indonesian schools and now speak Indonesian. Others went to Singapore and Penang to learn Chinese.

Most Chinese have changed their names. For example, Oei (Wee) to Wijaya, Lim to Halim or Salim, Tan to Tanoto or Tanumihardja, Gho to Gozali or Margono. Others changed to completely new names like Anwar, Ali, Sunjoto, Ibrahim and Hendra. I chose the family name Putrasahan, which means *Putra/Putri dari Asahan*, or 'children of Asahan', after the name of a river where we were born.

With all these developments, Chinese are no longer Chinese *totoks* or Peranakan Chinese but Indonesians of Chinese origin, in other words, Chinese Indonesians.

MY FAMILY

My wife is also a Peranakan (family name: Siem) from Central Java. Her great-grandparents were most probably from Semarang where there were already big Chinese and Peranakan communities in the 19th century. According to some old books, many historical happenings and Chinese migration data were recorded and kept in the Sam Po Kong Temple in Semarang, or in the so-called Kong Kuan. It is a pity that most of these were destroyed during colonial times.

We came to Singapore in 1971. All my children, Perri Putrasahan Gho, Kris Putrasahan Gho and Dian Putrasahan

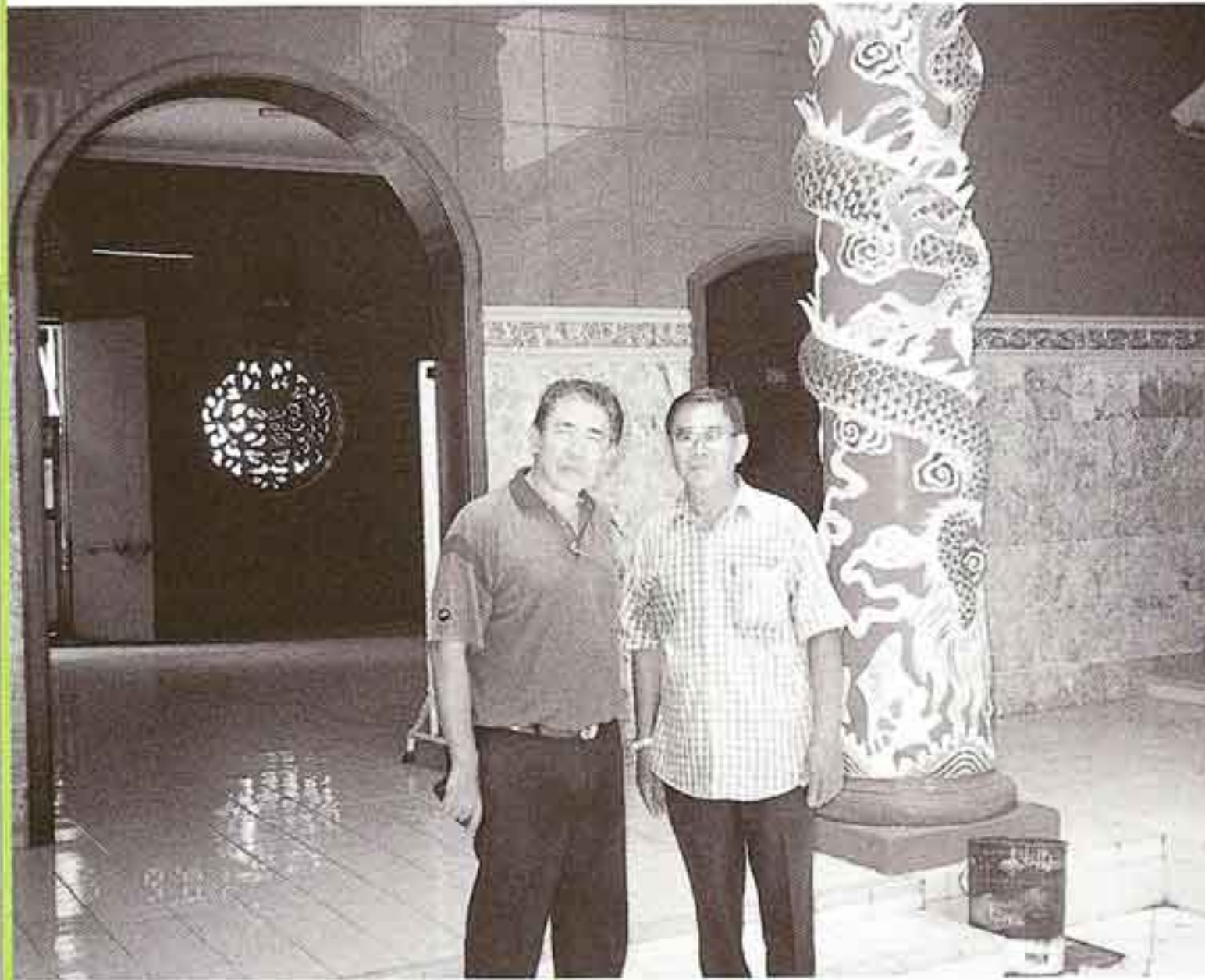
(who has a Mandarin pinyin name, Wu Shan Yuen), grew up here. Like almost all Chinese Singaporeans, they learnt English and Chinese, although at home we speak a mixture of Indonesian and English. Before coming here, we lived in Europe for about ten years and practically lost touch with our Peranakan Chinese culture. Moreover, we are Christians and do not practise the traditional Chinese/Buddhist customs anymore.

During my childhood, we had an ancestral altar in the most important room of my grandfather's house. We made offerings every New Year's Eve and had a big family get-together afterwards. On Chap Go Meh, we children rode trishaws around the town and to the seaside to see the full moon.

