

the
peranakan

january - march 2002

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



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

neo - peranakan
new ideas for old traditions



INSIDE

Crafty Peranakans Cuppage Road Temple
Old Food, New Cooks Devonshire Road Chye Tng



Marine Parade
Community Club

The Marine Parade Community Club,
Senior Citizens Executive Committee

in collaboration with

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bibiks BEHIND BARS

A PRODUCTION OF THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION
CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMME



bibiks BEHIND BARS is a hilarious comedy skit centering around the story of the *Bibiks* and *Nonyas*, in their favourite afternoon pastime, "*main cherki*"! Imagine, a gang of *Bibiks* being raided and ushered into the "*Black Maria*" (Police Van) and ending up at the police station! See how they wriggle their way out with all their sweet talk and alibis to let them all go free! Together with our new crop of perANAKAN WAYANG actors, The Peranakan Voices will entertain with traditional and familiar melodies between each act.

* The Melodians (popular *Melaka Band*) will be performing on 18 May show only.

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Hijacked, and it's good news

ANTHONY OEI

The young have hijacked this edition of *The Peranakan* and it's good news. You see, they are eager to tell us about their new cultural exploits. Indeed, they have hidden depth. We already know how the proactive Youth Group, Babacappella, the Peranakan Voices and the Cultural Development Group have been delighting audiences with their engaging performances.

Now, as we kick off the Year of the Horse, they are blazing new trails. In this issue, we read stories of some old, little-known landmarks and the creation of new art forms that are sure to enhance our enchanting Peranakan culture. These projects call for initiative, inventiveness and resourcefulness.

Not many of us know the existence of the Cuppage Road Temple or the Devonshire Road Temple. We can go past them a hundred times a day, without a second glance. Yet the holy shrines have stood there for ages, and no doubt answered the prayers of thousands of devotees. Noreen Chan, Tan Geok Koon and Tan Ban Huat have not only discovered these places of worship but also unearthed the tales contained therein, for our edification.

Peter Lee tells us that serious work is afoot to create exciting new types of Nyonya handicrafts. Three young bibiks inspired by new ideas, Heather Ong, Shia Ai Lee and Bebe Seet, are leading the way with their artistry. Their attempt is certainly timely, given the rising popularity of all things Peranakan in Singapore today. Their work will also pave the way for the further development of Peranakan art forms, and take the culture to a new dimension.

Heather Ong shares her experience as a modern Peranakan in the kitchen and reviews the world of ready-made *rempahs* — another innovation for today's busy lifestyle. Food, with its links to taste, smell and memories, is undoubtedly an important part of our heritage that is evolving with the times.

It is heart-warming to see more young members putting their respective talent to good use. Equally heartening is their eagerness to change and improve things. They are not satisfied with the status quo. They want to break away from the mould or comfort zone. They are confident of their abilities. This is what the Association has been advocating. It is important that we keep in step with the times. The needs and aspirations of today's youth are vastly different from those of yesterday's generation. We should leave no stone unturned to make it happen, if we are to progress. And our young members are the best people who can tailor our products for their contemporaries. They know the market best.

Of course, their artistic creations will not be lost among older Peranakans. We old foggies welcome them as these will add to the range and diversity of our colourful and alluring products. We can still appreciate new and beautiful things, you know. The offerings of the young will benefit us immensely. And mark this. Many older members are playing their role, too. They are contributing to our cultural pursuits in many ways, like art, drama, history, clothes, footwear and food. We are open to new ideas from young minds to improve ourselves.

We hope many more young Peranakans will rise up to the challenge and make the experience of being a Baba and Nyonya even more exciting. Our future lies in their hands. We will continue to encourage and support them in their attempt to realise their dreams. Working together, we can scale new heights.

At the end of the day, we will all be the richer for it.

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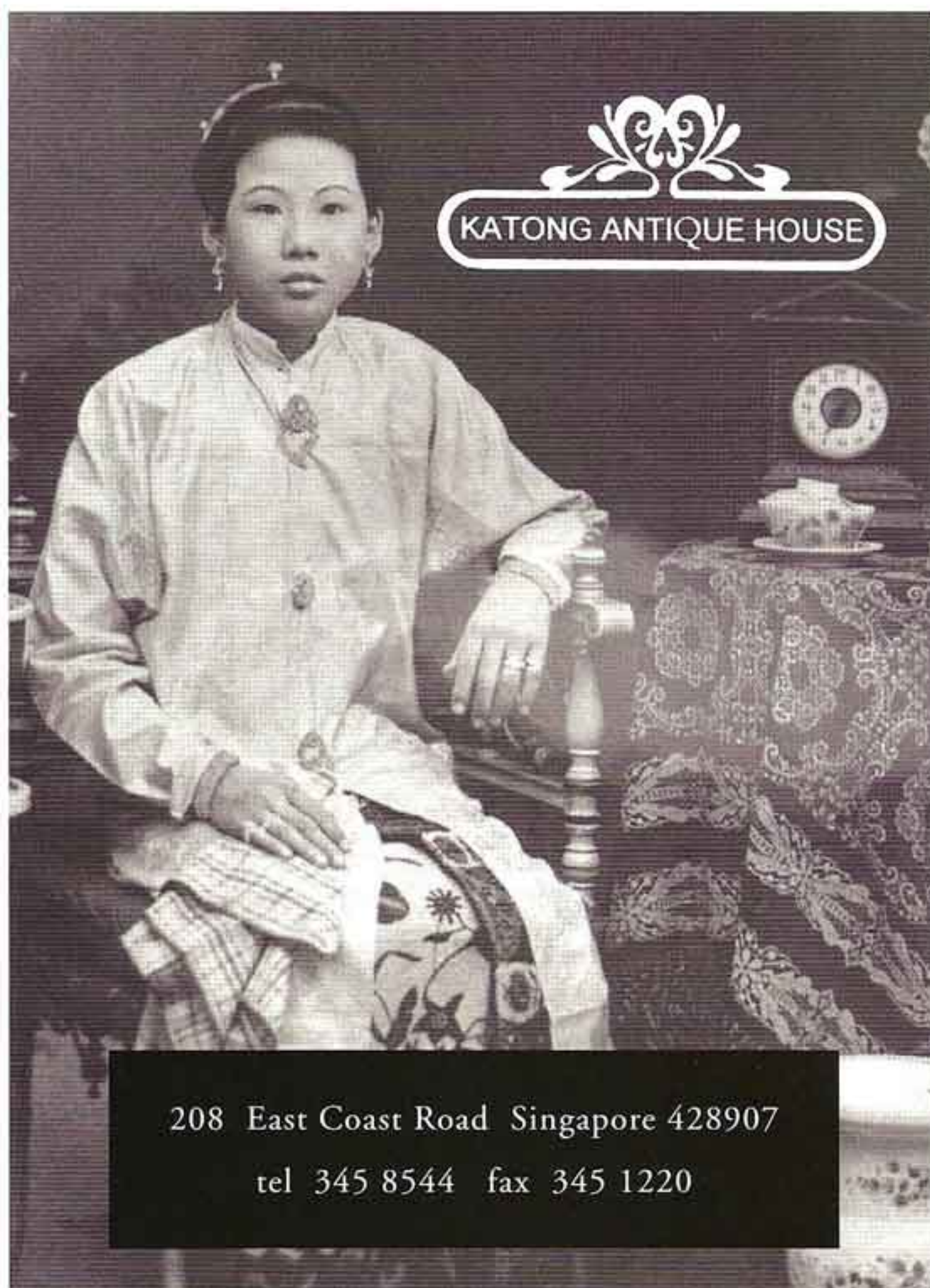
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First Song Lyric Writing Competition

Sharpen your wilt and pencil, the first Song Lyric Writing Competition is on.

