

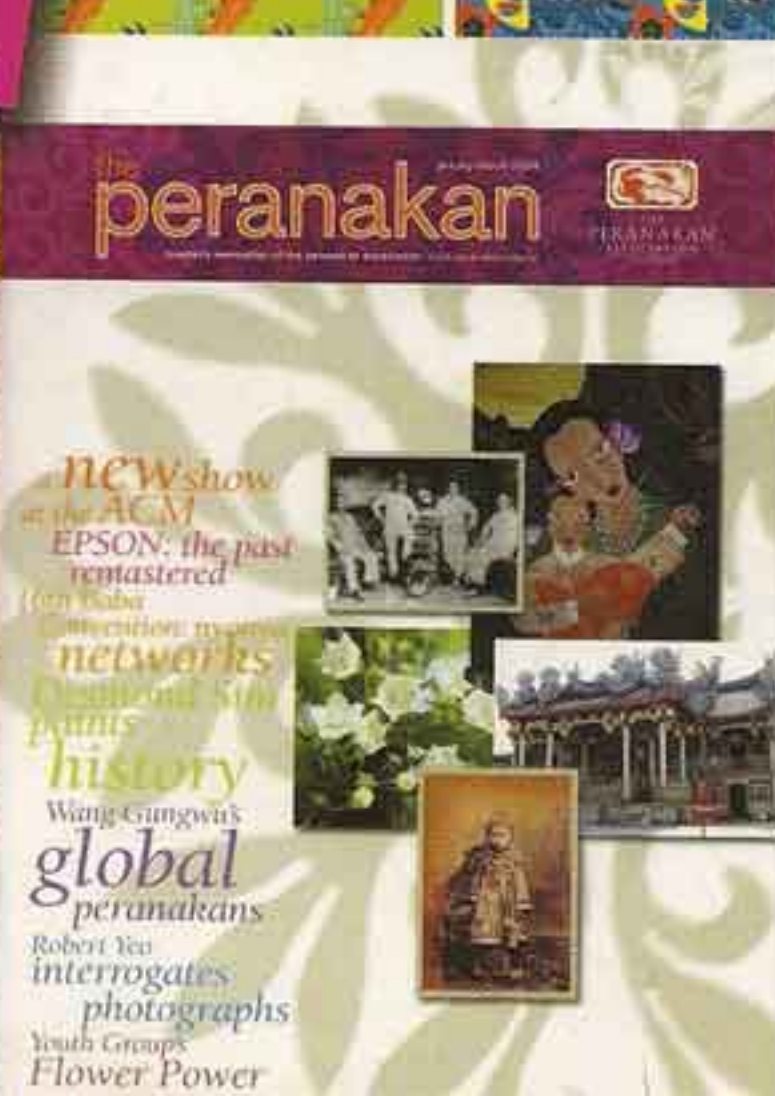
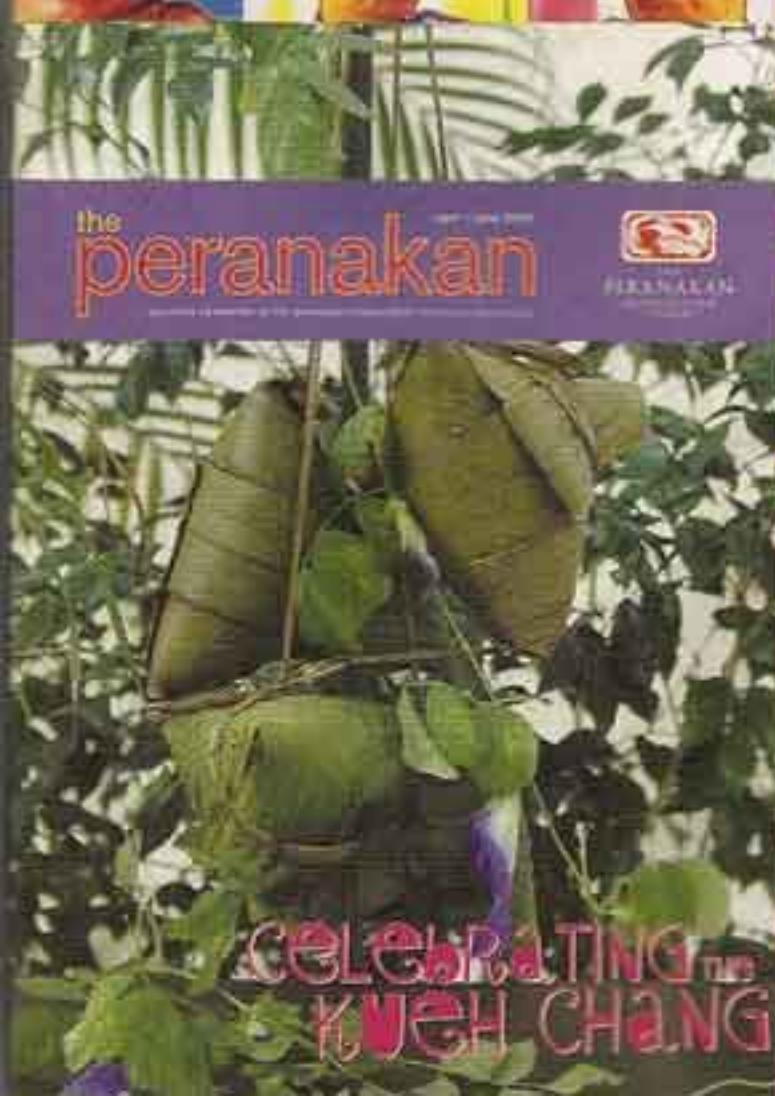
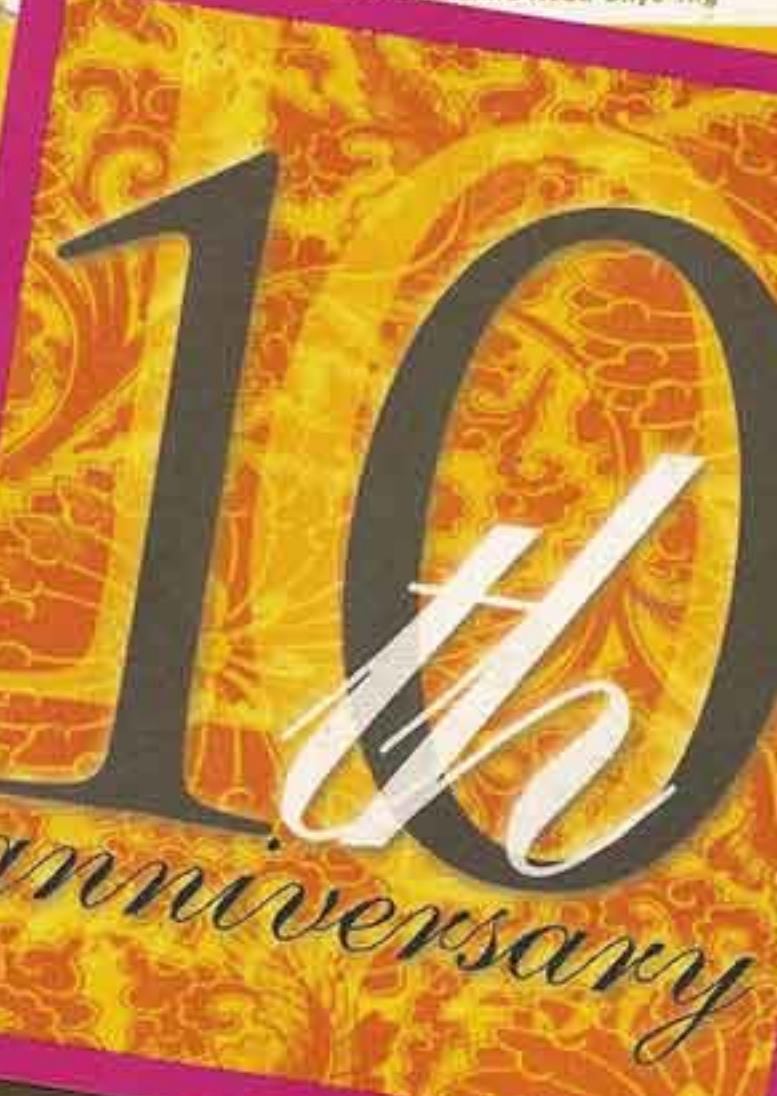
