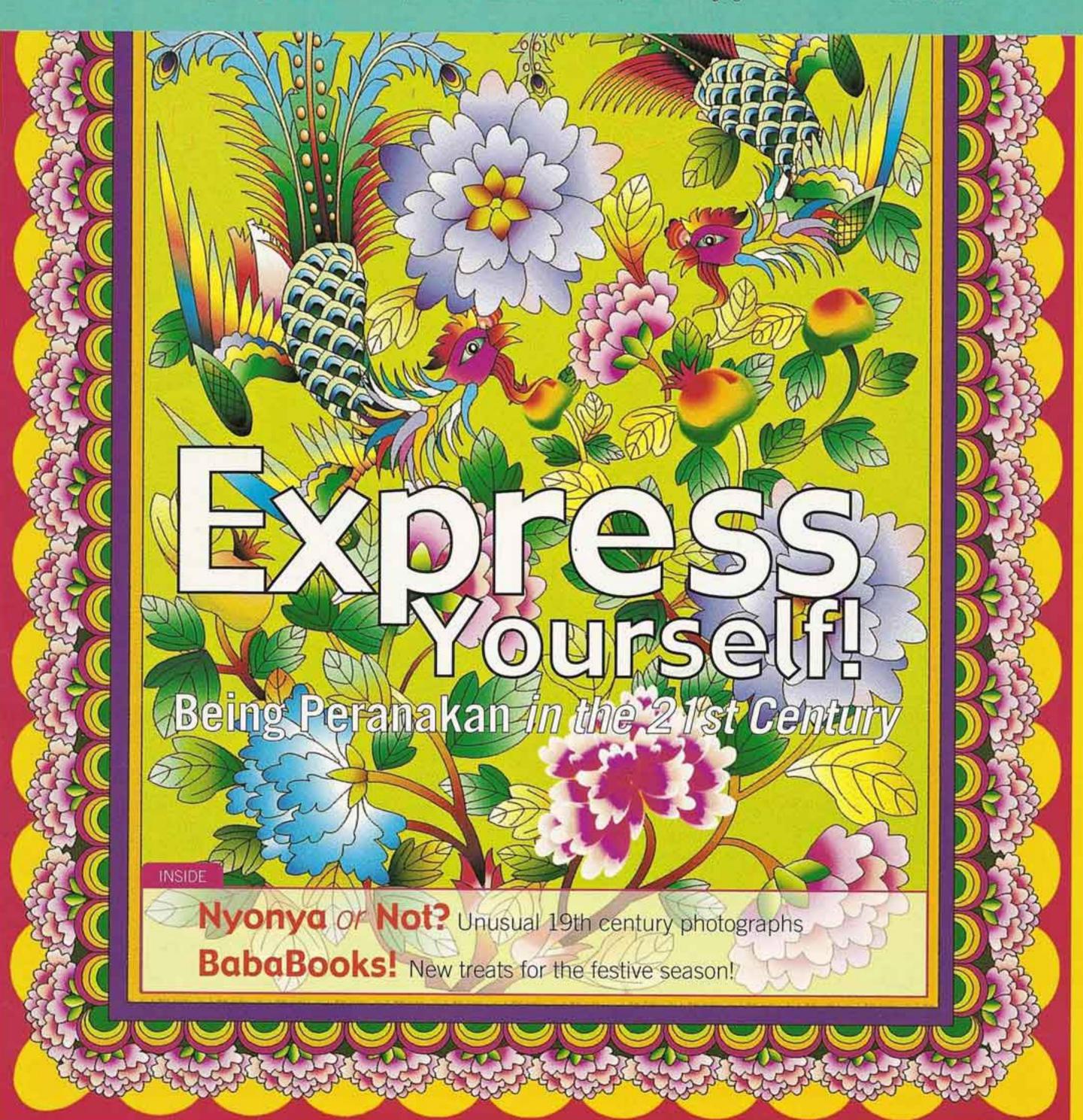
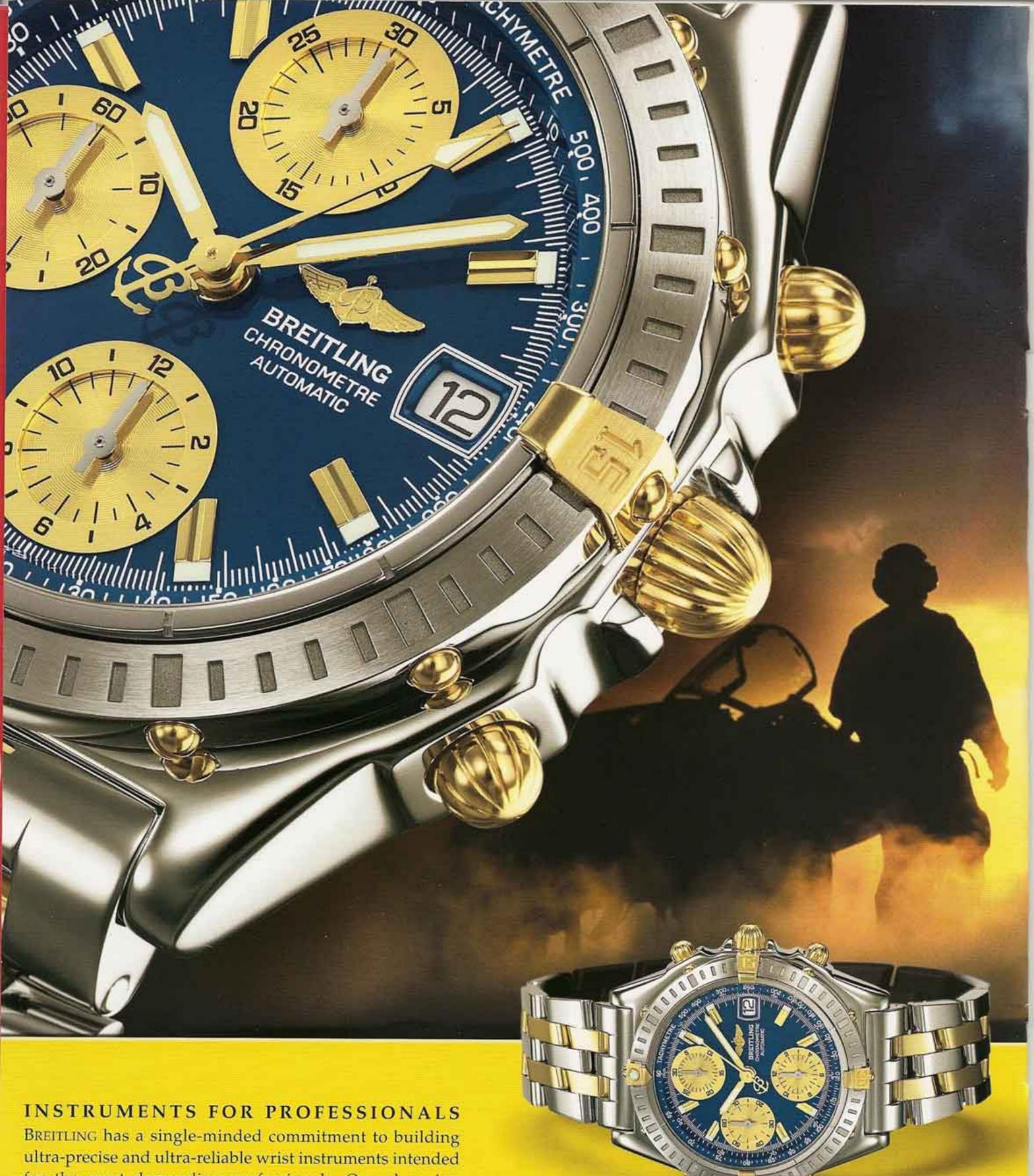


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E C TO TO PETER LEE

What does it mean to be Peranakan in the 21st century?