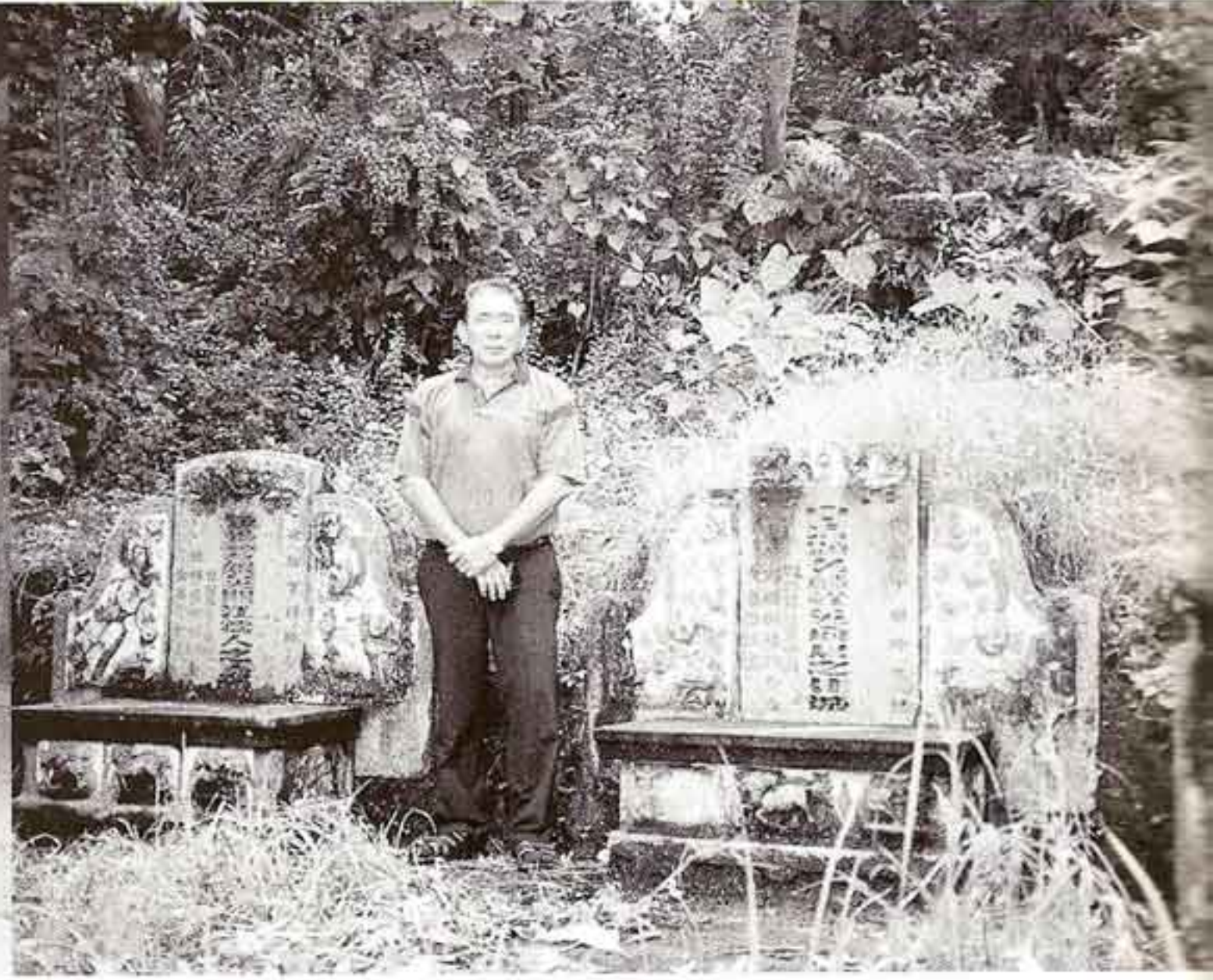
PADANG REVISITED

Recently, I revisited Padang to find out what changes have taken place in the Peranakan community there and what they have in common with the Peranakans of Singapore or Malacca.

One interesting point is that the language the Padang Peranakans speak is very similar to that spoken in Malacca, which is different from the Peranakan language in Java, for example. I believe this is because of the influence of the local dialect which is Minang, the same as that spoken in Negeri



Visit to Ho Tek Tong association with my cousin Josef Lie in Padang, 2001.



My first visit to Great-grandfather's and Great-grandmother's tomb in Padang, Sept 2001.

Sembilan by about 400,000 Malays of Minang origin who migrated there many years ago. However, the younger Padang Peranakans today speak Bahasa Indonesia which is regarded as a language of the educated.

As for food, there have never been special restaurants serving special Peranakan dishes. Some restaurants, owned by Peranakans, offer Padang food with a slightly modified taste, but cannot be considered as Chinese or Peranakan food. The same Peranakan food available in Malacca and Singapore, with the exception of *ayam buah keluak*, can only be found in a Peranakan home.

There appears to be more freedom for Peranakans to practise their old Chinese customs again. There are two rebuilt buildings in Padang housing two clubs which are said to have originated in Malaysia. One is Himpunan Tjinta Teman (formerly Ho Tek Tong). The other is Himpunan Bersatu Teguh (formerly Heng Beng Tong; note the same initials!). Most of the Peranakans I met were members of either one of the clubs. The clubs maintain their own Toapekong. Their main activities are community festivals or cultural performances like the lion dance.

There are many other surname organisations (*kongsi*) like the Lim, Lie, Oei, Tjoa and Gho *kongsi*. They are not very active and primarily look after the social activities of their members and arrange matters such as funerals. There is only one Chinese temple in Padang, financed and built by a rich Mr Lie together with his business friends. All these organisations are located in the Kampung China area.

How far the traditions and customs of the Peranakan Chinese in Padang can be preserved remains to be seen. We in Singapore are very fortunate because the peaceful situation and multiracial and multicultural environment allow us to actively preserve our Peranakan heritage. In my opinion, Singapore is the ideal place where we can establish a centre for preserving and studying Peranakan culture.

I would like to mention a comment my wife made after attending a Peranakan Association Dinner and Dance for the first time about five years ago. She said, 'I think this is the right group of people we belong to and I like to mix with them.' That was the night we decided to join the Association. ■



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CHAO CHOM MANDA BUNG

m

KING MONGKUT

m

CHAO CHOM MANDA PIAM

MOM SUN

m

PRINCE GAGANANGA YUGALA

(sisters)



WONG AH FOOK



PRINCESS
CHAVI VILAYA
GAGANANGA



PRINCE
SVASTI
SOBHON



PRINCESS
ABHA BARNI
GAGANANGA



SQ WONG



NELLIE
WONG

m



PRINCE
KOKSHATRIYA
SVASTIVATANA



QUEEN
RAMBAI BARNI
WIFE OF KING
PRAJATHIPOK (RAMA VII)



Kueh Ee at the Grand Palace?