Ever wonder that you can do better to the words of a certain song? Old ditties and favourite tunes sometimes get new text to become revitalised hits. Test your talent and bring out our unique Peranakan Malay-English-Hokkien patois to full expression by re-working on the lyric of a popular melody.

You don't have to be a trained musician, just show your brilliance with words and originality in your approach. Start with a song whose tune you know well and work on the verses and refrain.

which song to work on? You might start your selection from the Peranakan Association's 'lest We Forget,' a compilation of songs from the 30s to the 60s in a book. Gather your friends to make the lyric-writing a group effort if you like.

The winners of the top five winning lyrics will receive prizes (to be announced later) and the honour of having their achievements performed by the singers from our Cultural Group during our Association's annual dinner and dance November 29 2002. This crowning glory is to have the "rewritten" songs recorded in a CD currently produced by the Association's Cultural group. Judging will be done in strict confidentiality.

You may send in as many compositions as you like but each will have to be in an individual folder with the suggestion "lyrics to be sung to the tune of the original song-title." you may include instructions for singing, for example, as a male-female duet or other arrangements. Please include in block print your name, address, phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail address.

Closing date for the competition is 30th September.

Address it as: The First Song Lyric Writing Competition
The Peranakan Association,
Raffles City PO Box 1640
Singapore 911755.

Crafty Peranakans

Three ladies explore new Peranakan expressions in their handwork

PETER LEE

How often we despair about the decline of our heritage in the fast-paced environment of the present age. Yet there seems no surer way to do something about it than by example. All is not lost. Already *The Peranakan* has over the years reported on the efforts of individuals in creating new art with Peranakan themes - from the paintings of Tung Yue Nang, Martin Loh and Desmond Sim, to the innovative textiles of Kenneth Wee. Slowly and subtly our culture edges towards new directions with the creative efforts of these artistic people. Adding to this are the unexpected, delightfully surprising contributions of some of our members.

Babush-nyas

"I have always drawn inspiration from Peranakan collectibles in my own artistic expressions. I enjoy handicrafts as a hobby, and like to add a personal touch to gifts that I buy. I have given friends letter holders, trinket boxes and plaques painted with the rose-pinks, peonies and phoenix inspired by Peranakan motifs.

On a recent trip to Russia, their most popular souvenir, Matryoshka Dolls, intrigued me tremendously. These families of painted wooden dolls are of decreasing size, nesting one inside another. When I came across a shop selling the unpainted dolls, I bought a set to paint some Russian Babushkas (plump peasant grandmothers).

Upon my return home, I was sorting through some photographs, when the myriad colours of *sarong kebaya* caught my eye. I instantly knew that I would paint my dolls as a unique collection of plump Nyonyas in their traditional outfits instead. I painted five dolls in acrylic colours, based on actual *kebayas* from the wardrobes of friends and family. It took me a week to create my set of "Babush-nyas", a unique reminder of my trip to Russia and my Peranakan ancestry." Heather Ong, doctor.

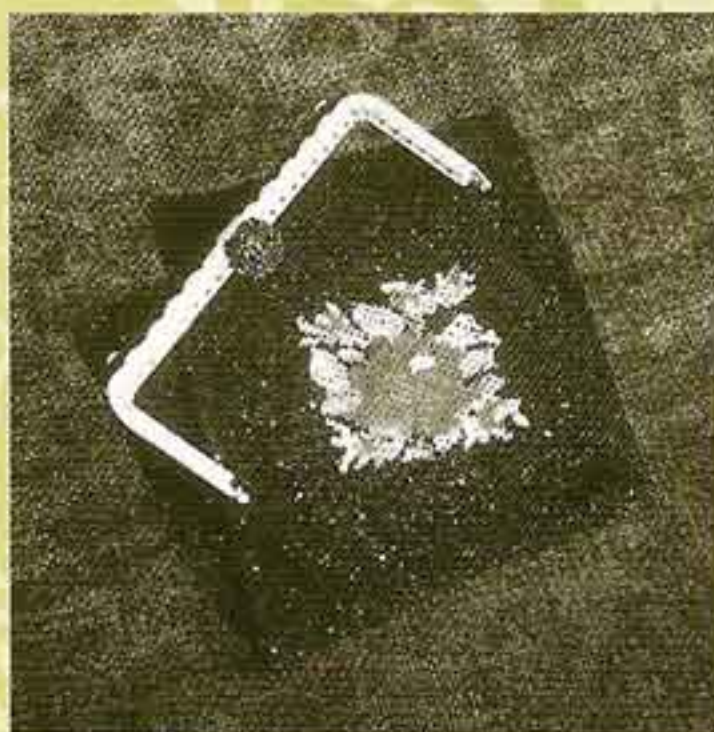


Bebe's beads

"I have always been interested in handicrafts; even when I was a teacher I took over most of the craft lessons in school. My first introduction to the world of Nyonya beadwork was a beautiful pair of *kasut manek* I saw in Wah Yik in Malacca, and discovered for the first time that they were collectible items (and not just something old ladies wore). So I decided to learn to do it myself and worked towards mastering the traditional art of Peranakan beadwork.



About three years ago, I ventured to new areas - beading *kebayas*, silk *sarongs*, evening bags and in 2000 I even made a one-of-a-kind Peranakan beaded teddy bear! Inspired by the tradition of bead weaving used as fringes in many beaded items, I have worked with my students to create evening bags, panels and even bookmarks. Two years ago I presented these developments as well as our rich tradition to an appreciative international audience at a bead convention in Santa Fe, California, USA. Peranakan beadwork goes global!" Bebe Seet, beadwork specialist and proprietor of Bebe's Niche.