UNDER THE HELM OF CONVENTION CHAIRPERSON,

Cynthia Wee-Hofer, this year's 15th Baba Convention does not only raise this question; it will make serious attempts to answer it. With her years of experience as a journalist and her keen, life-long interest in her own heritage, Cynthia Wee-Hofer is an ideal person to face these issues head-on, being also a woman in the forefront of contemporary living - she travels widely and has contacts and interests that span the globe, including overseeing some beautiful properties in London and Sri Lanka. In short, she has the qualities that are necessary for Peranakans to express themselves in the 21st century - to be both local and global, to know where we have come from, and to know how to carry this pride into the future.

In this issue, we try to do all these. We look at the bare facts of being Peranakan in Singapore today. And our findings show us a lot to celebrate! From writers, artists, producers, directors, actors, designers, craft specialists and chefs, to shops, museums and institutions, we are such an active, vibrant part of the Singapore cultural scene. Our activities also receive massive support from the media - whether in print, TV or radio.

No doubt the debate will go on as to what it actually means to be Peranakan. Purists may believe language is the most essential. Yet Penang Peranakans by their inability to speak Baba Malay, refute that premise. What the Penang Peranakans seem to have in common with those of Malacca and Singapore are a sense of shared history and heritage, and a way of life with many aspects considered sacred and profound, from the observances of festivals to the cooking of special dishes at significant times of the year. Of course in this day and age it is impossible to observe all the rites in the old way, but the younger Peranakans owe it to their heritage to know what these traditions are, and also to adapt them for today.

The other two features in this issue echo this sentiment. We look at some rather curious, early 19th century images of Nyonyas possibly taken by a French photographer, which raise some questions about our past. We also introduce a wonderful selection of new books that are of interest to Peranakans, many of which are written by members of our community.

So you see - old and new, past and present, local and global - the Peranakans of the 21st century. Things are starting to really happen...

- EDITORIAL
- 3 PERANAKAN NOW!
- 11 NYONYA OR NOT?
- 15 BABABOOKS
- 22 NOTICEBOARD

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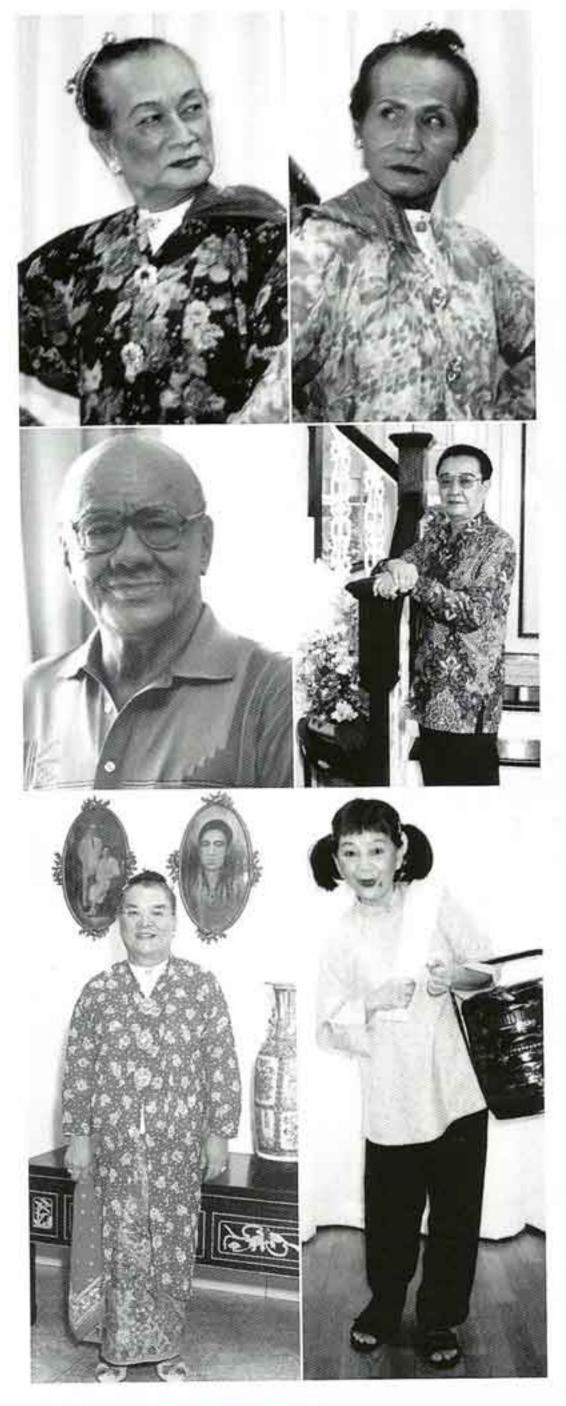
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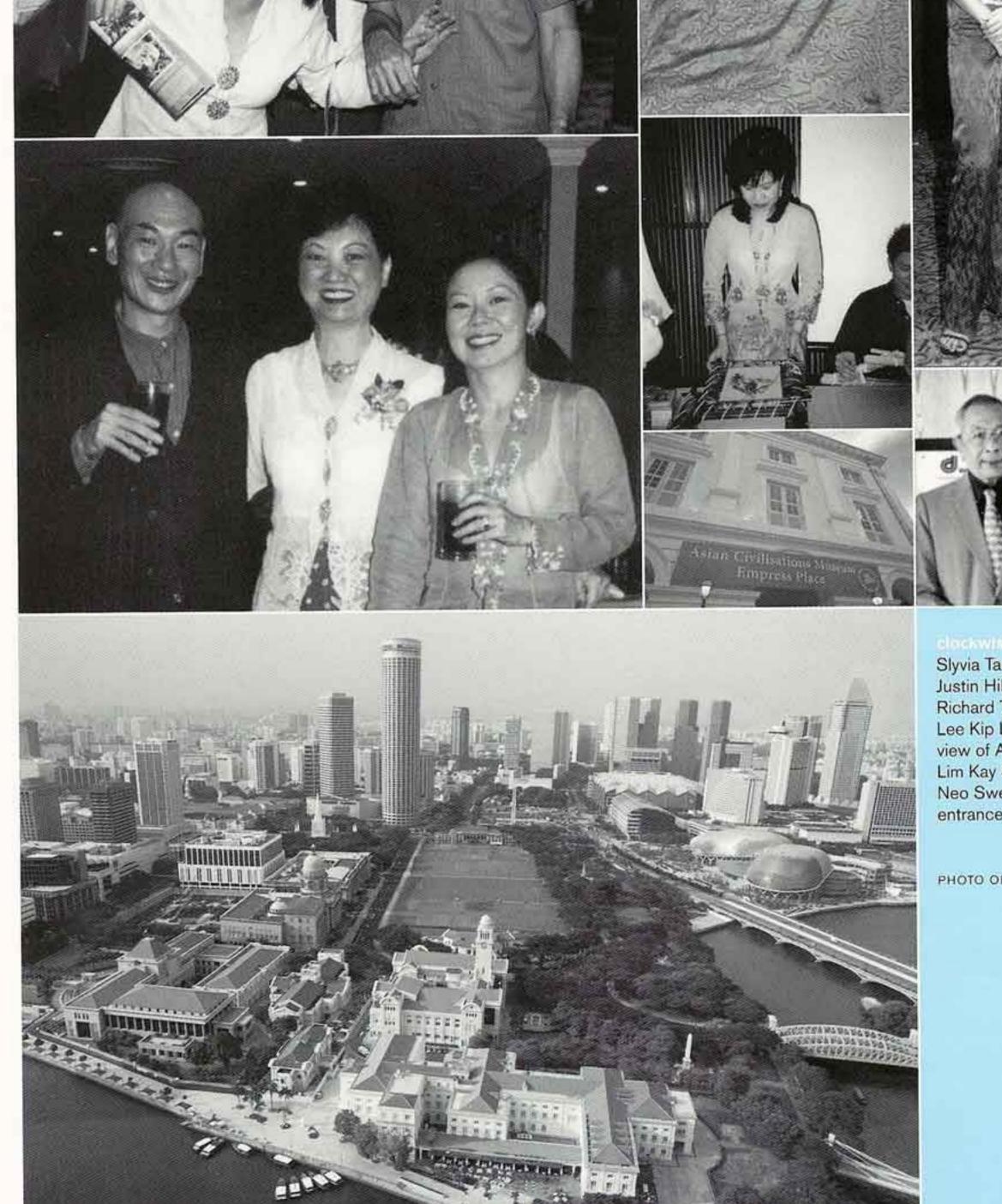
THE 13TH BABA CONVENTION CELEBRATES PERANAKAN EXPRESSIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY, BUT WHAT EXACTLY DOES PERANAKAN MEAN IN SINGAPORE TODAY? PETER LEE inspects the status quo.