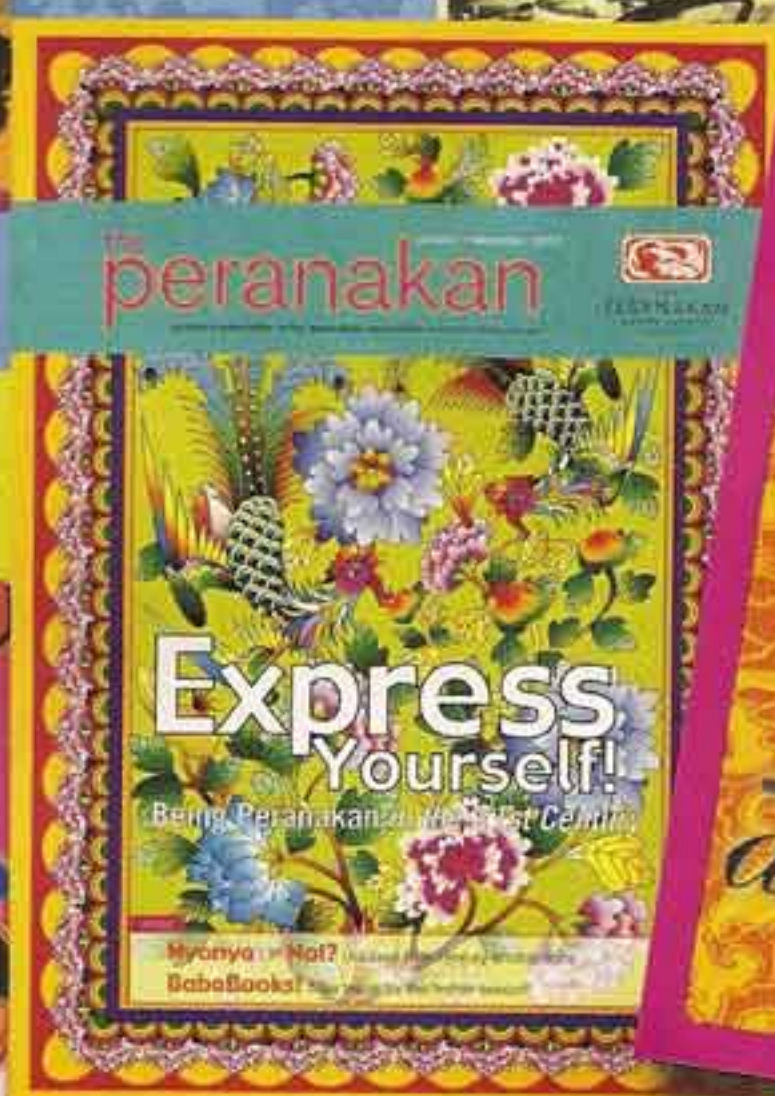
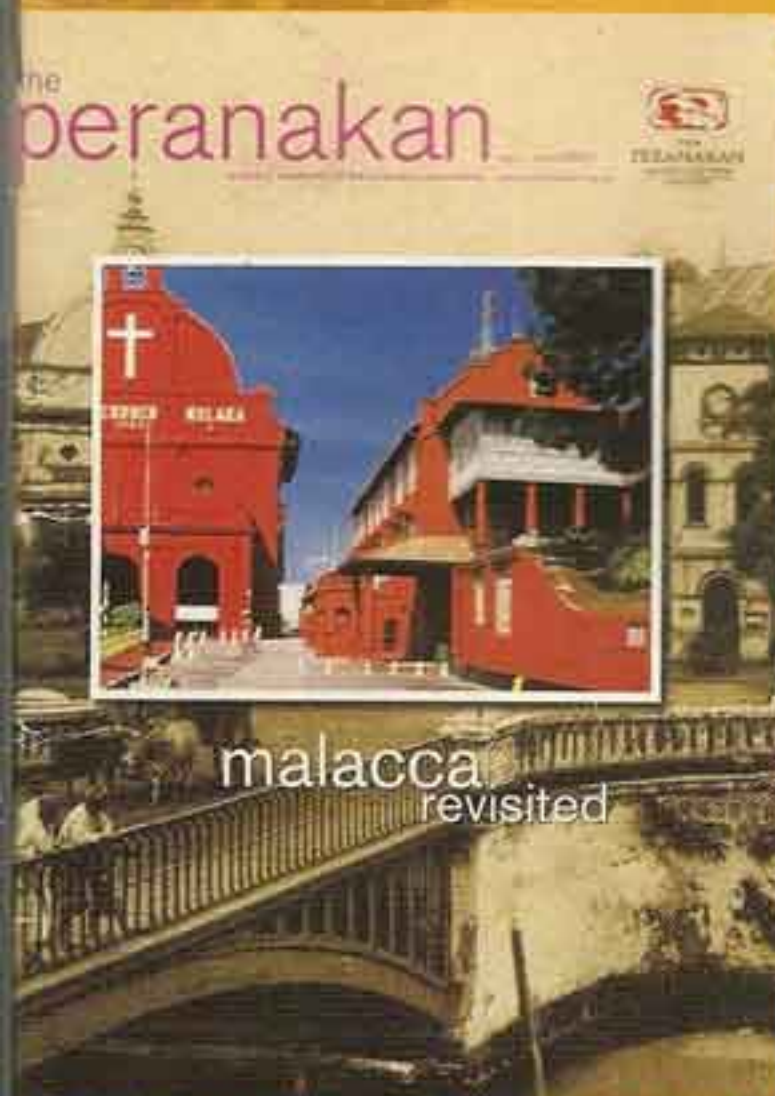
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quarterly newsletter of the peranakan association www.peranakan.org.sg