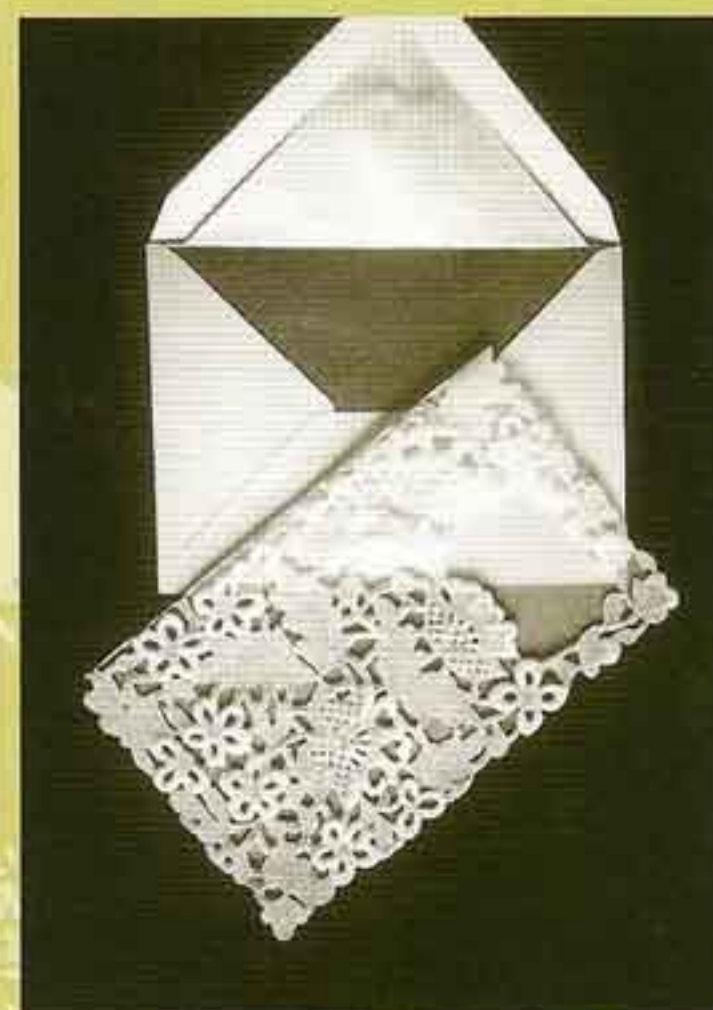
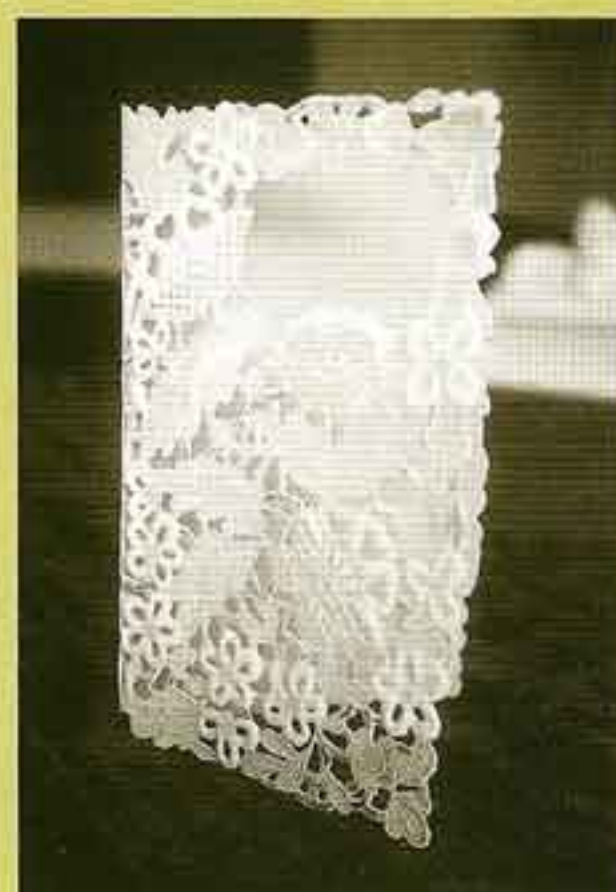


Peranakan Paper Crafts

"Crafts have been a serious interest of mine since my schooldays when I first learnt cross-stitch, knitting and crochet. But since then I have explored more unusual crafts, such as making jewellery from fired plasticine, and paper toles, which are photos or images turned into three dimensional pictures by a process of layering. I have used postcards and pictures with Peranakan themes to create these paper toles, and once even made one from a very decorative flyer for a Peranakan Association food fair.



I have also been very interested in parchment craft, which turns parchment paper into very delicate cards with lace-like edges, which are reminiscent of the lacework of a kebaya. I began to experiment with such Peranakan themes since I joined the Association about six years ago. I have learnt beadwork from Bebe Seet and with her other students, have tried to trace back the techniques of beadweaving. We have had lots of fun coming up with ideas to make new things such as bookmarks and mini panels." Shia Ai Lee, realtor.



Old Food, New Cooks

HEATHER ONG & CAROLINE SHUM

Is it possible for a young person, who has never made *rempah* before, to cook a Peranakan meal for a party of ten within an afternoon?

What better way to find out than to appoint some young inexperienced cooks to undertake this daunting challenge! To make things easier for the inexperienced cooks, we decided to test out some ready-to-use *rempah* and *sambals*.

What did we need?

Two novice cooks - Caroline & Judy - Heather's small kitchen, ready-to-use *rempah*, bottled *sambal belachan* and *sambal tumis* from Chilli Padi the Nonya Family Restaurant, fresh ingredients from the market (chicken, pork ribs, prawns, vegetables, *buah keluak* with shell intact), dry *rempah* powder from Mrs Irene Ooi, and some food tasters whose palates have been honed by Grandma's cooking - Noreen, Timothy, Tony, Isaac and Jocelyne.

How was it done?

We first studied a cookbook of Peranakan food written by Mrs Lee Chin Koon, and noted the amount of preparation needed to peel, pound and fry *rempah* the traditional way. Our two cooks exclaimed, "So *lecheh*! I don't know how to *tumbok rempah*! I don't want to clean the blender! It will mess up the kitchen!"

We then proceeded with our task at hand and followed the instructions attached to the ready-to-use *rempah* pastes - simply add water, *asam*, meat and simmer. "Ah, this is more to our liking," they cooed.

While the meat was simmering, we busied ourselves for the next half hour preparing other ingredients and cutting vegetables. We did some quick mixing and *voila*: a complete Peranakan meal without the mess - *ayam sio*, *babi buah keluak*, *udang asam pedas*, *sambal telur*, *sambal timun* and *sambal udang*.

How was the food?

The whole process - the simplicity, the *wangi* aroma that wafted from the cooking pots, the appearance of the food, the texture and the taste of the dishes, pleasantly surprised the skeptics among us. By following the simple instructions, the food was already *boleh tahan*, however, we enhanced our dishes with authentic additions like *buah keluak* nuts, *daun kunyit* and pineapple to the *asam pedas*, *bunga kantan*, onions and dried shrimps to make *sambal timun*. We also made subtle adjustments to the taste, like an extra touch of *asam* or soya sauce.

We completed the meal with rice, *chap chye* and papaya *titek* soup (graciously provided by the more experienced cooks!), then *chuchi mulut* with *agar-agar* lime juice, and fruits. To round off the evening, we played traditional games like *chongkak*, *chatek* and five-stones. We also enjoyed a Lunar New Year preview of pineapple tarts, *kueh bangkit*, and prawn rolls from Chilli Padi Restaurant.