In any discussion about the state of Peranakan culture, the key issues seem to centre on loss and despair, or conversely on hopes for a 'revival' in the future. However if we look at hard facts, things are not as bad as they may seem. This year alone we have had two stagings of Bibiks Behind Bars. Gunong Sayang Association has had a successful run of their play Anak Udang Anak Tenggiri. There have been a few television series on the Peranakans On the Trail of the Phoenix and Ways of the Matriarch. There are new books by or about Peranakans. There are CDs and VCDs of our productions. There are performances and events at private functions, malls, and schools. Not to mention the permanent tributes to Peranakan culture in the museums and in such institutions as Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Singapore Chinese Girls' School. And how can anyone fail to be lured by the whole range of Peranakan restaurants and shops?

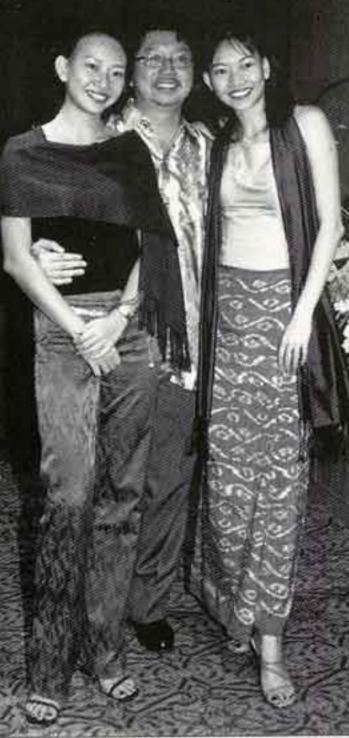
No doubt in the old days the Peranakans were at the top echelon of Singapore society. The wealth and stature of the community led us to play major parts in social and civic causes. Song Ong Siang's book, One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore, is almost completely monopolised by Baba personalities, and has become a sort of Almanach de Gotha or a Burke's Peerage of the old Peranakan families. Thankfully in new Singapore everyone has a chance at the economic pie, and Peranakans now form an equal portion (maybe a spicier portion) of the Singapore melting pot. If you think in cultural terms especially, I think we have an excellent report card for a small community. Rather than moaning about the loss of our heritage, or worrying too much about the future, let's celebrate the spirit of being Peranakan now!



Felix Chia, William Tan, G T Lye and Jessie Cheang









Slyvia Tan, Lim Kay Tong and friend Justin Hill; Sally Gan; Nadia Kang, Richard Tan, Nadine Kang; Lee Kip Lee, Albert Chan; aerial view of ACM Empress Place; Lim Kay Siu, Shia Ailee, Neo Swee Lin; Bebe Seet; entrance of ACM Empress Place.

PHOTO OF ACM COURTESY OF NHB

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Nyonya or Not?

PETER LEE SPECULATES ON RARE AND EARLY IMAGES OF TWO RATHER TAK SENONOH NYONYAS, AND DELVES INTO THE MYSTERIES OF EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

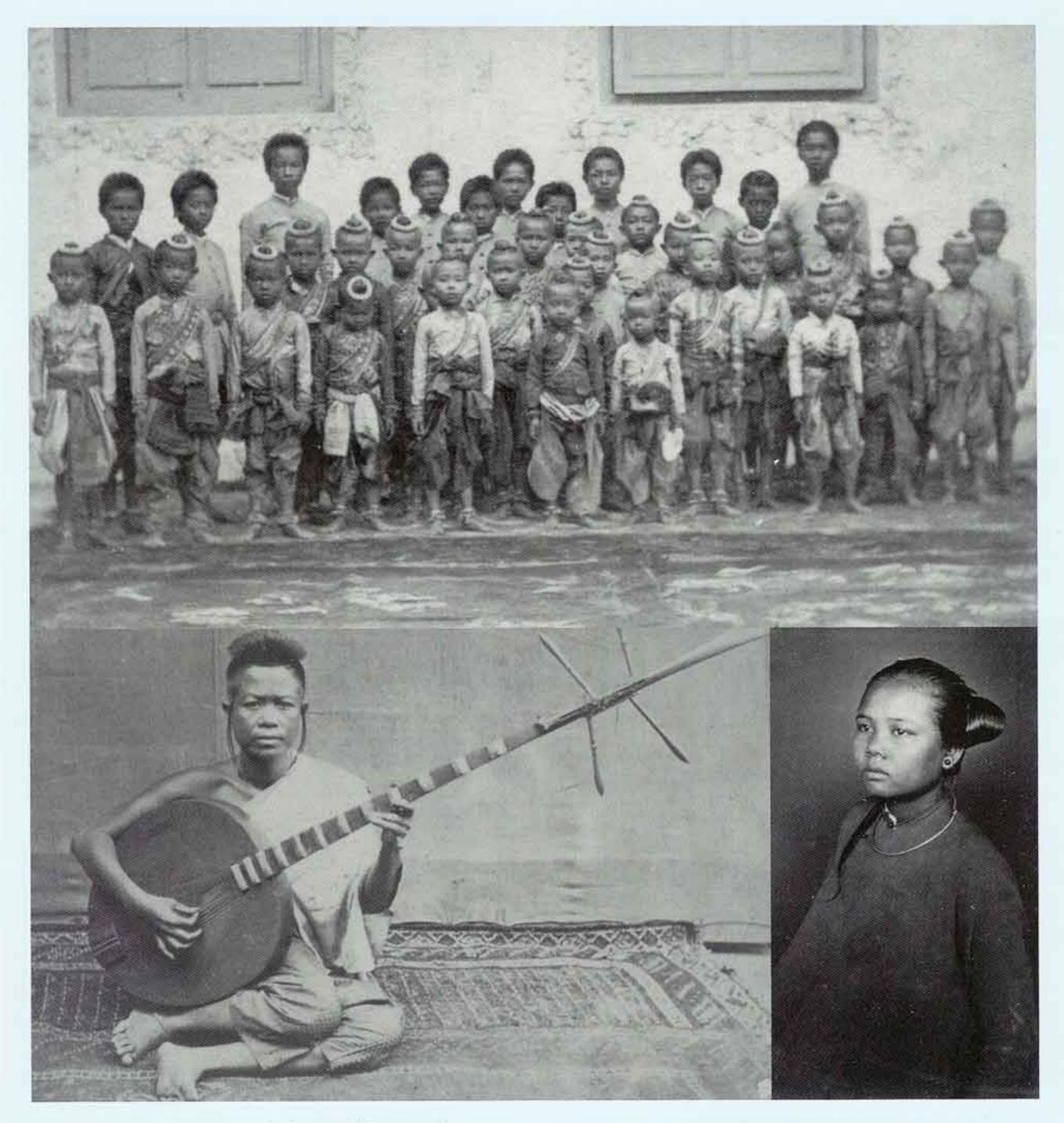




Nyonya ladies, by an unknown photographer, c. 1863-79

Two rather interesting photographs from the earlier era of photographic history have recently come to light. They could in fact be one of the earliest known photographs of Nyonyas. At first glance there may be nothing unusual about them. Each depicts a lady in a baju panjang and sarong. In one, the lady is seated on a high-backed chair and rests her left arm on an ornate colonial table. In the other, the Nyonya sits rather alluringly with one arm raised and hand holding on to the back of the chair. She is daringly déshabillé, her unfastened baju casually wrapped over her body kimono-style. On the table are all the paraphernalia of opium smoking, including a rather decadent-looking pipe. (Could this be the earliest image of a Nyonya courtesan?)