april-june 2004



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editorial

LEE KIP LEE

The Peranakan - 10 Years On

Kus Semangat! The Peranakan is ten years old this year, although we started off with two chatty, informal Circulars from David Ong who greeted us in April and September 1993 in his inimitable style with 'Apa Kabar? Greetings from YOUR Association. *Jangan lupa ini kita punya Association* and that we should therefore do all we can to support it!

Later, with the technical expertise of Peter Lee, the first issue of *The Peranakan Association Newsletter* - No.1/94 - appeared in June 1994, with a 2-column format and an Editorial Committee comprising David Ong, Lee Kip Lee, Helen Tan and Lim Geok Huay, who also assiduously typed out the master sheet for photocopying until November 1994 when we went into print.

The first photograph appeared on page 1 in September 1995 and showed our then President Dr George Tay receiving Dr Wee Kim Wee at a Dinner-Talk, whilst the first masthead was displayed on page 2.

In July/September 1996, we proudly emblazoned across the top of page 1, the new name of our periodical: *The Peranakan - Quarterly Newsletter of The Peranakan Association*.

We began accepting advertisements in Jan/March 1998, and the magazine took a more professional appearance with the appointment of Equinox Art & Design as designers in 2000.

In the same year we launched our own website with the assistance of the Youth Group - www.peranakan.org.sg - about which Isaac Chan wrote, 'The Internet, being a tool of this century and the next, will definitely be a vehicle to ensure continuity of our culture into the next millennium.'

To commemorate our 99th Anniversary, the first colour photographs were introduced in October/December 1999 with a full-page photograph of the legendary Mrs Lee Choon Guan on the cover.

The quality of this magazine has progressed from strength to strength and for which all credit must go to the Editorial Committee and Contributors for their unstinted effort in providing us with such topical subjects.

To follow up on Robert Yeo's article 'Interrogating Photographs' in the last issue, may we appeal to other members to submit to us for publication similar family photographs with their comments on the style of dressing and the fashion and coiffure of the day; their recollection of the occasion when the picture was taken; and what were the occupations of the various people in the photograph.