Our Ladies in the Court of Siam

BY PETER LEE



It is perhaps a trivial curiosity, but who would have thought one could write a story about Straits Chinese ladies at the court of Siam? The tale connects two rather different women, separated by half a century. The connection may be tenuous, but it is nevertheless a whimsical, surprising and fascinating link between the Thai royal family on the one hand, and on the other, an obscure nyonya forgotten by history, as well as, more recently, a daughter of one of our eminent past presidents.

The first is a woman whose story and personality is shrouded in the mists of time. The name of Chao Chom Kim-niao appears in the definitive list of the wives and concubines of the great King Chulalongkorn in *The Royal Family of Thailand—The Descendants of King Chulalongkorn* by Jeffrey Finestone. 'Chao Chom' is the honorific title accorded to the minor wives of the King. Chao Chom Kim-niao, recorded as the 116th wife in a list of 153, is described as the 'granddaughter of Phraya Anukul Sayamkichi (formerly Tan Kimcheng); died 2.1.1897). In our good old Baba terminology, this princess is most likely a Nyonya by the name of Tan Kim Neo. Her grandfather Baba Tan Kim Ching (1829-92), chief heir of benefactor and tycoon Tan Tock Seng's fortune, was perhaps the most important rice merchant in southeast Asia. He was heavily involved in Siamese trade and built excellent relations with King Chulalongkorn who bestowed upon him the title Phraya Anukul Sayamkichi Upanich Sit Sayam Rath, and appointed him Consul-General and Special Commissioner for Siam in the Straits Settlements. Such was

the intimacy of their relationship that when the King and Queen of Siam visited Singapore on 30th May 1890, they stayed at 'Siam House', the mansion of Tan Kim Ching at the corner of North Bridge Road and Coleman Street.



Tan Kim Ching

Tan Kim Ching's sons predeceased him, and his grandson Tan Boo Liat (1874-1934) inherited most of his grandfather's community and social interests, becoming a leading member of the Hokkien and Straits Chinese communities at the turn of the century. He was in fact in the first committee of The Straits Chinese British Association when it was founded in 1900. He was also conferred with the same title as his father by King Chulalongkorn. Song Ong Siang notes many endeavours of the illustrious Tan family in his *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, but makes no mention of this cousin or sister of Tan Boo Liat sent to the Siamese court. Only one fact may be surmised by her title. Minor wives who bear royal children have the rank of 'Chao Chom Manda'. Chao Chom Kim-niao evidently did not produce any offspring.

Luckier in that respect has been Mom Nellie Svastivatana, who has a son in Singapore, and two daughters in Australia. 'Mom' is a courtesy title conferred on the wives of high-ranking princes of the Thai royal family. Her late husband, Mom Chao ('Prince') Kokshatriya Svastivatana (1914-1971), was the son of Phra Ong Chao ('Prince') Svasti Sobhon (1865-1935), and brother of Queen Rambai Barni (1904-1984) the consort of King Prajadhipok (1893-1941). Mom Nellie's father-in-law Prince Svasti Sobhon was at one time Minister of Law, and was a son of King Mongkut (1804-68) and half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (1853-1910). Mom Nellie may be more familiar to Singaporeans as Nellie Wong, the daughter of Dato' SQ Wong (1888-1980), who was a leading Malayan figure in the first half of the century, and a past president of the Straits Chinese British Association, as well as a founder director of many important companies in Singapore such as Great Eastern Life.

Mom Nellie visited Singapore recently and agreed to enlighten *The Peranakan* about her royal connection. At the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Wong family escaped to India, and members of the family soon found themselves in one way or another supporting the war effort. Assisting the British Ministry of Information, Nellie Wong prepared submissions for a Malaya-Singapore fortnightly report. In New Delhi she met Mom Chao Kokshatriya (also known as 'Kokasat'), who was a member of Force 136 (assembled by Lord Mountbatten as an anti-Japanese unit for Malaya) seconded to the Thai section of the same ministry that Wong was working in. Mom Chao Kokasat was very familiar with the Thai terrain and was working in

the cartographic section Mom Nellie seemed not to be impressed by his royal connections. 'I thought he was a private in the army, and anyway, I was more a socialist by sympathy.' They fell in love and married in New Delhi in 1944. Her husband who enlisted in England where he had been studying, was discharged immediately after the

war and was sent to Singapore. But he soon left for Belgium where he completed his degree in Applied Chemistry in a record nine months. Upon graduation, the Svastivatanas, or rather, the Svastis (as they preferred to be known) led a quiet life in Singapore, where he worked at the University as a lecturer up to his retirement.

Mom Nellie never had very intimate contact with her Thai relations, and was introduced to the family for the first time in 1947. 'They treated me as an equal so I didn't have to kneel.' (In court tradition royal personages have to be approached on knees.) The Svastivatana family is massive, her husband having 33 other siblings by various wives. She moved to Sydney in

1980 where she lives with her daughter, returning occasionally to visit her own large family in Singapore. A petite and elegant lady, she speaks with the kind of careful enunciation of her generation of educated Malaysians, and remains physically active, unafraid to hop onto an MRT train by herself. Her children maintain some links with their Thai heritage and can in various degrees speak the language. By royal decree, descendants of a King can enjoy the privilege of a royal title for four generations, and Mom Nellie's children and grandchildren will continue to hold titles before becoming 'merely' commoners like the rest of us. ■





Preparing Satay Chelop.



Our Nyonya Chefs.

The Nyonya cuisine will be the only aspect that will survive among the Australian Peranakan families and will continue to be a bonding factor among us.

In Perth, a Baba from Malacca, Ee Tiang Heng, has endeavoured to publicise the Peranakan culture. He has given cooking demonstrations on Nyonya dishes and lectures on the history of Malacca, Peranakan culture and Nyonya cuisine at various clubs and gatherings. Mr Ee is a grandson of Ee Kong Guan, a barrister renowned in Malacca for the preservation of Bukit China and the conservation of heritage buildings before he migrated to Perth.