The first curious fact is that these small images (known as cartes-de-visite, or 'visiting cards', which were very



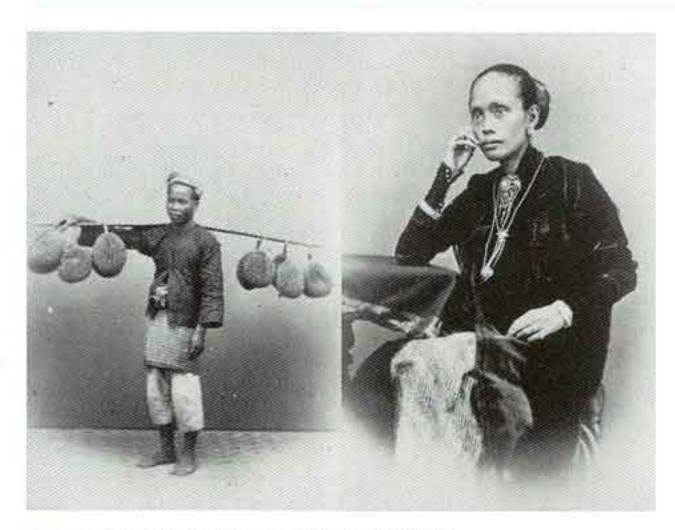
popular in the second half of the 19th century) appear rather incongruously in an album of Indo-Chinese photographs taken by Émil Gsell between 1866-1879. One of these images also appears in an advertisement of Gsell's photo studio in Saigon. Were these Nyonyas courtesans working in Saigon? But was there ever such a thing as a Nyonya courtesan?? On closer inspection, more unusual features appear. The sarongs are not of the typical variety preferred by contemporary Nyonyas of the Straits — the checked kain chaylay — but rather the fine Indo-European batiks of that period from Semarang and the North Coast of Java. The chuchuk sanggols or hairpins of one of the Nyonyas are strangely not visible

Cambodian court musician, by Émile Gsell, c. 1866-79; Vietnamese lady, by Émile Gsell, c.1866-79.

from the front as they normally would be, although in both cases the hair is arranged in typical fashion, with the ayam mengeram ('brooding hen') chignon at the sides.

Unfortunately, photography in the 1860s is still an understudied field. Eminent scholars such as John Falconer have written extensively about photography in the late 19th century. Falconer believes photography reached a zenith with the output of the German Singapore-based photographer G R Lambert. However, an earlier Singapore-

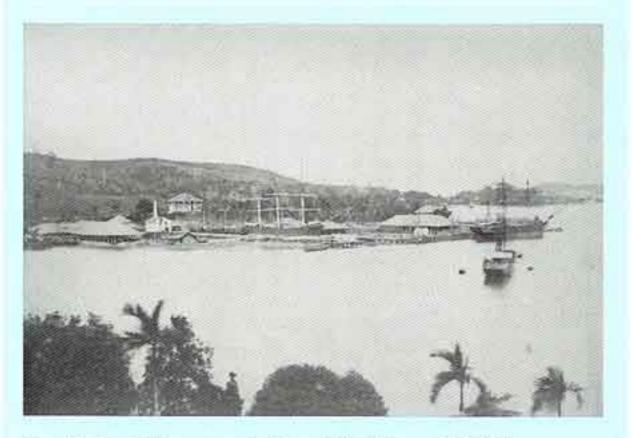
"The first curious fact is that these small images (known as cartes-de-visite, or 'visiting cards', which were very popular in the second half of the 19th century) appear rather incongruously in an album of Indo-Chinese photographs taken by Émil Gsell between 1860-1875."



durian seller, by August Sachtler, c.1863-74
Malay lady, by August Sachtler, c. 1863-74

based photographer, August Sachtler, had an inventory as large as Lambert's, if not larger. Sachtler, like Gsell and other contemporaries, had vast inventories of photographs. Ouite often they seemed to have shared their inventories. Sachtler for example sold photographs of Indo-China that were almost certainly taken by Gsell. He also sold photographs of King Mongkut that may have been photographed by the eminent Thai photographer of the period, Francis Chit. It seems very much the fashion of the period to share (and I am sure at times, pirate) another photographer's work.

Which does not help solve the mystery of the Nyonyas. They may well be photographs taken by Sachtler (who took many photos of Malacca and its people), or perhaps another photographer based in Java. Whatever their history, has anyone ever seen such a racy photograph of a Nyonya??



New Harbour, Singapore, by August Sachtler, c. 1863-74

The invention of photography was first publicly announced in France in 1839. The earliest process, known as the daguerrotype, produced a positive image on a rather small copper plate. The earliest photograph as we know it, where a negative image is transferred to a positive image on paper, was invented at about the same time but was refined and became popular only about a decade later.

The technique of making daguerrotypes travelled fast and by the early 1840s, was already known in southeast Asia. The French traveller and customs officer Jules Itier (1802-1877) produced what are believed to be the earliest daguerrotypes of Singapore in about 1841. The earliest images taken of Java date to 1841, while the first daguerrotype camera arrived in Siam in 1843.

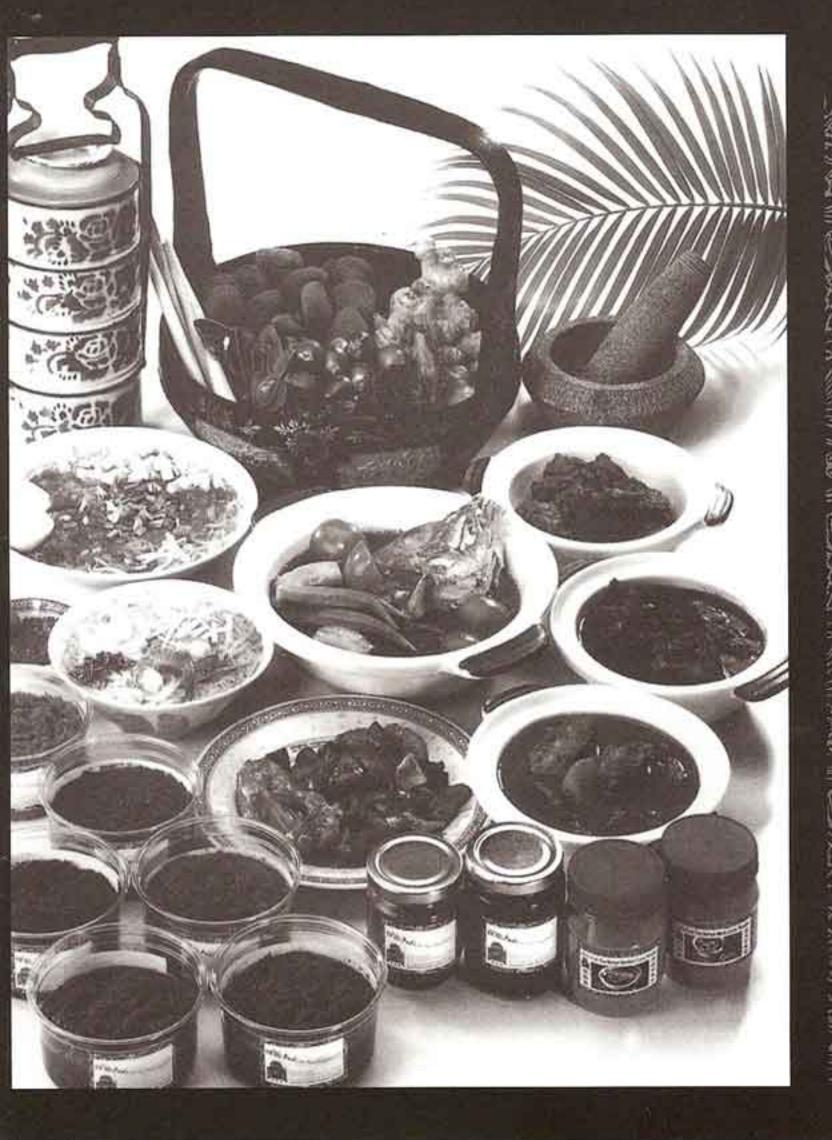
However with the invention of the paper photograph, the development of photography in the region accelerated at an incredible pace. By the 1860s, many photographers began operating in southeast Asia. In French Indochina, there was Émil Gsell. In Siam, there were the court photographers Francis Chit and Khun Mot. In Singapore, the German photographer August Sachtler. The great Scottish photographer John Thomson arrived in Singapore in 1861, and travelled extensively throughout the region as well as China during that decade, taking what are arguably the most beautiful photographs of Asia in that period. However the history of this period is still poorly understood.