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 EDITORIAL COMMITTEE | Noreen Chan, Peter Lee, Maureen Lim, Anthony Oei, David Ong, Heather Ong, Ong Poh Neo, Cynthia Wee-Hoefer
 CIRCULATION | Lim Geok Huay

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Annual General Meeting 2004

LEE KIP LEE UNANIMOUSLY RE-ELECTED AS PRESIDENT

ANTHONY OEI

President Lee Kip Lee was unanimously re-elected to another two-year term of office at the 104th Annual General Meeting held on 27 March as attendance hit a new high at 61 members.

This is his third consecutive time at the helm of the 1,700-strong Association. The new term covers 2004 to 2006.

The elections of those standing for the other seats were also unanimous. Elected as office-bearers were: Peter Wee, 1st Vice-President; Ong Poh Neo, 2nd Vice-President; Lim Geok Huay, Hon. Secretary; Peter Lee, Asst Hon. Secretary; and Gavin Ooi, Hon. Treasurer.

Members elected to the committee were: Alan Koh, Bebe Seet, Stephanie Tan, Christopher Tay, Chan Eng Thai and Mark Lionel Tay.

Fresh faces in the committee are business consultant Christopher Tay, the second son of the late Dr George Tay who was Association president for two terms from 1994 to 1996, lawyer Chan Eng Thai who has his own practice, Planet Fitness customer service manager Mark Lionel Tay, and Stephanie Tan, an executive secretary with Rolls Royce Marine.

The Association will miss the participation of former committee members. Thomas Tan, who served as a committee member for one year (1996-1997) and as a Vice President for four years from 2000 to 2004, was instrumental in many important areas of change and development in the Association, such as the re-vamp of the

Association's constitution.

Similarly, Richard Tan, who headed the Cultural Development Group from 2000 to 2004, virtually created the performing arts arm of the Association, and his portfolio of achievements include pulling together our choir, Peranakan Voices, in 2000, producing the play *Dah Sa Chupak Tak Boley Sa Gantang*, in March 2001, and creating our highly acclaimed and successful pioneering comedy musical *Bibiks Behind Bars* in September 2002. The many cultural shows he staged for the Association at many public and private events also raised the visibility of the Association and the culture to a new level.

Isaac Chan headed the Youth Group during his tenure in the committee from 1998 to 2004, which assisted all major events of the Association, put together a dance group that performed at many occasions, and established the Association's website in June 1998.

Rita Bertrand Tan was the coordinator for advertisements and sponsorship during her two-year term in the committee, and was instrumental in sourcing extra funding for the newsletter, for which she had been doing since 2000.

Along with the elections, all the other items on the agenda, including the minutes of the previous AGM, the committee's annual report for 2003/2004 and the audited accounts for 2003, were approved and adopted.

The turnout was double the usual number seen

in many previous AGMs and was a refreshing development. It would seem to suggest greater awareness among members of the importance of AGMs. Indeed, these are occasions where major decisions are made and where members have the opportunity to have their say about the Association's affairs.

Delighted with such support, President Lee thanked the attendees at the outset for taking time to be at the meeting. Then he took them back to 2003, which he described as another successful year, despite the economic recession and the outbreak of SARS.

The highlights were the Annual Dinner & Dance, which drew almost 800 members and their friends, and the 16th Baba Convention in Penang jointly organised by Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang and the Peranakans from Phuket, Thailand. He thanked members of the general committee and sub-committees for devoting so much of their time and energy to the task.

Expressing his gratitude to those who elected him and his committee, President Lee pledged to continue to carry out the objectives of the Association's mission statement to 'preserve and revitalise the Peranakan culture'. The main task at hand was planning for the 18th Baba Convention to be held in Singapore next year when he looked forward to members' participation.

He said: 'My committee and I are very pleased to have this opportunity of meeting our fellow-members and we hope that you will stay back after the meeting in order that we may get to know each other better and be able to exchange views on the activities of the Association.'