Tony
giving
the thumbs up





What are these ready-to-use rempah?

The *rempah* from Chilli Padi Restaurant was perfected by Mr Jolly Wee, a chef with many years of experience. The ready-to-use pastes stem from requests by restaurant patrons, who wanted to replicate the restaurant's delicious food at home, but found it difficult to prepare the *rempah*. Chilli Padi has ready-to-use *rempah* for Peranakan dishes like *ayam buah keluak*, *ayam sio*, *asam pedas*, *mee siam*, and *laksa*. Bottled *sambal belachan* and *sambal tumis* are also available.

Mrs Irene Ooi's dry *rempah* in powder form also carried simple instructions - add water, *tumis* for a few minutes, add meat and simmer. Mrs Ooi's recipe is handed down from her aunt, Mrs Leong Yee Soo, author of another Peranakan cookbook. The dry *rempah* was developed when her son, who was studying overseas, wanted a taste of home cooking. Frozen wet *rempah* pastes did not survive the long

flight to London, but the dry form was lightweight and easy to send overseas. Try her selection of *rempah* powder for fish and chicken curry, *rendang*, *satay* marinade & sauce, *mee siam* and *laksa*.

What did we learn?

Ready-to-use *rempah* has ensured that the joy of Peranakan cooking can travel far beyond a Nyonya's kitchen, thus creating more awareness of our culture. Many of us young Peranakans did not have the interest to learn the cooking techniques "hands-on" from our grandmothers. Now that we are older, we would like to learn the foundations of good cooking, especially the making of basic *rempah* and its variations. It is difficult to find the time and patience required to master Peranakan cooking, so in the meanwhile, the commercially available, easy-to-use *rempah* is a welcome addition to the busy cook's kitchen. 🌟

* Chilli Padi's selection of ready-to-use *rempah* is priced between \$6 to \$7 per tub, each enough for ten persons.

It is available at Chilli Padi Restaurant, 11 Joo Chiat Place, #01-03 (Tel: 6247 9531), and at promotion counters in the basements of Tangs and Takashimaya Department Store

*Mrs Irene Ooi's dry *rempah* powder costs between \$2 to \$3.50 per packet, each enough for ten persons (Tel: 6466 7149)



Cuppage Road Temple

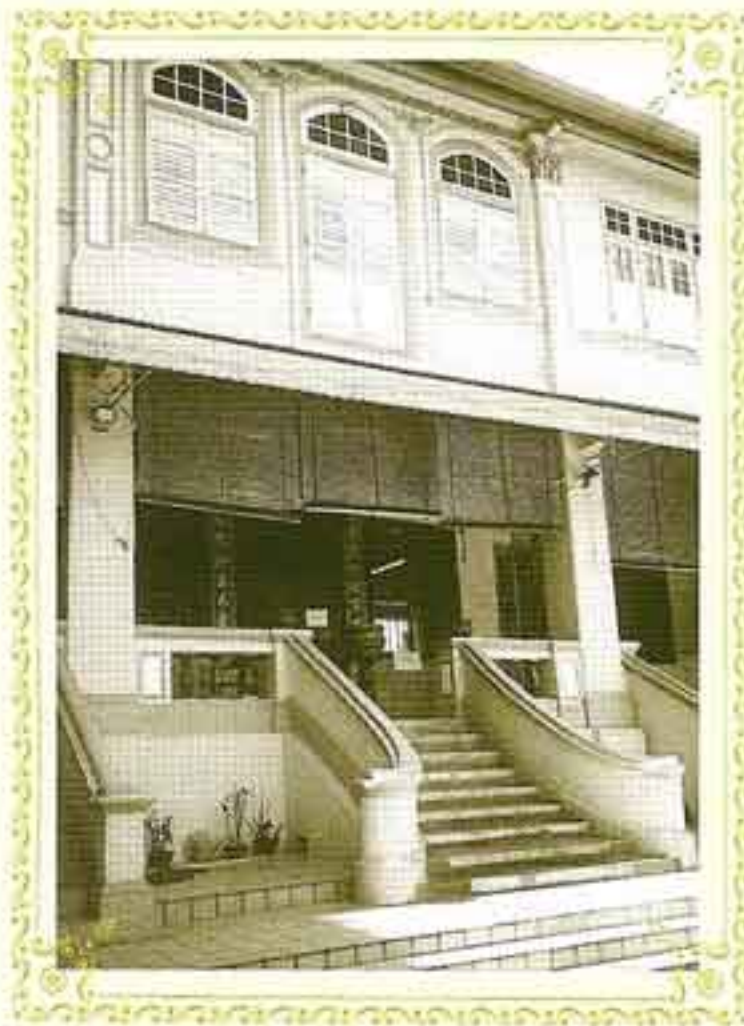
The Sian Teck Tng Vegetarian Convent

NOREEN CHAN

Tucked away at the quiet end of Cuppage Road, between the Starhub Centre and a bend of the Central Expressway (CTE) is a little-known historical gem with great significance to the Peranakan community. The "Cuppage Road Temple" as it is popularly known, is a two-storey building in the traditional Chinese style, with a small courtyard and colourful archway. On most days it is a little haven of peace just a stone's throw from the commercial bustle of nearby Orchard Road, but come Buddhist feast days it is crammed with worshippers clutching bundles of joss-sticks, paper offerings, fruits and flowers.

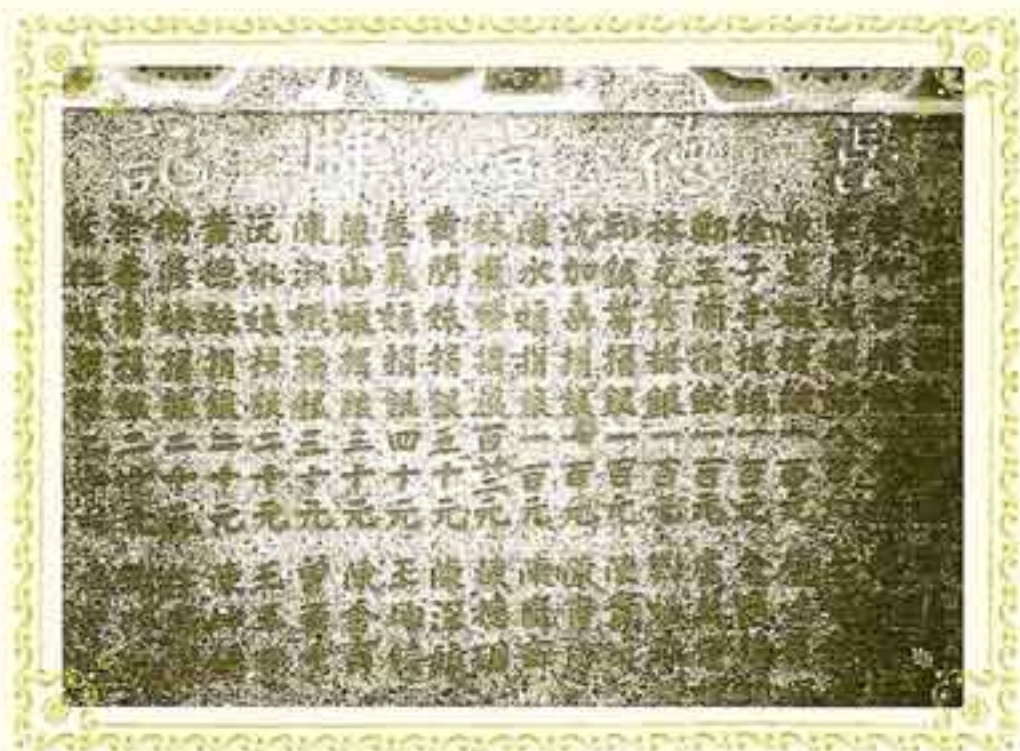
On a rain-soaked December morning I trooped up to the temple, to meet *Kor Tai*, the 82 year old lady who has headed this institution for the last two decades. She has not lived there for as long as Miss Chong, another remarkably youthful-looking octogenarian who has called this place home for sixty-three years. It is to both of them that the credit goes for this article.