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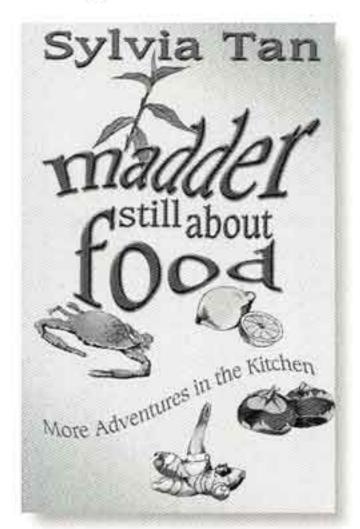


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BABABOOKS

Madder Still About Food

Sylvia Tan's latest collection of must-have recipes!



What is a birthday soup? Charbeck, of course. Few may remember the dish - pork, liver and meat balls in a tau cheo flavoured soup, but you can find out more about the traditional practice of serving it on birthdays in Nyonya Sylvia Tan's newest book, Madder Still About Food.

The second compilation of her monthly Sunday Times columns, Mad About Food, the book gathers together her exploits in the kitchen, be it experimenting with a dish she had tasted while travelling in Siem Reap, Cambodia (look for the chapter on fish with pineapple and sour fruit soup) or reliving the foods she remembers from her Peranakan childhood. Which is where charbeck and old-fashioned recipes such as teehee rebong char and bakwan kepiting come in. You can find in the book, not only the recipes but also the occasions that give rise to the serving of such well-loved dishes.

And if you fear that cooking them may mean laborious hours in the kitchen, Sylvia has worked through the traditional and often time-consuming methods and stripped down the steps so that thoroughly modern youngsters may find it possible to try their

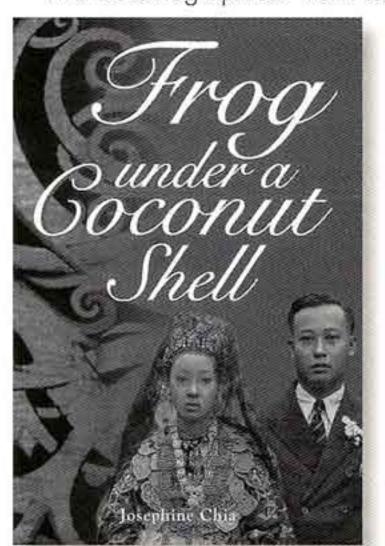
hand at reproducing these dishes of their heritage. Indeed the columns pertaining to Peranakan eating were written to do just that - record the culinary heritage of the past in case it dies out. It is a cultural diary of growing up as a Peranakan woman.

Read it, cook with it or just keep it as an account of Singapore life then and today, the book is available in bookstores at a cost of \$12.90 each. You can also order the books directly from the author by emailing her at wdspice@singnet.com.sg

Frog Under a Coconut Shell

A new gem of non-fiction by prize-winning author Nyonya Josephine Chia

This autobiographical work takes us back to life in a Singapore kampong in the 1950s and 1960s, when the



author's mother was young and beautiful. Catherine Koh Soon Neo was typical of the women of her time, uneducated and bred only for marriage, but she had the courage to fight to give her daughter the opportunities she never had — by giving her an education.

The title of the book is taken from a Malay idiom: *katak bawah tempurong*, or as we Peranakans would say, *kodok bawah tempurong* — a frog who lives under a coconut shell — which is almost the same as the English expression *frog in a well*. The story takes place mainly in the small kampong of Potong Pasir, the 'coconut shell' to its villagers. Catherine's gradual deterioration with the onset of Alzheimer's disease also echoes the image of the obscuration and entrapment of the coconut shell.

This book is an attempt by the daughter to come to terms with her mother's affliction. However, the subject is not just about decay and disease, but the heartwarming relationship between mother and daughter. Through the mother's reminiscences of her youth and experiences, we see, through the daughter's eyes,

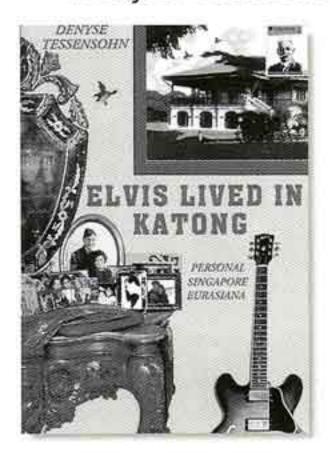
a slice of Singapore life in the 1950s and 1960s, and the intensity of their emotions and the trials and tribulations of both their lives.

Josephine Chia, 51, is a Peranakan and is very proud of her heritage. She was born and raised in Kampong Potong Pasir and became an assistant dental nurse before she went to the University of Singapore. She migrated to England in 1985 and read for a Masters in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University. She won several prizes for her short stories in the UK, including the prestigious lan St James Award, and her stories have been published in two UK anthologies. Her novel and short stories have been published in Singapore. Josephine is also a yoga teacher and has written a book on yoga and health

BABABOOKS

Elvis Lived in Katong – Personal Singapore Eurasiana

Denyse Tessensohn's gem of a book, reviewed by Lee Kip Lee



This unique book begins with a narrative of the author's outstanding Eurasian family whose progenitor, Edwin John Tessensohn, was recognised for his services rendered to the country by the naming of Tessensohn Road after him and by the imprint of his image on our \$1 postage stamp.

But what a package of glorious notalgia it is also for all Singaporeans with its reminders of days gone by - Bun Bee the provision shop at Beach Road, Tay Koh Yat Bus Co, Legendary Eurasian Beauties, Roxy Cinema, T.G.Kiat's Rose Syrup, and stereotyped entries usually scribbled in the autograph books of students reminding them to 'drink hot coffee, drink hot tea, burn your lips and think of me!'

There are also The Quintessential Grago Quiz, The Dreaded Katong Mentality, a Kristang Vocabulary, pages of old advertisements of long-forgotten products such as Morphy-Richards irons, Rowntree's Dairy Box Chocolates, Player's cigarettes, Air View

Cabaret and Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co. The pages are adorned with excellent illustrations by Steve Hogan. As described in the blurb on the back cover, this book 'is a vibrant cameo of Singapore at its best. Share in the abundant feast of growing up Eurasian in Singapore in the '50s and '60s. Its heavy nostalgia stirs memories of "before Rochore mee became Hokkien mee - Kid Pancho - Rose Chan".

For orders and a chat with the author please call 6344 7034, fax 6344 9453 or email denyse@pacific.net.sg. from whom the book is available at \$17.90 inclusive of local postage. It is also obtainable at the major bookshops and will also be on sale at our Annual Dinner & Dance and at the 15th Baba Convention.

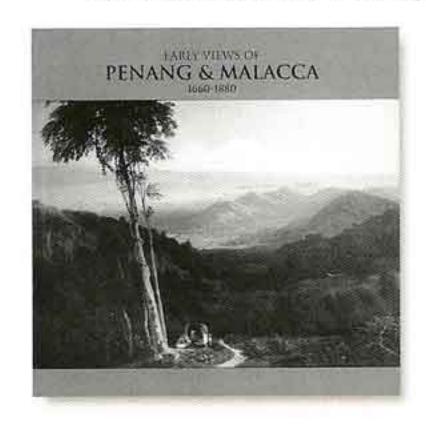
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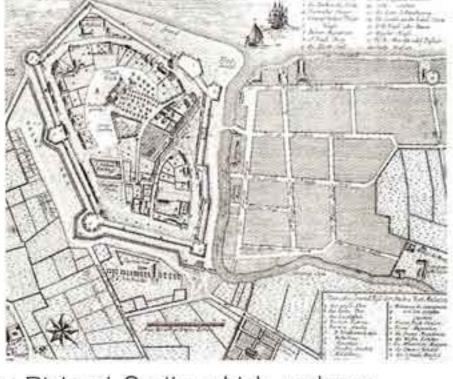
A Nyonya lady has put together a new book of Peranakan and Cantonese recipes for busy people. Ireme Khong has always wanted to compile a cookbook that is fool-proof and fuss-free so that anyone from students to yuppies and busy families can have a taste of true-blue home cooking without too much effort or fear! To order *Straits Cuisine Simplified*, which comes with many illustrations, please contact Irene Khong at 9061 0383 or 6235 4375, or at irene@thelearningfamily.org. The book is priced at \$24.90 or a special price of \$19.90 for 10 copies or more