It is heartening that the Association remains strong and relevant today after more than a century of existence when a group of pioneering and farsighted Straits-born Chinese founded the organisation in 1900 to improve the welfare of the community. Last year, membership increased by 63 to 1,731 of whom 60 joined as Life Members and three as Associate Members. 6

Mother's Day Celebrations

ANGELINE KONG

The Peranakan Voices after a hiatus of nearly five months, returned to the stage on Sunday, 9 May 2004 with yet another enjoyable performance.

The occasion, Mothers' Day Celebrations at the Marine Parade Community Club organised by the club's Women's Executive Committee, was attended by more than two hundred residents from the constituency. The show kicked off at 12 noon with an opening speech by the guest-of-honour, Mr R Ravindran, MP for Marine Parade GRC. Various performers took to the stage with their items.

Just seen at The Peranakan Association Annual D&D in December 2003, the Peranakan



Voices swung into a lively rendition of its repertoire of Peranakan songs and had the audience swaying and singing before long. The mood grew so infectious at one point that even the performers backstage were joining in the fun. Buoyed by the enthusiastic response, the Peranakan Voices sang their hearts out and fully deserved the cheers and thunderous applause at the end. Adding further gaiety and colour to the proceedings were Babas Francis Hogan and Georgie Lee, who entertained the audience with a skit that had the audience in stitches. All in, everyone had a rousing good time.



Parents' Day Dinner Celebrations

Jointly organised by Yio Chu Kang/Ang Mo Kio CC WECs & Yio Chu Kang Zone 6 RC

ONG POH NEO

Residents celebrating Parents' Day at the Yio Chu Kang Community Centre on 5 June 2004, a balmy Saturday evening, could not have experienced anything more riotously colourful than Peranakan culture. Following the CC's opening item, a *Sarong Kebaya* beauty contest, and after MC Patrick Huang's introduction by way of a brief and concise history of The Peranakan Association, the Babas & Nyonyas swung immediately into action.

Association member Alvin Yapp trumpeted the entry of the inimitable petite Francis Hogan, all aglow in stage make-up, chignon, baju panjang and high-heeled beaded slippers. He caught and held everybody's attention as he demurely sashayed through a *dondang sayang* song. His next, '*Sioh Bak Chang*' (a Taiwanese song), impressed further as it was sung in Hokkien.

The well-cast trio of Irene Ooi (mother), Rin Chen (son) and Shirley Tay (daughter) portrayed the age-old fixation with the mother-son domestic situation. Shirley's despairing and plaintive English rendition of 'Big Heart, Small Heart' - was a gentle reminder to parents of the ravages

wrought by favouritism, prejudice, wilful neglect that often tear a family asunder.

The popular Peranakan Voices next took to the stage with 5 songs starting with 'Bunga Sayang' and ending with 'Nyonya Manis'. They gave a dignified and polished performance. As always, the Peranakan Voices offered to the CC residents an essential view of Babas and Nonyas attired in their best, harmoniously singing and swaying, their voices soaring above the cares of the world and uplifting hearts in one sweep.

After that Arthur D'Castro crooned a romantic Malay ballad, and with the Katong Minstrels, strummed, and sang their way through a foot-tapping session. At the end, with Alvin's successful American-style hosting, the Nyonyas of the Peranakan Voices lured the guest of honour and many of the diners, fathers, mothers and their children to dance the joget not only on stage but around the 30 dinner tables as well. It was a delightful, rousing performance and a fitting and heart-warming finale by The Peranakan Association performers.



WHY DOES 'IDENTITY' MATTER AT ALL?

Reflections on 'Peranakan', 'Chinese', and other Identities

Kwok Kian-Woon

*Associate Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Nanyang Technological University*

I have been asked to summarise the Association's Dinner Talk that I presented on 23 April 2004. To begin with, let me thank the Association for inviting me to share my thoughts, in spite of the fact that I am not an expert on the Peranakans (although I have written about Chinese identity and the Chinese in Singapore). My thanks also go to the audience for the highly animated discussion that followed my talk, which was essentially an attempt to raise questions such as the following: What do people mean by *identity*? Why, when, where, how, and for whom does identity matter? How can we speak of *hybrid* and *multiple* identities? What does it mean to go through an identity crisis? Is there a *politics of identity*? In the face of globalisation, how do people go about picking and choosing in the supermarket of identities? What is the impact of technological advancement? Should we do some fundamental rethinking about identity in the wake of September 11? In particular, what kind of rethinking do we need in the context of Singapore and Southeast Asia? And what might be the role of Peranakans in stimulating and contributing to such rethinking?