The Sian Teck Tng Vegetarian Convent - to use its official name - was built one hundred years ago. The land was provided by a Teochew family living next door (where the old Cuppage Road Market used to stand), and funds for building were donated by well-wishers and devotees, whose names are recorded on two large commemorative stone tablets that flank the main entrance. In the past, it was not uncommon for women to give up their everyday lives to *masok chye tng*. They tended to be widows with grown-up children or unmarried older women, but sometimes younger women chose to enter the convent, like Miss Chong, who joined at the age of seventeen. A place like Sian Teck Tng enabled these ladies to live in a supportive community where they could dedicate their lives to religion and helping others. A generation or two ago, there might have been thirty or forty women living there, nowadays the number is closer to a dozen.



In a glass case atop a small altar, he is flanked by the deities Kuan Kong and Hood Chiang, whom devotees pray to for success in business and school examinations respectively. Datuk Tai Sui, on the other hand, helps ensure *selamat* or general well-being.

Each year, four zodiac signs - those of the traditional Chinese twelve-animal calendar - are picked out as being less fortunate than their fellows and therefore more prone to illness or other misfortunes. It is these individuals who come to *Sip Tai Sui*, asking for a good year in return for oil and paper offerings. This is usually done after the fifth day of the first lunar month. One must not forget to return at the end of the year to *bayar niat*, and this must be done by *tang chek* or the winter solstice (when traditional Peranakans observe the old custom of *gelek kueh ee*). In case anyone interested, the zodiac signs which should *Sip Tai Sui* in 2002 are *ayam* (chicken), *kuda* (horse), *kuching belanda* (rabbit) and *tikus* (rat).



Main altar

Sian Teck Tng has traditionally had a long association with the Peranakans, not least because of its location. Both it and its "brother" temple in Devonshire Road were close to what were then Peranakan neighbourhoods of River Valley Road, Killiney Road, Cairnhill and Emerald Hill. My grandmother remembers being brought as a young child by her grandmother to the Devonshire Road temple just around the corner from her family home of Rosedale. That would make me the fifth generation Peranakan to continue the old traditions.

With changing times, traditions, beliefs and lifestyles, it is perhaps inevitable that temples like Sian Teck Tng find themselves caught up in the relentless march of progress. A large portion of its land was acquired by the government for the construction of the Central Expressway, and nowadays the hum of passing traffic provides the accompaniment to the prayers and chanting. So next time you speed northwards on the CTE, as you emerge from the tunnel in the vicinity of the Holiday Inn Park View, watch out for the temple with its distinctive red-tiled roof and green-and-yellow façade. More than a mere remnant of the past, it formed part of the spiritual heart of the Peranakan community, and as such, has helped to make us what we are today. 🌸



Inner room with altar of Kuan Kong, Tai Sui and Hood Chiang

Devonshire Road Chye Tng

TAN GEOK KOON and TAN BAN HUAT



To many Peranakans, the temple at Devonshire Road is the *chye tng jantan* ("male vegetarian hall"). It is a vegetarian temple run mainly by males, in contrast to the *chye tng prempuan* run by ladies. Few Peranakans know the actual name of the temple, Tong Sian Tng. In Hokkien, *tong* means "togetherness", *sian* means "virtue" and *tng* means "hall". Thus, the temple is a place for people to come together for the perfection of virtue.

Origins

The temple was founded by Beh Soon Cheng who came from Swatow, China, around the mid 19th century and became the Chief Abbot (popularly known as *Lau Su* or "old master"). *Lau Su* practised traditional Chinese medicine at the temple. He also founded two vegetarian convents for ladies - the Sian Teck Tng at Cuppage Road and the Chek Sian Tng, originally at Kramat Road, but re-sited since 1984 to Ang Mo Kio Avenue 10. Thus, the three *chye tngs* were very closely connected.

Towards a Peranakan identity

Since all three *chye tngs* were located close to residential areas populated by many Peranakans e.g. Emerald Hill and River Valley Road, it was convenient for the Bibiks and Nyonyas to visit these temples. *Chye tng jantan* became particularly well-known among the Peranakans around the late 19th century onwards, following the miraculous healing of an eminent member of the community, Song Guat Neo. Song, the widow of Tan Jiak Kam (brother of the famous philanthropist Tan Jiak Kim), suffered from a chronic skin disease and frequently visited the temple to seek treatment from *Lau Su* and pray for a cure. When Mdm Song was cured of her ailment, she decided to dedicate her life to religion. She eventually rose to the rank of *Kor Tai* and supervised the two vegetarian convents for women. Consequently, many of the residents were able to converse in Peranakan; the food also acquired a Peranakan flavour. Indeed, the *chye tngs* became closely identified with the Peranakan community and its way of life.

Beliefs and Practices

Tong Sian Tng is dedicated to Guan Yin. To the Peranakans, Guan Yin is Hood Cho. Although Guan Yin, popularly known as the Goddess of Mercy, takes the most prominent position in the main shrine, there are numerous other deities. *Chye tng jantan*, like many other Chinese temples in Singapore, practises an eclectic mix of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

In the past, many Peranakans went to *chye tng jantan*. The Peranakans generally preferred to worship at the *chye tngs* over other types of Chinese religious institutions. Most Bibiks and Nyonyas went to the *chye tngs* every *chay it* and *chap goh* or the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month, coinciding with the new moon and full moon. Typically, the Bibiks and Nyonyas would pray for the well-being of their families. They invoked Hood Cho to *poh pi* (bless) the individual members so that everyone would be *peng ann* (at peace). They also sought career stability for their husbands and interceded for the academic success of their children. Apart from the bi-monthly visits, the Bibiks and Nyonyas also went to the temple on Hood Cho Seh. These were the "birthdays" of Guan Yin, which took place three times a year.