Views of Penang & Malacca 1660-1880

An exhibition and catalogue of rare prints and maps at KL's Petronas Gallery 9 October 2002



In the bid to place Malacca and Penang in the World Heritage List, the Penang State Museum organised an exceptional exhibition of 99 rare, original paintings and prints of the two cities from the 17th to the 19th centuries. On show in Penang in June 2002, the exhibition moved to the Petronas Gallery in KL on 9 October for 2 weeks. Of special interest to Peranakans were the view of Koh Seang Tat's Edinburgh House and a map of Malacca

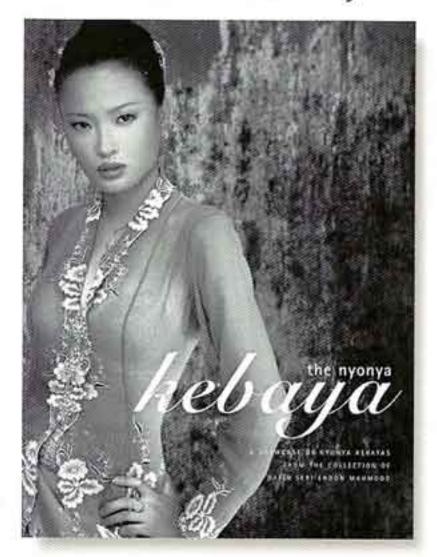


dated to 1744, belonging to KL-based collector Richard Curtis, which perhaps

makes one of the earliest mentions of Herren Strass (Heeren Street), showing a fish market or 'Passaar' and an alley with a building in front of it described as the Stadt Strassen ('State Street'). For enquiries about the beautifully-illustrated catalogue, Early Views of Penang & Malacca 1660-1880, please write to muzium@po.jaring.my

Kebayas Unite!

Water may divide, but kebayas unite Singapore & Malaysia with the launch of a new book by Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, wife of Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi. By Cedric Tan



It started out as a simple fascination for the lovely *kebayas* worn by her late mother. Having been instilled by her late father that a lady must dress immaculately, Datin Seri Endon became enchanted with the Nyonya *kebayas* and began wearing them from a young age and then moved on to collecting them, which she has done for the past 20 years. Having amassed a collection of vintage blouses, she has decided to unlock her treasure trove to the public in her maiden book, *The Nyonya Kebaya - a Showcase of Nyonya Kebayas from the Collection of Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.*

In the various chapters, the author weaves her thoughts on how she was first captivated by the beauty of the *kebaya* and then spins into its evolution and production. She also threads her way into the *batik sarong*, *manek* slippers and jewellery that made the *kebaya* more complete. She also shares her hopes of a renaissance and encourages the use and application of *kebaya* motifs on other products.

This book is contextually informative yet light. The author does not claim to be an authority on this subject but shares her insights from what she gathers when she acquires a *kebaya* from the owners, manufacturers or even the antique shops. Each chapter is preceded with a *pantun* composed by Malaysian poet laureate Datuk A Samad Said. Using Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion and Baba-Nyonya Heritage Museum as backdrops, the artistic team has portrayed the *kebayas* in their best light and mood; perhaps one of the best in terms of presentation of Peranakan artifacts in print to date. You can surely expect the best especially if the Art Director himself is a Baba who loves Peranakan food and artifacts.

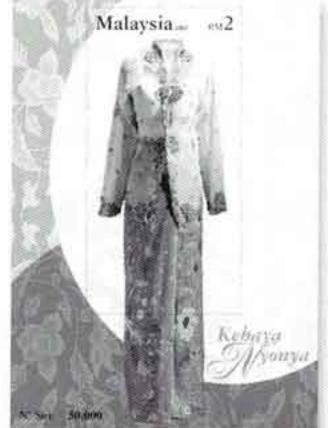
The interesting segment of this book is the author's call for innovative applications of the motifs. Here, she has led the way by showing how, for example, plain chinaware and linen can be decorated with *kebaya*-inspired designs. Thus the *kebaya* legacy can be perpetuated not only in its actual physical form but also in spirit.

In her book, Datin Seri Endon spotlights the Peranakan community whom she considers to be true-blue Malaysian, because of our ability to adapt and innovate without losing our sense of belonging. With the influx of foreign influences, the path to survival lies in tapping the positive

values therein and then blending them into current practices, thus gaining the best of both worlds. It is very heartening to read such comments and compliments from a distinguished person. Having travelled far and wide with her husband Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, and having seen many works of art and treasures, she realises that nothing is closer to her heart than local arts and crafts such as the embroidered Nyonya *kebaya*. She has learnt its humble beginning and seen it blossoming to the heights of fashion before wilting against the flow of time. The funds derived from the sale of the books will be donated to Malaysian Budi Penyayang Foundation, which caters to promoting healthy family relationships. Definitely a feel-good book for us Peranakans.

Those interested in obtaining the book can contact the publisher at The Writers' Publishing House Sdn. Bhd., Lot A 10-3, 3rd Floor, Jalan Selaman 1/1, Dataran





Palma, Jalan Ampang, 68000 Selangor, Malaysia. Tel 603-42702088, Fax 603-42701933, Website www.writers.com.my. The book costs RM200.00 each excluding courier service. Complete first day covers of the Nyonya kebaya stamps enclosed in decorative folders, are currently on sale at major Malaysian post offices for RM30.00 a set

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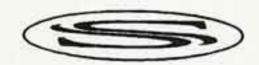
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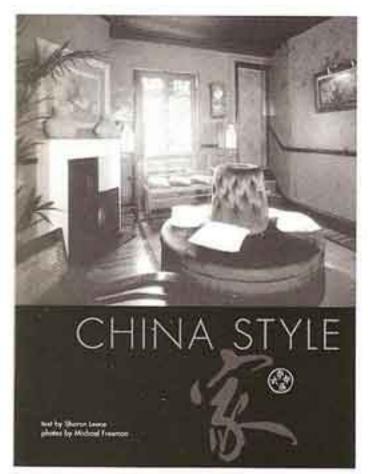
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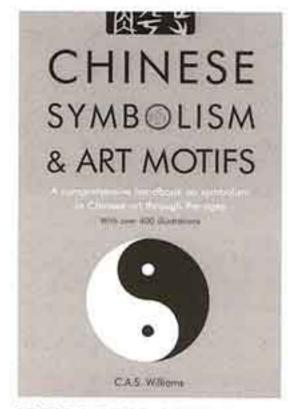


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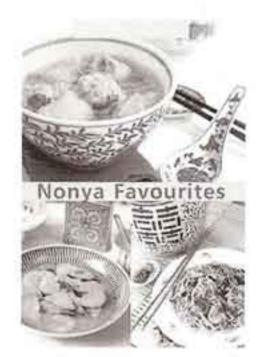