Every culture evolves and eventually passes away. The one thing that remains is the history of those who created traditions in the making of that culture. Similarly, the Babas have played a significant role both socially and economically and they should be rightly remembered.

To name a few, I would like to mention such personalities as Tan Kim Seng, who donated the Kim Seng Bridge in Malacca; Lee Choon Guan, who donated an aircraft during the war years; and Tan Chay Yan, who started rubber



Laujat at Port Steven.

plantations in Malaysia. After reading the biographies of these great Babas, I am sure anyone would be proud to call himself or herself a Peranakan, even when one is far away from old Malacca. ■



Sing along.



Before the Tok Panjang.

Reflections of a Peranakan Youth Group Member

Being a member of perANAKan has many benefits, but there are a few burdens (though never onerous), such as being asked to contribute an article to the newsletter. So, with my vast experience of eighteen months' of hanging out with my fellow young (and I use this term in a relative sense) Peranakans, I will now attempt to answer some of the questions posed to me by curious onlookers...

BY NOREEN CHAN



Left: Youth Group with President Nathan at the Istana (June).

Right: 'Thank You' Dinner Party for helpers at 'Emily', Ivan Heng's house (14 September).

So what's this perANAKan youth group anyway?

Officially, the aim of the youth group is to promote awareness and understanding of our rich cultural heritage among younger Peranakans. In practice, the members join in general Peranakan Association functions and organise activities of their own; it's more of a social thing, you go, see your friends, have a good time and pick up a lot of knowledge along the way.

The youth group members come from all walks of life; what we have in common is an interest in Peranakan culture. I have to say, 'youth' here is a relative term; if you haven't qualified for senior-citizens' subsidised fares on public transport you're probably eligible. We are only as young as we feel anyway; by this criterion some of our members have yet to emerge from giddy adolescence!

So what do the youth group members actually do?

Well, we eat, meet, eat, chat, and when the conversation runs out, eat. Hmm, I seem to have used 'eat' three times. We must be a well-fed group of people! Although it does seem that many of our activities are of a gustatory nature, that's not all we do. The last few months, for example, were all action...

In June we joined other members and friends of The Peranakan Association on a weekend jaunt to Malacca. Over three exhilarating and exhausting three days, we sampled the many delights of this historical city, eating and shopping our way along Jonker Street by day and by night. Everyone came home with a souvenir, whether it was a piece of antique Peranakan jewellery or a slightly larger girth.

The following week saw some of us dressed in all our finery, trooping up to the Istana where President S R Nathan had arranged to meet a number of cultural groups. I know, the invitation card said 'Smart Casual', but hey, when have the Peranakans ever missed a chance to dress up? Call me a snob, but I think as a group we topped the sartorial stakes that night. The opportunity to have photos taken with the incumbent head of state, as well as former president Baba Wee Kim Wee, generated a degree of excitement matched only by the discovery that we could have our ice kacang made to order at the buffet.

In July, Uncle Peter Wee hosted a number of us at the Katong Antique House, where he took us through his extensive collection of kebaya and batik textiles (sarong and bimpoh), tracing the history and development of these most distinctive features of Nyonya dress.

At the end of August, Wild Rice Productions opened *Emily of Emerald Hill* at the Jubilee Hall, starring the inimitable Ivan Heng. A number of us volunteered our services as ushers, and our traditional

baju invited many comments and questions from theatregoers. At least one person joined The Peranakan Association during the play's run! As a sign of appreciation, everyone who had helped out was invited to Ivan Heng's home for makan after the play closed.

So what else does the youth group do on its own?

The perANAKan e-group, moderated by Baba Terence Teoh, is pretty cool. Not only is it a good way to pass information (about coming events) around almost instantly, it has been a great platform to share tips and to get help. Just recently a couple of Peranakans based overseas were able to obtain VCD's of Peranakan plays through the help of the e-group.

Two get-together dinners were organised during the last quarter, during August at the Marché in the Heeren, and in September at Don Noodle Bistro. There were a few new faces present, and the 'regulars' ensured that the group was the loudest and jolliest present in the restaurant!

In fact we meet quite regularly outside organised activities; whether it is watching the latest Peranakan play, shopping for batik sarong or going to the shoemaker to tapak kasut manek. It can be a relief to know that you are not the only one who has trouble pinning your kerosang or naik sanggul, and there's always help around from your more experienced friends!

Then of course there's the eating (yes, again). We celebrated the Mooncake festival with a feast of popiah, pie tee, porridge and pomelo...oh look, an alliterative plethora of P's, enjoyed by hungry young Peranakans! By the time this goes into print, we will have checked out a new restaurant and hatched yet more plans for the future.

So what's ahead? The annual Dinner & Dance on 2 November is high on everyone's list, and after that the Baba Convention in Malacca at the end of November. And no doubt, more food and general hilarity. 🍴

Sounds promising, how do I join?

Couldn't be easier. No secret passwords, fancy ceremonies, background checks. You can subscribe to the e-group by sending an email from your account to peranakansubscribe@yahoogroups.com or email our co-ordinator, Heather, at youth@peranakan.org.sg. Come along to our next get-together, meet the gang and have a great time.

Watch this space!

EVENTS

The night we dined with the President

BY ANTHONY OEI

On 20 June, Peranakan Association committee members had dinner with the highest-ranking dignitary in Singapore at the most distinguished edifice in the land. President S R Nathan and the First Lady had graciously invited us to the function at the Istana, along with members of several other social organisations, for an evening of interaction.

We were very excited and deeply honoured to have been invited. It was a great privilege to meet Singapore's No.1 Citizen and dine with him in the same Banquet Hall where he holds glittering state functions, and to step into the high-security, sprawling and palatial Istana and savour its grandeur.

Association President Lee Kip Lee went up to meet the President on his arrival at the Hall and they exchanged pleasantries. Mr Lee made our evening even more memorable by introducing each of us to him before the start of the buffet-style dinner where the guests of over 50 included former President Wee Kim Wee and Mrs Wee.