The Peranakans consulted Hood Cho when faced with major problems. The Peranakans went to the *chye tng jantan* to *chiam si* (or consult the oracles with divination sticks) because the Hood Cho was said to be very *siah* - the predictions given were very accurate, the advice given always appropriate.

The Peranakans also sought the help of the *Lao Sus* to check the Chinese almanac for auspicious dates for important events, e.g. weddings and house moving.

Clearly, while the Peranakans had lost their familiarity with the Chinese language, they were still very attached to Chinese customs.

Ti Kong Seh

One of the most important festivals commemorated at the *chye tng jantan* is Ti Kong Seh. Ti Kong is the God of Heaven, whose "birthday" is celebrated on the ninth day of the Lunar New Year. The prayers used to take place at the second level, where the Ti Kong shrine had an open verandah with a clear view of the sky. It is customary to begin making offerings only from around 11 p.m. on the night before Ti Kong Seh, but many older Peranakans would arrive at the *chye tng* from as early as 6 p.m. to *sembayang* Ti Kong. On the actual day (the ninth day of Chinese New Year), regular devotees would be given delicious vegetarian food to take home. The food was prepared by the women from the two affiliated *chye tngs*. Vegetarian curry and mock *itek tim* (steamed duck), both prepared Peranakan style, were the specialties.



The march of time

In the 1970s, the offering of six-foot long candles for Ti Kong Seh was stopped. The candles, called *dilin setinggi diri* (candles reaching one's height), signified man's hope for longevity. By this time, the *chye tng* had only a few residents, most of them elderly. It became increasingly difficult to cope with the laborious cleaning up necessary after the overnight burning of the tall candles. The practice of giving away vegetarian food on Ti Kong Seh also stopped - their counterparts in the two women's *chye tngs* were beginning to feel the strain of age too.

It was also around this time that Loh Kah Teow *Lau Su* passed away. The old *Lau Su* was highly regarded for his expertise at traditional Chinese medicine and his insightful reading of *chiam si*. His successor, Lee *Lau Su*, was the last *Lau Su* to be ordained for the *chye tng*. Today, the only surviving "old guard" is Lim *Sin Senh*, a septuagenarian.

In some ways, the changes mirrored the developments in Peranakan society - the passing away of the last generation of *sarong*-clad women and along with them, the end of many long-practised customs.

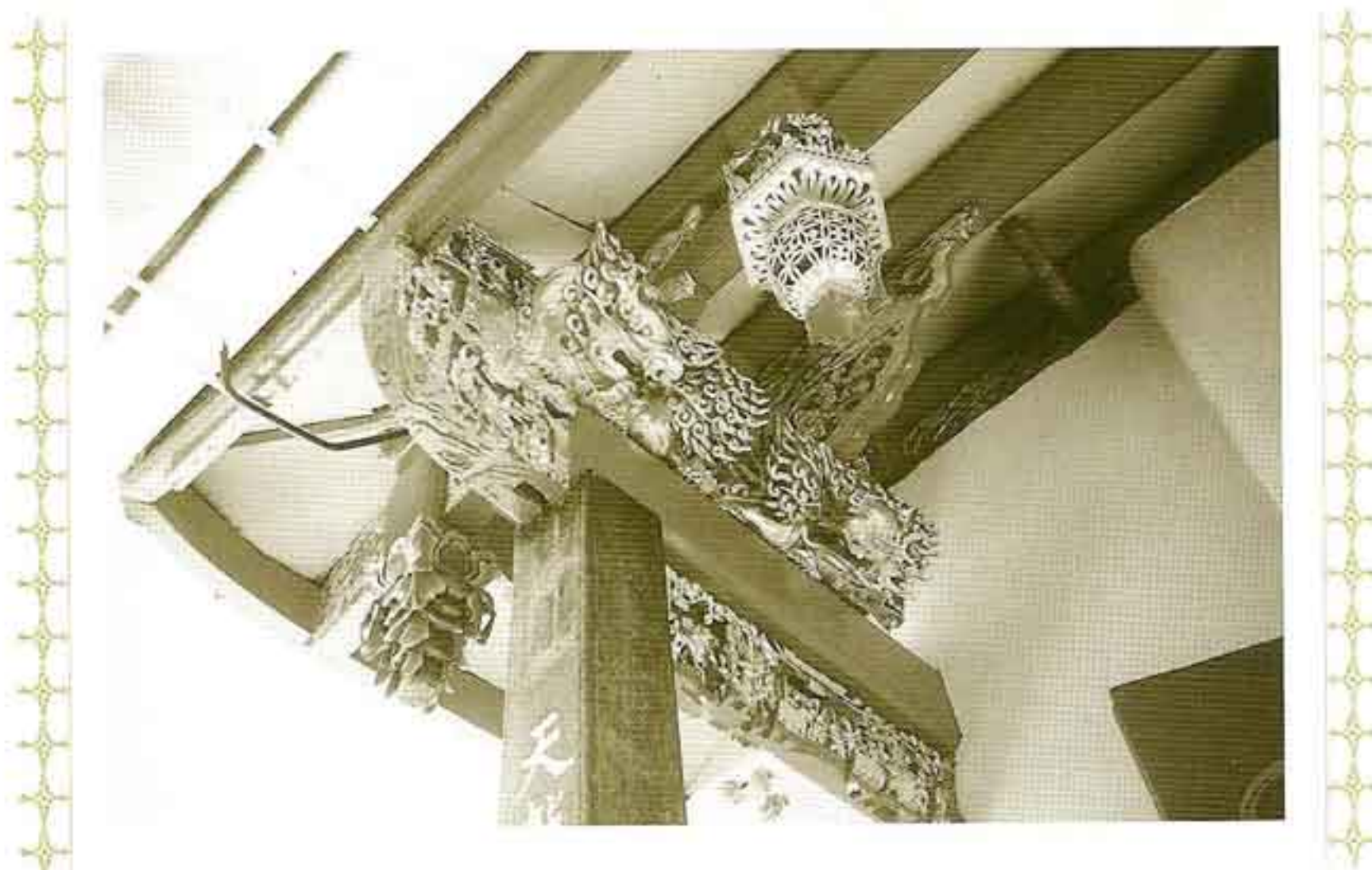
A new image

A monumental change occurred when a lady joined the *chye tng* and assumed the role of temple-keeper. From around the late 1980's to early 1990's, extensive renovations were carried out to the temple. As a result, the Ti Kong shrine was moved from the upper level and is now to the right of the inner shrine hall.

The daily religious practices have also been modified. Previously, a devotee would light a pair of candles at the main shrine hall, joss-sticks would be placed at the numerous urns all around the temple, and joss paper would be burned in a stone furnace. Today, all the shrine halls are kept smoke-free. Only joss-sticks are offered and these have to be placed at a huge urn outside.

Various temple activities have also been organised on a regular basis. Notices of these activities are given in Chinese and English. There are monthly chanting sessions of Mahayana sutras. Residents from welfare homes have also been invited to the temple for vegetarian meals - an attempt at involvement with the wider community.