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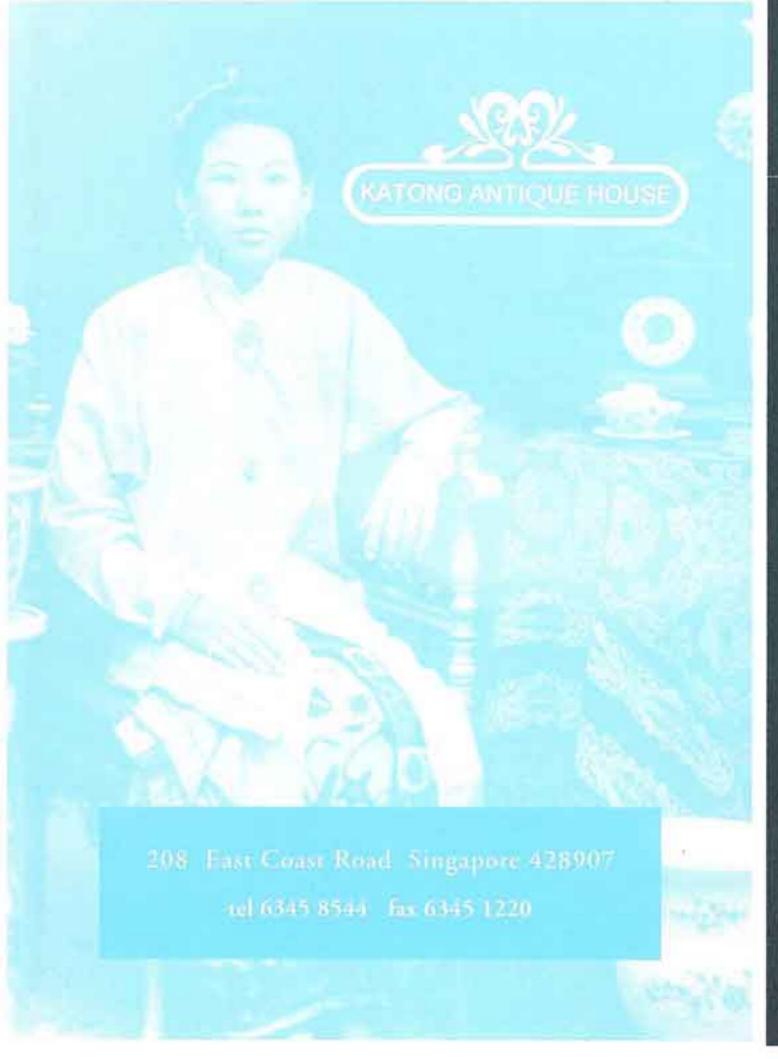
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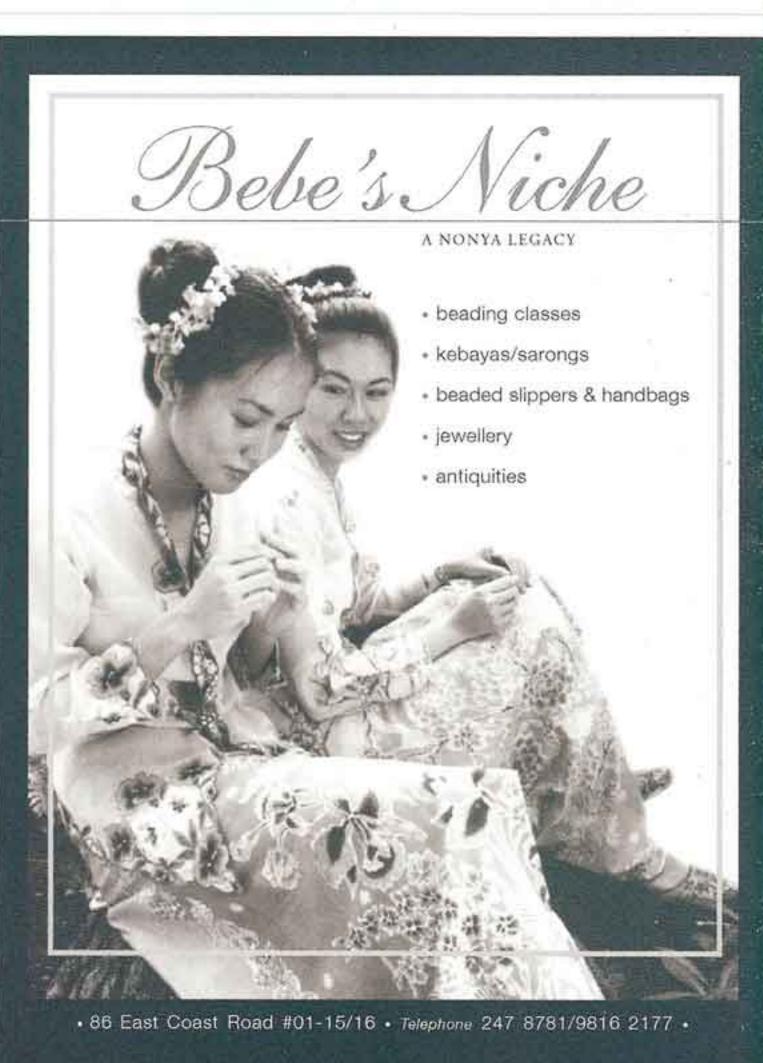
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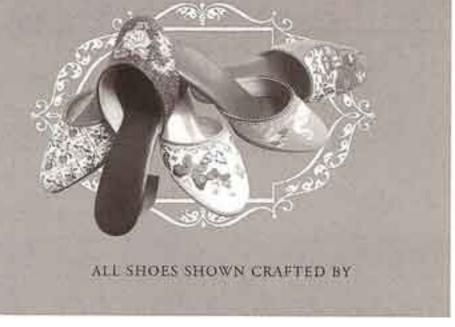
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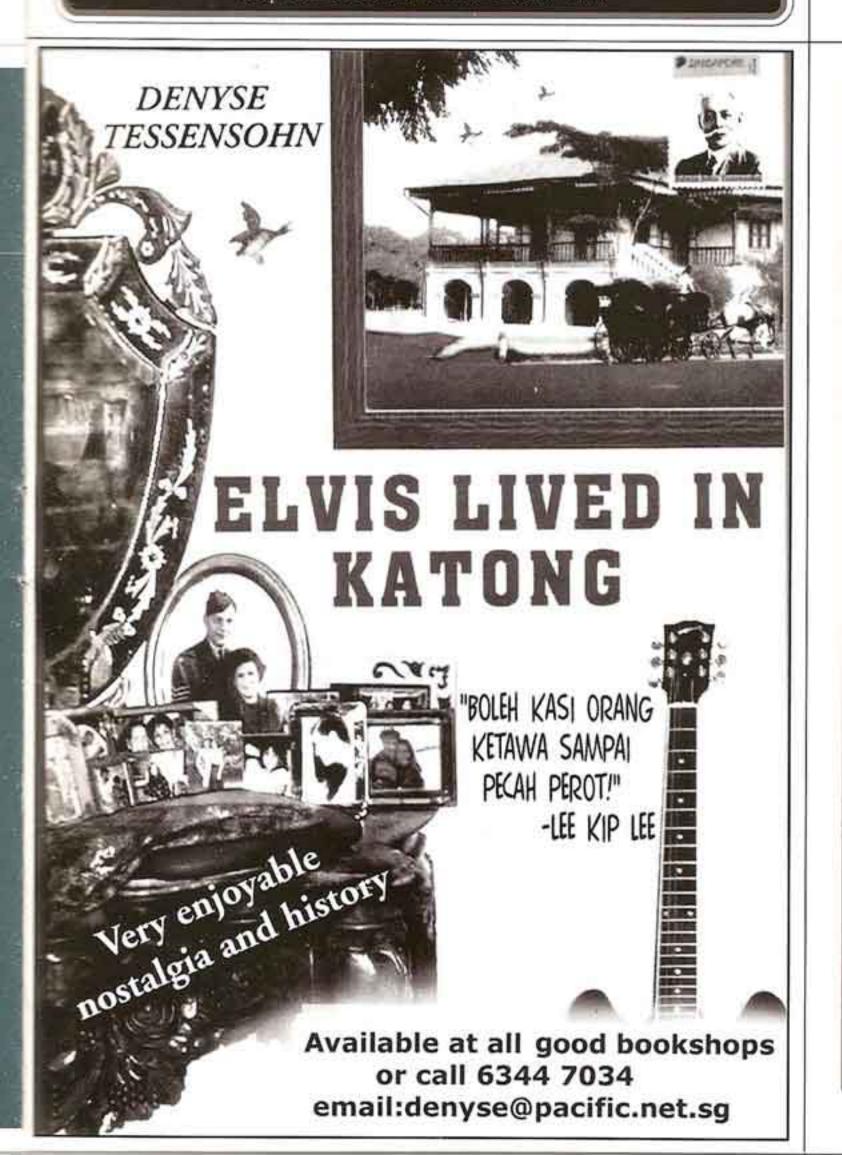
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NEW MEMBERS

The Association welcomes the follwoing 43 members, whose addition increases our roll to 1,686 members.