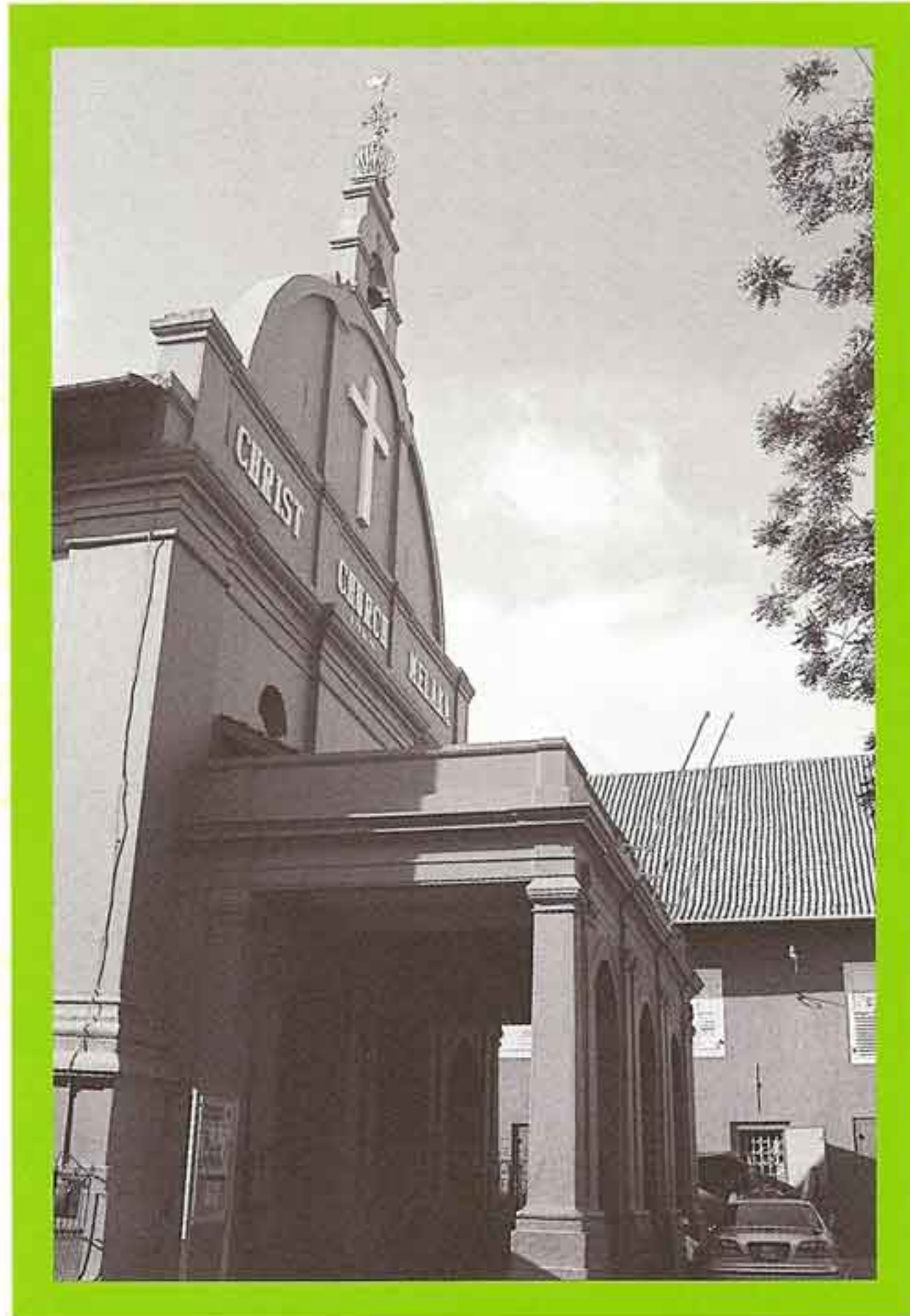
The august party was an informal affair designed for the guests to mingle freely and enjoy themselves. Most were dressed in smart casuals. Many of us Babas wore batik shirts and our Nyonyas, *sarong kebaya*, which turned many heads that evening.

President Nathan also sported a blue batik shirt with a floral motif. He made everyone feel at home with his genial manner. He is warm, friendly, humble and a good host. Despite his high position, there are no airs about him. He is truly a man of the people, always eager to reach out to them. He had a table reserved for him and his distinguished guests, but he was seldom seated there. He spent much of the time moving

among the other guests, shaking hands and talking with as many as he could.

We enjoyed ourselves immensely. Thank you, Mr President, for having invited us to dine with you and for a very memorable and delightful evening. ■





Malacca Heritage Tour

15 to 17 JUNE 2001

BY MARLENE FOO

The Newton Circus Hawker Centre Carpark was abuzz with the sound of excitement in the morning hours of Friday 15 June as eighty members and friends of the Asian Civilisations Museum and The Peranakan Association gathered for yet another tour of Malacca. This time it was not the usual weekend shopping spree but a heritage tour to satisfy the desire of those anxious to discover the historical sites and the cultural wealth abounding in the Peranakan culture in Malacca.

The 3-hour journey via the Tuas 2nd Link did not seem too long when we finally arrived in Malacca, a familiar 'home' to many of us whose families had their origins there. Eager and hungry for lunch we proceeded to Nyonya Suan, a popular Peranakan restaurant, before checking into the Golden Legacy Hotel where some of the energetic ones went shopping whilst others rested in preparation for the evening's activities.



Ten Nyonya Chefs from Malacca who prepared the buffet dinner.



That night, as our group arrived at the premises of The Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM) at Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (formerly Heeren Street) they made a resplendent entry with the women dressed in their dazzling *sarong kebayas* and the men in their batik shirts. We were first taken for a tour of the clubhouse, which consists of two adjacent, typically long Peranakan houses with two air-wells and which stretched to the reclaimed land which was once the sea at the rear. The interior was decorated with old Peranakan furniture and artefacts with a hall complete with a stage and dance floor providing a touch of modernity. There was also a display and sale of *kasut manek* (beaded slippers).