Today, some Peranakans still worship at the temple, their presence becoming more visible on Ti Kong Seh. Of course, this is remarkably different from the time when the temple was very much a part of the life of the community. Nonetheless, many Peranakans, especially the older ones, are likely to have many memories of the place we know as *chye tng jantan*. 🌸



The 14th Baba Convention, Melaka

Why We Should Preserve Baba & Nyonya Cuisine

MARLENE FOO



Some Singapore delegates at St. Paul's church

Representing The Peranakan Association Singapore, 65 members and friends attended the 14th Baba Convention in Melaka in search of ways to preserve the subject closest to their hearts - *Food, Glorious Food.*

"The Nyonyas have always known that the way to a Baba's heart is through his stomach! As a result, the Nyonyas have developed one of the most distinctive and mouth-watering cuisines in the world today," said the President of Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka, Baba Jimmy Khoo, in his Welcome Address at the Opening Dinner.

We totally agree with Baba Jimmy Khoo after listening intensively to his talk on "The History and Background of Nyonya Food" at the Seminar on Nyonya Cuisine held at Baba Jimmy Khoo's "country club" located at The Fish Pond, Durian Tunggal.

As a key speaker Baba Jimmy Khoo, shared with us some of the features and dishes which characterise Nyonya cooking together with advice on its preservation.

The history of Peranakan culture is well known. But undoubtedly the intermingling of cultures created the fusion of rich spicy food into our society. Nyonya cuisine is truly a local hybrid which tantalises tastebuds.

In assessing the influences which developed the cuisine we can see that the use of local leaves and fruits to enhance flavour and aroma seems to come from Malay cooking whereas the Chinese brought with them the cooking styles of their homeland, mostly the Southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. They introduced noodles, bean sprouts, bean curd, dried mushrooms, sesame seeds, soya beans and soya sauce to blend the

ingredients into a Nyonya melting pot. Hence, the Nyonya cuisine has its own intrinsic flavours which makes it rather unique and different from other Chinese cuisines. Most Nyonya dishes depend heavily on spices and chillies.

In the old days the art of culinary skills was mastered through sheer memory and estimation (*agak agak*). There were no standard measurements and every ingredient was applied by pure estimates. However today's food does not seem to taste as good as it did when our grandmothers were cooking. Somehow the food of yesteryear seemed to have more flavour than today. It is said that some of the old appliances used in a Nyonya kitchen may have had the advantage over the more modern appliances. Lets compare some of these essential items.



Delegates from Penang

The Coconut Scraper

Coconut grated from a *parut* (wooden board with short spiky nails) is said to be superior to the electrically grated coconut. This is because the former does not turn sour as easily as the latter which has been exposed to heat!

Granite Millstone

Hand-ground rice flour is regarded to be finer and smoother than machine ground flour. The old method of grinding flour requires a huge granite of cylindrical shape (*batu boh*). The grinding process takes a long time and has to be done in shifts.

Batu Giling

This method to ground spices is finer and more aromatic compared to an electrical blender.

Batu Lesong

Preferred choice over an electric grinder when pounding *sambal belachan* (shrimp paste). It is said that the pestle blends the chillies with the belachan better. The grinder only chops up the ingredients into fine grains. Therefore the *belachan* from the *batu lesong* is tastier.

Most of the older Bibiks believe that food simmered for a long time over a charcoal fire for curries, and spiced dishes cooked in earthen pots, taste better.



Tips from Kenny on how to prepare Nonya Kueh



Stalls managed by members of Org Committee

Today's professional Nyonya Chefs who acquire enormous culinary skills have published cookbooks to promote popular Peranakan dishes not only in restaurants but also in our homes.

What is to be done to preserve Nyonya cuisine? Here are some suggestions :

- * Hold cooking classes for young Peranakans
- * Publish booklets with detailed recipes
- * Encourage older members to pass on their culinary skills to the young in their immediate families
- * Organise Peranakan cooking contests

With these suggestions, we can try to ensure that Nyonya Cuisine remains a living family tradition and an intrinsic part of our heritage.

In concluding the presentation, Baba Jimmy Khoo's shared this thought for the day:

The Nyonya Cuisine is truly a reflection of our dear Nyonyas themselves.....

*rich, succulent, spicy,
tantalizing to the eye and to the tongue,
visually exciting and with such aroma
and promise of the chillie delights
that other ladies (and cuisine) pale in comparison
and the poor Babas can only cry for more!*

The second speaker, Baba Kenny Chan gave us an insight to popular Nyonya recipes in conjunction with a cooking demonstration.

This Seminar brought back fond memories of a grandmother's love, patience and the long hours she spent in the kitchen cooking authentic Nyonya dishes and *kueh-kueh* for the family. With this in mind, we should try to preserve Peranakan traditions by passing on our cooking skills, handicrafts and artistic techniques to our children and grandchildren.

For leisure, we had the pleasure of touring the "Country Club" facilities which boast a swimming pool, a mini golf course, lush greenery, a plantation with a variety of plants and a unique *Keluak* tree.

We were brought back to our days of nursery rhymes when we came upon a life-sized shoehouse (built with a karaoke system and a well stocked bar!).

Lunch was of course sumptuous with an array of colourful Nyonya stalls set up by members and families of the Association. Sampling each stall tells you that Nyonya Cuisine is SIMPLY THE BEST! *



Seminar Participants

Joget Night

HEATHER ONG

On 28 December 2001, seventy *joget* enthusiasts made their way to the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) for an evening of food, fancy footwork and fun. As part of its Retro Nite series, the ACM had organised a *Joget* Nite and the event was a sell-out within weeks of its announcement. The foot-tapping music was provided by the Melodians - well-known to those of us who have visited the Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka - and "guest singers" helped enliven the proceedings, among them Baba William Tan and Nyonya Jessie Cheang.

The evening started with hellos among old friends and introductions between new ones. While the Melodians warmed up the atmosphere, the party-goers helped themselves to the *makan kecil* which included such Melaka specialities as *lepat kacang*, specially brought to Singapore for the occasion. Before long, happily "fuelled", everyone got down to the real business of the evening...dancing!

Joget was only one of the dances enjoyed by all; there was also cha cha (including that well-loved derivation affectionately known as "obi-cha cha"), waltz and line dancing. Young and not-so-young took their turns on the dance floor, and novices were given tips by the old hands on how to trip the light fantastic, whether it was the *ronggeng* or the Electric Slide. The hours sped by until the band announced "Last Number", whereupon a conga line formed and wound itself round and round until the last strains of music finally ended to loud applause.