I do not pretend to have adequate answers to these questions, but allow me to retrace some steps in my own attempt to address them. Identity is a social science concept which has slipped into everyday vocabulary and contemporary political discourse. Why? To answer this, I recall two lines quoted by Marshall McLuhan. The first line, attributed to 'the Balinese', reads: 'We have no art. We do everything as well as we can.' It is followed by an ironic statement purportedly made by A.K. Coomarasamy: 'We are proud of our museums where we display a way of living that we have made impossible.' Like the concept of art, identity becomes a self-conscious concept

when what is seamlessly woven into the fabric of everyday life is no longer taken for granted. Likewise, a museum established to display a traditional way of life is also the surest sign of its passing, the official announcement that it has become *past*. Hence it is mummified or 'museumified'.


These observations may be especially pertinent for Peranakans, who for decades have debated about the decline and demise of their culture - another sure indication of 'identity crisis'. In his discussion on the 'future of the Babas' at the end of his book (1998), Jurgen Rudolf mooted the idea of a 'non-commercial Baba-Nyonya Heritage Museum' which would need sponsorship and government support. Today, such a museum is realised in the Asian Civilisations Museum at the former Tao Nan School in Armenian Street. Hence my point again about preservation: we preserve what is either dead or dying so as to prevent further decay. Instead of *preservation*, we should think about *conservation*: instead of mummifying what is dead or preventing decay, our positive efforts to develop a culture are made in light of the larger 'ecology' of contemporary life, with all its complex problems and challenges. This is not the place to offer an in-depth exposition of the implications of such a perspective. At the risk of presenting my thoughts in a fragmentary way, I highlight three sets of concerns that have been on my mind as an intellectual and as one who lives in Singapore and in the context of Southeast Asia.

First, we need a better understanding of why identity matters at all in a multicultural society and in a globalised world. On the one hand, there is something almost instinctive about group belonging, recognising and identifying with one's own fellows. This feeling of fellowship - what might

be called the 'warm glow' of identity - is a common experience that gives meaning to everyday life. On the other hand, an identity is constructed, maintained, asserted, defended, displayed, fought for, and fought over vis-à-vis the Other, whether by a majority or minority group, indeed especially by the latter in the face of oppression or discrimination. The political conflicts over identity are not about culture per se; they involve issues related to unequal power and access to resources. Moreover, such conflicts often lead to mass violence as exemplified in the horrors the twentieth-century world witnessed: the Holocaust, the Killing Fields, Rwanda (whose tenth anniversary is now commemorated). The twenty-first century has been ushered in by September 11, a global event whose multifaceted causes and consequences are still not properly understood. To the extent that the politics of identity continue to figure in the spread of mass violence today, Amin Maalouf is right to conclude his book *In the Name of Identity* with the words: 'everywhere there is a need for calm and thorough reflection on the best way to tame the wild beast of identity'. At which point does the 'warm glow' of identity transform, or descend, into the 'wild beast' of identity?

Second, and I shall be brief here, we need a better understanding of the making of identities in the face of modern transformation, especially technological advancement in communications, which has accelerated the speed and transformed the scale of global flows of capital, people and information. Globalisation is not a new phenomenon in human history, but the speed and scale of globalisation in the contemporary world and its uneven impact on different groups of people across and within societies have implications for personal and collective identity. On the one hand, fixed and stable notions of identity give way to ideas about pluralism, hybridity and multiple identities. On the other hand, this brings about chaos and confusion for many, who in turn continue to yearn for a singular and monolithic identity.

Third, what can we draw from experiences of cultural groups in Singapore in helping us rethink the question of identity in the contemporary world?