The Buffet Dinner was a magnificent spread prepared by a team of ten Nyonya members of the PPCM who presented us with a dream menu consisting of such



Decisions... decisions... 'Which pair do I NOT have?'

One for everyone's album... posing for group photo in Malacca.

The group enjoys a specially-prepared meal at the Malacca Association's clubhouse.

delectable fare as *sambal timun*, *sambal bendir*, *sambal belachan*, *babi masak buah keluak*, *ayam tempura*, *babi toh hay*, *bee tai mak*, *chap chai* and *tapay pulot*. And, of course, to round up the evening there was a sing-along session, dancing and a hilarious cross-dressing party game.

The next day began with a visit to the Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum which comprised three shop-houses owned by the family of Mr Chan Kim Lay the Vice President of the PPCM. The priceless exhibits on display gave us a vivid impression of the grandeur of the lifestyle of the wealthy Peranakans of yore. From there we proceeded to the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, the oldest Chinese temple in Singapore and Malaysia. It was built in the mid 17th century and was a meeting place for all the Chinese clans to formulate rules and guidelines for the welfare and protection of all Chinese in Malacca. It was recently restored to its original glory by craftsmen from China.

After dinner, we made our way to the weekend night market at Jonker Street for a final shopping spree (local handicrafts and food). Before our departure on the third day we made a final call on the PPCM clubhouse to purchase *kueh-kueh* and *bak chang* prepared by its members. We finally left Malacca after a sumptuous lunch at Manis Sayang.

The trip was an enriching experience; we made new friends with whom we shared a common interest in and a love for the culture and traditions of our Peranakan Heritage.



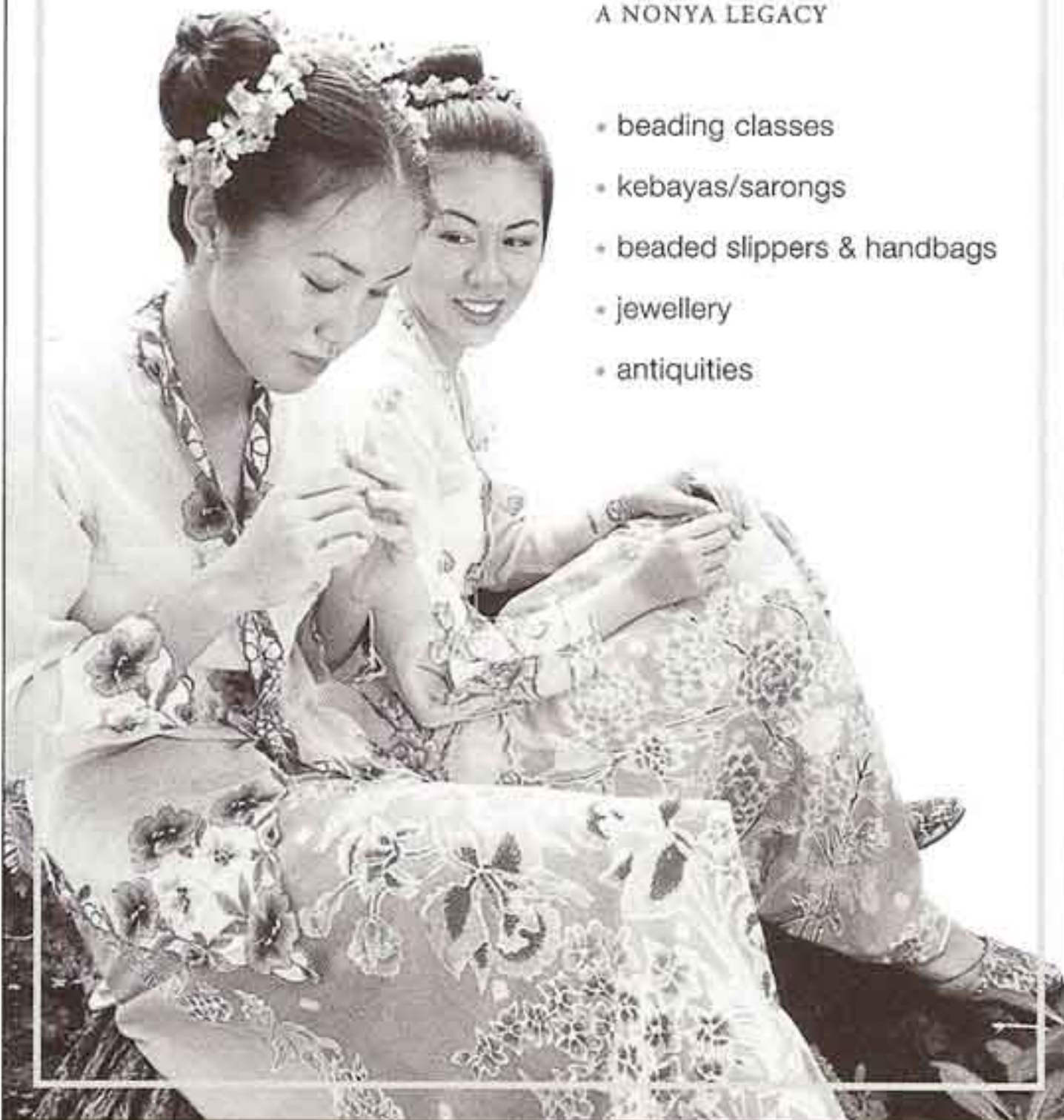
Winner & Team, Cross-Dressing Contest



Cross-Dressing Contest.

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The Peranakan Roadshow Baba & Nyonya masuk sekolah!

BY RICHARD TAN



One for the Roadshow. Members of our own Peranakan Voices.

The first in a series of Peranakan Roadshows was launched on Monday 15 October by the Association's Cultural Development Group with the presentation of culture and heritage. It was truly a first of its kind introduced to schools in Singapore!

We must thank St. Andrew's Junior College and the additional support of the National Arts Council's 'Arts in Education' Theatre Grant, for making all this possible.

In a multi media 'MTV style' presentation, the Roadshow kicked off with an introduction of our historical beginnings—a quick survey of our forefathers from China, and various aspects of our culture from lifestyle to antiques, from fashion to food, traditional rituals to modern day influences. The presentation was warmly received by the students of SAJC as 'infotainment' (informative entertainment).