Like all good things, the *Joget* Night had to come to an end. As friends departed and goodbyes faded into the night, the question on everyone's lips was, "When is the next one?" 🌟



In Appreciation

MAUREEN LIM

Through the year, besides our annual gala dinner-and-dance, our Association participates in heritage events and organises social gatherings for members. The success of these activities is due in no small measure to the efforts, enthusiasm and energies of a faithful band. As a small token of appreciation, the President, Mr. Lee Kip Lee and committee members hosted a steamboat dinner on 12 January at Hotpot Restaurant in Far East Square for about 25 members. Good food and good friends can only result in a most enjoyable evening; in fact, many were loath to part company after the dinner, and decided to continue the evening at Boom Boom Room. To them we say "Thank you. We appreciate you and hope that you will continue to serve your Association." 🌟

Rookie Peranakan Attends Chinese New Year Tea Party

CLAIRE SEET

After spending almost a decade overseas studying because of my Nonya roots, (that was the excuse that I gave my parents explaining my failure in Mandarin studies) I now return to not only discover my heritage, but also to delve deeper and learn about Chinese culture.

The highlights of Chinese New Year celebrations have always been about those little red packets that is given out as a token of good luck and being around with one's family. It is not that I have not known this all along, but perhaps upon reflection, I needed to come home to be around my family to experience what Chinese New Year should be, a time for togetherness. Let me share with you a secret. There is a recipe to shift this from the conceptual realm of thought to an exhilarating experience.

The Peranakan Association has that formula and I assure you, they go about it with style. They throw a party, which is an invitation for more celebration with food, music, fashion, dancing and of course without this essential ingredient the combination will not be complete: friends.

For me, it began a week before the party. Of course the token red packets came in handy when I purchased my outfit - a brilliant emerald green silk jacket and pants. Until I lose some weight, nothing will persuade me to wear and split the material of a *sarong kebaya*. Fashion, of course has to be a statement of one's commitment to having a good time, even if the Peranakan theme was not reflected.

The party was held at Roland Restaurant, Marine Parade on the 23 February starting at 2p.m. On my way there I noticed the sky - a brilliant blue, clouds were bright white and puffy, creating wonderful patterns - almost as if the heavens smiled and approved of our endeavours to come.

Guests started arriving and before long the music was in full swing. The one thing that I really enjoyed that day, was the manner in which everyone took to the dance floor. The vibes created by the band, which was resonated by the dancers, young and old made it an event to remember. It seemed to me that everybody at this party had the same agenda - simply to have a good time, dancing and enjoying the company.

The main feature of the party was the show that the guests themselves performed in. The Peranakan Association proudly presented us with the Peranakan Moulin Rouge "*Boleh Boleh*" dancers. These were two men dressed in cancan frocks who entertained us, "Parisian" style showing off a lot of cleavage and flashing legs and derrieres. The cross dressing was so effective that the MC got carried away.

This was followed by a band competition featuring members of the audience, where the two bands selected mimicked bands performing live to recorded music chosen by the party's organisers. The second band even borrowed the microphone and performed a voice-over to the music played.

The Dendang Irama Band belted out more music and the crowd *goyang*-ed and *gelek*-ed the rest of the afternoon away.

It was definitely an enjoyable occasion - to celebrate together with not only family but friends and acquaintances to create positive vibes to last the year ahead! 🌟



Youth Group

ready to face the new year

HEATHER ONG

Of the fresh faces who attended our events last year, we noticed several young Peranakans who participated enthusiastically in everything. As their understanding of the culture grew, so did their passion for it. They are now eager to organise the events which will enhance our appreciation of the culture.

The challenge this year is once again to get more young members' participation in all Peranakan Association events. Last year, some events organised especially for the youth had to be cancelled due to poor response. We have repeatedly requested for your fresh ideas and feedback, as we want to know what would entice YOU to come and participate in the celebration of our rich Peranakan heritage. There are more than one hundred people on our yahoo-e-groups list, but only two gallant gentlemen replied (yes, we are working on your suggestions). We welcome any requests for interesting events that you would like to see. Email youth@peranakan.org.sg, or call Heather at 6481 4288.

If you would like to keep touch with fellow young Peranakans from around the world, do send an email from your account to peranakan-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. We have found this to be a wonderful vehicle to share ideas, and to update one another on outings and events.

Our calendar for 2002 continues with a mixture of teaching sessions, discussions and social gatherings. Please respond as above, and we will send you a reminder nearer the date. 🌸



NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following 22 new members whose addition increases our roll to 1,622 members:

Mrs Chia-Wang Daphane
 Mdm Chong Chiew Hoon Janet
 Mr D'Castro Arthur
 Mrs Lee Adeline
 Mdm Lee Kim Lian Jennifer
 Mr Leong Kwok Choy Raymond
 Mrs Lim Helen
 Mrs Liu nee Wong Yuling Joyce
 Mrs Long Mabel
 Mr Neoh-Khoo Kim Hock Edmon
 Ms Ong Cheng Gim
 Mdm Poh Beng Neo Beatix
 Mdm See Swee Bee Penny
 Mr Tan Bah Bah Francis
 Mr Tan Boon Eng John
 Mr Tan End Seong Philip
 Mrs Tan Mable
 Mr Wee Hoe Chin Donald
 Mdm Wee Min Jen
 Mr Yap Ken
 Ms Yeoh Lay Peng

OBITUARY

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of:

Mrs Chuah Chong Yong Lily
 Mr Teo Lay Swee
 Mrs Ee Eng Hong

COMING EVENTS

The 102nd Annual General Meeting of The Peranakan Association will be held on Saturday 23 March 2002 at 2.30p.m. at Room 623, Level 6, Regional English Language Centre, 30 Orange Grove Road (next to Shangri-La Hotel), Singapore 258352.

NONYAS & BABAS GO WEST

A fund raising Line-Dancing event organised by The Peranakan Association Cultural Development Group on Sunday 5 May 2002, 12 Noon to 4.30p.m. at Pan Pacific Hotel Ballroom @ \$40 nett per person/ \$400 per table inclusive of Lunch.

For enquires please contact:
 Ruby Ng - Tel. 6353 0408,
 or Irene Ooi - Tel. 6466 7149



Pesta Peranakan! at Tampines Mall

EVENT PROGRAMME:

DATE	TIME	EVENT
25 Apr (Thu)	5pm	Opening Ceremony
	7pm	Peranakan Voices (Choir)
26 Apr (Fri)	12pm	Masak Demo
	1pm	Peranakan Skit
	5pm	Peranakan Fashion Parade
27 Apr (Sat)	1pm	Peranakan Voices (Choir) + Peranakan Skit
	3pm	Masak Demo
	5pm	Grand Peranakan Wedding Pageant
	7pm	Peranakan Fashion Parade
28 Apr (Sun)	1pm	Peranakan Voices (Choir) + Peranakan Skit
	3pm	Masak Demo
	5pm	Grand Peranakan Wedding Pageant
	7pm	Peranakan Fashion Parade

CHERKI, ANYONE?

Saturday 18 May 2002, 2 - 5pm, Katong Antique House

BEJEWELLED BEAUTIES

A talk on Peranakan jewellery by Baba Peter Wee
 Saturday 15 June, 2 - 5pm, Katong Antique House

for enquiries, please contact us at youth@peranakan.org.sg



THE
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SINGAPORE