LIFE MEMBERS

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Mr Chan Patrick

Mr Chee Guan Chye

Ms Chan Swee Yoke Sylvia

Mrs Chew Adelene

Mr Chin Soon Siong David

Mr Chong Patrick

Mrs Chow Ivy

Mr Chua Kim Choon

Mrs Goh Angelina

Ms Goh Bee Lee, Elsie

Mdm Goh Kim Gek Jenny Ms Goh Swee Lian Eileen

Ms Ho Alexandra

Mr Ho Hock Khoon Bryan

Ms Khoo Meh Lin Martha

Mr Koh Guan Poh Winston

Ms Koh Lian Hua Eliza

Mr Law Swee Kim Kenneth

Mr Lee Andrew

Dr Lee Soo Ann

Mr Lie Kian Lee

@ Gerald Haryanto

Ms Lim Cynthia Anne

Mdm Lim Kee Eng Shirley

Mr Lim Khuat Chor Luke Ms Ong Andrea

Mr Ong Chin Guan Noris

Ms Ong Gek Choo Avril

Ms Ong Gloria

Ms Phan Rose Mary

Mrs Shin Choo Neo

Miss Suresh Devi

Ms Tan Christabel Angela

Mr Tan Chwee Heng Jack

Ms Tan Jennifer

Ms Tan Rosalind

Mr Tan Seng Chiang Patrick

Ms Wong Pek Fong Agnes

Ms Yap Eunice

Ms Yeow Ruby

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ms Chia Josephine

Mrs Iyer Jane

Mr Neo Lim Sing Nelson

OBITUARY

The Association extends its deepest sympathies to the families of the following members on their recent bereavement:

Mr Ee Chin Hock

Mr Herbert Lim Eng Kwan

Mr Billy Low

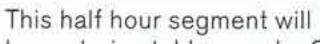
Mdm Kay Tan

A PERANAKAN TAPESTRY

Desmond Sim's new monologue will be launched at the 15th Baba Convention



A Peranakan Tapestry is a series of interwoven monologues tracing the voyage of the Peranakans both Babas and Nonyas from the early Chinese ships chugging their way up the straits, and depositing the first generations of Chinese migrant workers, till the Peranakans of today.



have stories told around a Qing dynasty chair that makes its way from China, to Malacca and then Singapore. But more than that, it follows a single thread of a fictitious family history, weaving through intricate details that give us a tiny, fleeting, tasting portion of Peranakan life through time.





PERANAKAN FESTIVAL 2002 Craft, Food & Wedding Procession

 Sunday 1 December 2002, 11am to 6pm
 Festival ground next to Asian Civilisations Museum,
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 Special \$1 Admission to Singapore History Museum & Asian Civilisations Museum, Armenian Street

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Impressive Peranakan Wedding, 1.30pm

- Wedding Procession starts from Singapore History Museum to Asian Civilisations Museum, Armenian Street
- Live entertainment by Melodians Band direct from Malacca, and Peranakan Association Cultural Development

Highlights:

- Restoration of beaded slippers by the last surviving master cobbler, Mr. Yee Swee Fan
- Great makan with wide selection of authentic Peranakan food
- · Dazzling Peranakan jewellery from Singapore and Malacca
- Embroidered Kabayas in rainbow colours

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

Spotlight on Peranakan Theatre

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Full house, massive media support,
rave reviews!

THE BBB BASH!

Find out what happened at our festive Thank You Party for the cast and crew of Bibiks Behind Bars!

IVAN HENG IN MELBOURNE

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Gunong Sayang Association's ANAK UDANG ANAK TENGGIRI

G T Lye's play and songs are big hits with the Peranakans!

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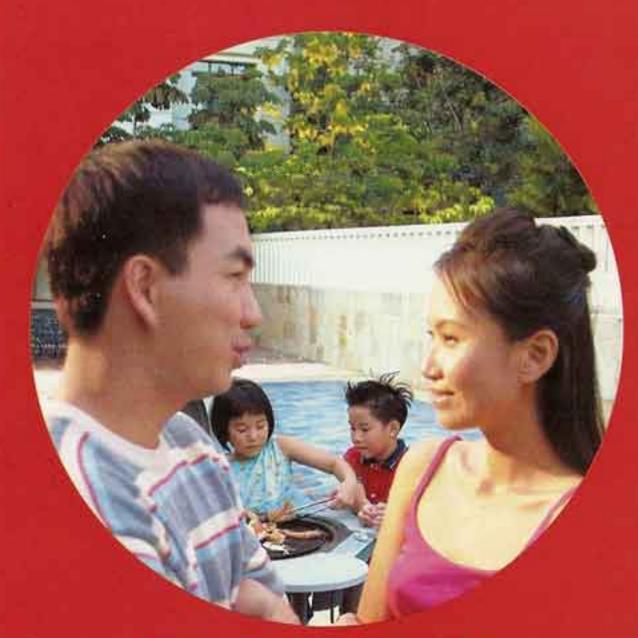
Introducing The Peranakan Association ang pow with a design of phoenixes and peonies illustrated by Eric Tay.

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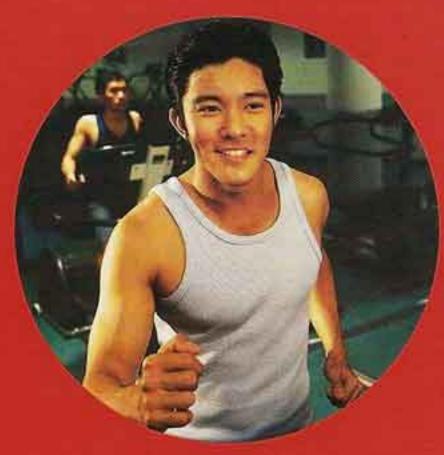
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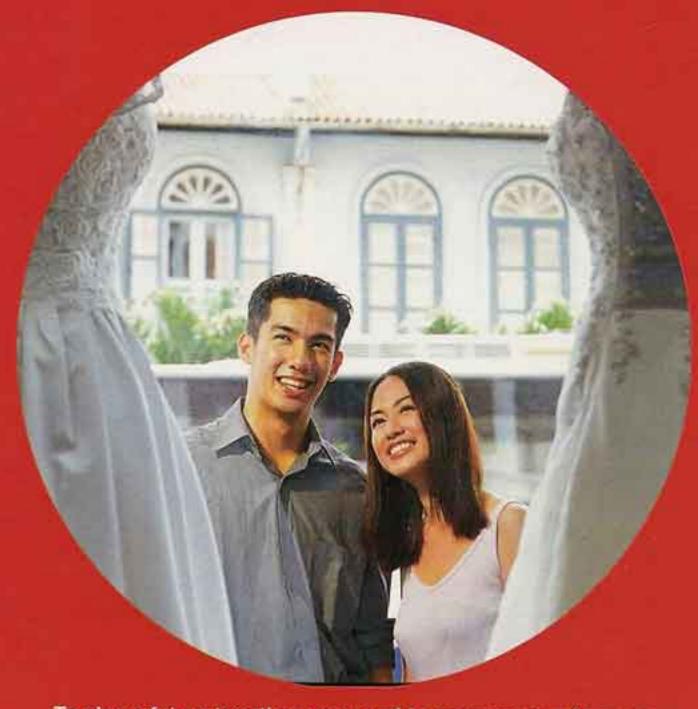
It's time to draw up a financial plan for your child's future.



It takes constant planning to ensure a comfortable retirement.



Live for the moment and plan for the future.



To plan a future together, you need to manage your finances.

How's your financial health?

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Whatever your stage in life: building a career, embarking on marriage, raising a family, or contemplating retirement, you should be constantly reviewing and revising your financial plan to achieve your changing goals.

First you need to get a financial check-up, free of charge and without obligation. After a thorough analysis, we'll recommend a customised financial plan to help you achieve your goals.

So, for some great advice on financial planning, call your Great Eastern representative or our enquiry line now at 6248 2211.

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