The show shifted from screen to stage during the presentation of traditional attire and jewellery, as our models paraded in their traditional *baju panjang* and *kebaya*. In a surprise move, three other

SAJC students were specially selected to model in Peranakan attire, adding a new twist to the *kebayas* as they mixed and matched it with their modern day clothes, from casual jeans to evening wear! These young *Nyonya* wannabees easily stole the show, judging from the resounding applause and oohs-and-ahs they received from their school friends and teachers!

The hour long show closed with our Peranakan Voices (our Association Choir) rendering some of our popular Peranakan and nostalgic songs and inviting the audience to *joget* and sing-along, making this another true blue Peranakan celebration! Some students confessed that they have never seen so many 'aunties and uncles' with so much vim and verve, enjoying themselves on stage!

The verdict? The teachers and students had a wonderful time! So, they have already *chope* and booked us way in advance for SAJC's next Cultural Festival in 2002!

For now, stay cool! The Babas and Bibiks will be back!!!

Kenny Chan's New TV Series



A weekly Peranakan cooking show, *The Cook, His Food & the Dishy Nyonyas*, started its run on Sunday 30 September at the 9pm slot on Arts Central starring Kenny Chan and his wife Fern Loo as well as the Association's very own Jessie Cheang and GSA stalwart Mabel Lee, who appear in a few episodes. Dr Noreen Chan, who is an active member of our Youth Group, wrote the script for a couple of episodes.

Celebrity chef Kenny Chan (most recently seen in our very own Wayang Peranakan in March) plays Romeo a swinging bachelor and chef extraordinaire. His food attracts Nyonyas like bees to honey. True to his name, Romeo gallantly cooks Peranakan dishes for his niece, his past and present girlfriends, his neighbours and some Nyonyas who happen to throw themselves at him.

Romeo lives in a Peranakan ancestral house (*rumah abu*) with his elder sister, Tachi Geok, where sibling rivalry runs high whenever they are in the kitchen. Outside the kitchen, Romeo has his own sagas with cousin Lynn in Malacca and

Jennifer, his potential girlfriend in Singapore. Things reach boiling point when an old flame reappears and seems to rekindle the embers of a past liaison.

Like a moth to fire, each week Romeo is unwittingly drawn to the 'stomach of the house' (*perot rumah*) to cook—either through the calculated schemes of some Nyonyas or some serendipitous event.

What ensues is a saga of soap opera proportions, with Romeo embroiled in a comedy of errors while trying to stem the enthusiasm of the unrelenting Nyonyas.

All the while Romeo whips up favourite Peranakan dishes with the help of his Nyonyas who scramble over pots and pans for his undivided attention. Recipes from the show, such as *ayam buah keluak*, *udang lemak nanas* and *nyonya chendol* are available at the Arts Central website (<http://artscentral.mediacorp.com/index.htm>). TENGOK PUAS PUAS, LEPAS TU MASAKLAH!

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GUNONG SAYANG ASSOCIATION'S WAYANG PERANAKAN

Hujan Balek Ka-Langgit (THE IMPOSSIBLE)

BY BEBE SEET

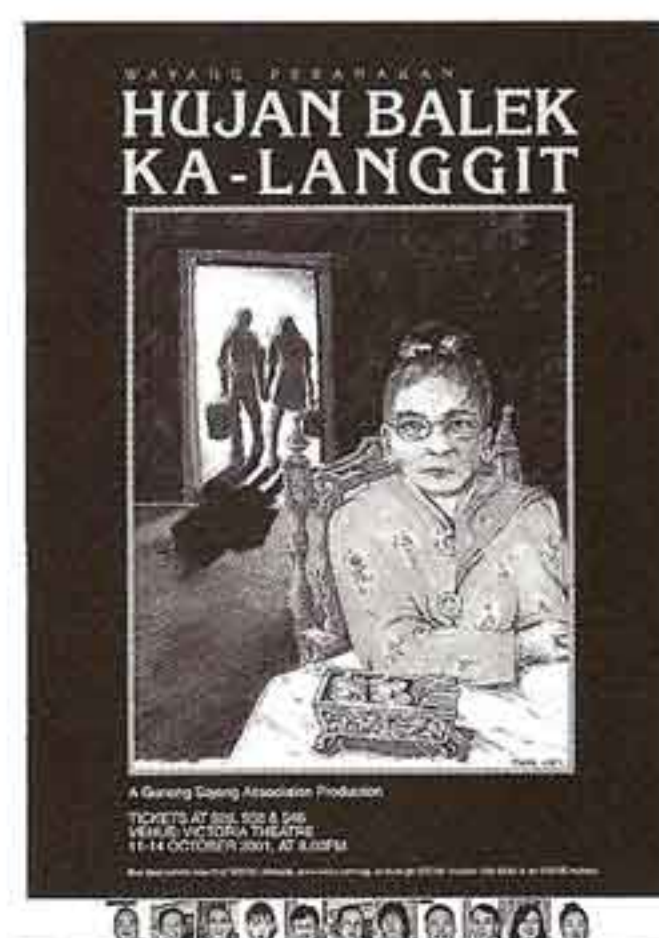
The opening act of a *bibik*, deranged by grief over the loss of her family, status and wealth, provides a good opportunity to get acquainted with the lives of the Peranakans of yore. A drama inspired by the sagas of generations of indomitable matriarchs, *Hujan Balek Ka-Langgit* (The Impossible) centres on the portrayal of two distinct female characters in a Peranakan household—the older, self-centred and tyrannical matriarch and the younger, frightened and submissive concubine.

A devious manipulative matriarch tries to maintain her power over the family at all costs, unfortunately causing all family members to abandon her and leading to her mental breakdown. GT Lye, veteran actor/director, plays the matriarch Bibik Linggi, delivering a familiar household stereotype in a straightforward way. KT, as Lorna Chong, steps into his *bini kechik* role comfortably, evoking sympathy for expressing the character's long-suffering servility. Call them victims of a fate scourged by tyranny—such was the norm for women of that generation; but certainly not in the opinions of the young women of today! A sweet-young-thing in the audience was overheard voicing her vehemence of Lorna's servility and Baba Ong Kim's loathsome lack of guts (Bibik Linggi's son). One member of the audience remarked on the pageantry of

the traditional ceremonies such as birthdays, and the beauty and elegance of the patois spoken by the cast. Subtitles really helped for those who could not understand the 'deep' patois.

Despite falling short of the usual raucous gags, there were enough twists to provoke a realistic sense of cynicism as well as the predicament that provides the sweet Cinderella-like happy ending. What is the special appeal of a Peranakan play

that draws people? Waves of sentimental nostalgia fill the hearts of the older folk as typical utterances of Peranakan patois in the dialogue are embellished with musical renditions of favourite old time *dondang sayang* by the familiar voices of William Tan, Terry Lim and Julie Chia. Gunong Sayang Association's production has traditionally been an annual attraction—a novel blend of arts, striking costumes and performance.



Bibiks Behind Bars

A Comedy Skit presented by The Association

Announcing a series of comedy acts that will go on the road as part of the Association's reach-out programme for our Peranakan community at large! *Bibiks Behind Bars* is a hilarious comedy skit centering around the story of the favourite pastime of the bibiks and nyonyas of old— main judi (main cherki)!



The hilarious and talented cast from Bibiks Behind Bars.

Imagine, a gang of *bibiks* being raided and ushered into the 'Black Marias' (police vans), ending up at the police station! See how they wiggle their way out with all their sweet alibis and convincing the judge to 'let them all go free'.

Together with a new crop of *anak wayang* (performers), the Peranakan Voices (our choir) will entertain with traditional and familiar Peranakan melodies between each act! 🎭

Coming to a community club around the east coast!
Dates and venues will be announced soon!

NOTICE BOARD

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome aboard the following 21 new members whose addition increases our roll to 1,603 members:

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Mdm Chan Siew Kim Alice
Mr Chiang Ming Shun
Mr Chiang Ming Yu
Ms Michelle De Souza
Mr Goh Chai Lam Bob
Mrs Goh Mary
Mrs Ho Lesley Armand
Mrs Huang Lucy
Mr Huang Patrick Robin
Mdm Lee Geck Neo
Ms Lim Patricia
Ms Lowe Geraldene Anne Luth
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Mdm Oh Nancy
Ms Ong Ming Li Phyllis
Ms Ong Siew Kim Jenny
Ms Ong Siew Kee Catherine
Mr Singh Jaya Prakash
Mr Tan Kwong Ann Daniel
Ms Tay Kim Neo Janet
Ms Xue Meixin Claire

OBITUARY

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of
Mr Chong Kow Thye
Mrs Patsy Tan
Ms Khoo Ee Lian
on their recent bereavement.

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION'S 101st ANNIVERSARY AND ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE LAGI SATU KALI BERJUMPA (SEE YOU ONCE AGAIN)
Mandarin Hotel,
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7.30 p.m.
\$68 and \$98 per person.
Donation Tables from \$1,500.
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14th BABA CONVENTION, MALACCA

FRIDAY 30th NOVEMBER 2001 to SUNDAY 2nd DECEMBER 2001

The Registration Fee of RM220.00 per head entitles each delegate to participate in the following events and functions:

30th November 2001 7.30 p.m. Welcome Dinner & Dance – 'Malam Cahaya Bintang' – at the Banquet Hall, Hotel Equatorial, Melaka.

1st December 2001 The venue for the day and night will be The Fish Pond Resort, Durian Tunggal, Malacca which is about 10 miles from Malacca Town.

8.45 a.m. to 12 Noon. Convention Seminar Theme: 'Why We Should Preserve Baba & Nyonya Cuisine.'

12 Noon. Nyonya Buffet Lunch followed by Cooking Competition, Fishing Competition and participation in old Baba & Nyonya games until tea time.

7.30 p.m. to Midnight. Convention Dinner & Dance at The Fish Pond Resort, Durian Tunggal. Food stalls will provide Nyonya hawker food – laksa, popiah, satay, etc. during dinner when there will be dancing.

2nd December 2001 11.30 a.m. Farewell Lunch at Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka premises at 149/151 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock before departure.

Hotel Accommodation

Direct reservations should be made with Hotel Equatorial, Malacca Tel.06-2802026 – not later than by 10th November 2001.

Single Occupancy RM140.00 per room per night with breakfast.

Twin Sharing Occupancy RM160.00 per room per night with breakfast.

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Gavin Ooi - Secretary
Lim Geok Huay - Treasurer
Richard Tan - Entertainment
Rita Bertrand - PR / Advertising
Christine Ong - Programme Coordinator
Kevin Aeria - Programme Coordinator
Alan Koh - Advisor

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Babacappella, The Peranakan Voices,
Mr William Tan
The Danny Koh Big Band

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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

We regret to announce that owing to the current economic downturn the Peranakan Association Food & Craft Fair 2001 scheduled on November 2001 at Far East Square has now been cancelled, and the Peranakan Bangsawan scheduled on 12 & 13 December 2001 at the Kallang Theatre has now been postponed to another date next year.

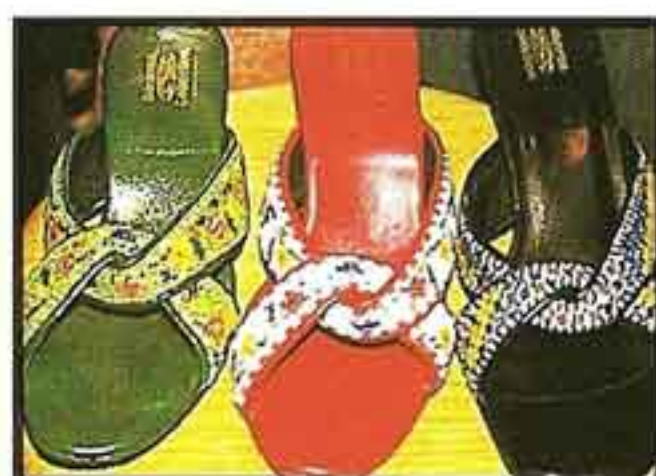


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