This again is too complex a question for me to attempt to answer in a remotely satisfactory way. Here I can merely suggest that what is needed is continued personal and collective questioning of identity, and not merely in political and utilitarian terms. In this connection, I am reminded of a 1988 essay by Sally Borthwick on the Chinese-educated in Singapore in which she wrote of the 'search for a substitute culture in the vacuum caused by the removal of Sir Francis Drake and the daffodils on the one hand and Lu Xun and Gorky on the other hand'. The quest for identity involves deep cultural questioning, and it might well be said that this is a quality of mind that remained underdeveloped in our post-Independence years. Up to the late 1980s, Borthwick concluded, 'while a distinctive Singapore style can probably be identified in terms of material possessions and expectations, it has yet to find a counterpart in the cultural sphere.' On that note, where are we today, in a far more complex post-September 11 world and in the context of Southeast Asia? Again, I shy away from attempting to answer the question and can only suggest that it is one that demands our serious intellectual attention. I end this reflection with both a clue and a hope: perhaps the historical vicissitudes of groups such as the Chinese-educated and the Peranakans, especially in their struggles with identity, offer lessons for how we can respond to the cultural challenges of the present. 

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North & South

HEATHER ONG

Every event sees new people joining us, and taking their first steps towards discovering their Peranakan roots. Some are members of the association, some are friends of members, and others contacted us through the yahogroups internet forum. We have cyberspace participants from the north (Malaysia, Europe) and south (Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand).

We started the year with a good meal at Nonya Bong's Kitchen, a no-frills eatery in Balestier Road. Chef and proprietor Jeffrey whipped up a menu of authentic Penang Peranakan food, letting us enjoy Northern favourites like salt fish sambal, *gulai*, *otak-otak*, Thai-style dips and *pengat pisang*. We had a filling meal at a very reasonable price, and then lingered for some time after dinner, enjoying the company of new friends. Among them were two brothers from Malacca & Kuala Lumpur, who had come to Singapore for the weekend.

The last few months had several long weekends and public holidays. I know of many Peranakans, young and old, who headed north to Malacca or Penang for a bout of shopping & *makan*. Though each has his favourite haunts, I often refer to Baba Cedric's article 'An Insider's Malacca', which appeared in a 2001 issue of our newsletter, and Baba Christopher's Penang food guide (Oct-Dec 2003). I brought two Australian friends to Malacca, handed them copies of the article and let them wander around. They found it very informative, as they managed to catch a glimpse of the Peranakan culture there and enjoyed themselves tremendously.

Going to Malaysia as individuals is convenient, but nothing beats the rollicking good time and camaraderie we get when the bus is filled with other members of our association. We are looking forward to any organised trip, perhaps to this year's Peranakan Convention in Malacca?

In April, we held a session on 'Introduction to Peranakan Patois'. We had the privilege of using a room at the Eurasian Community House, a spanking new clubhouse on Ceylon Road. Experienced teacher Ban Huat started the fun-



Youth Group members at Nonya Bong's Kitchen

filled session by getting participants to rate their knowledge of our patois, and answers ranged from 0 (don't know any word) to 5 (able to understand and speak reasonably well).

Here is an excerpt from his teaching handout entitled 'Gobair' (Gossip). This scenario was certainly familiar to our participants that day, mostly young working adults.

Mary: Eh! Betty, apa khabair? Lama tak jumpa!

Betty: Khabair baik! Aiye! Tachi Mary, lu ni lagi tengok lagi hoe-mia-eh? Lagi tengok lagi tuapan.

Mary: Tak'ah lah gua ni hoe-mia sama tuapan! Tengok lulagi hoe-mia. Gua dengair lu pi Australia tiga bulan, tinggal sama anak kechik lu si Florence kan?

Betty: Ya, gua tinggal sama si Florence dia baru beranak. Gua ni bukan pi holiday tau? Gua ni kena jaga chuchu, masak, chuchi baju, kemas rumah...betul macham orang gaji guet lai lah. Bukan pi makan angin.

After going through a few sentences, we all realised that living in Singapore meant that we

all had an inherent score of at least 2 (can understand some words in a sentence). Eurasian Association President, Mr Bryan Davenport, and Executive Assistant Ms Lorraine Bligh also joined in, and by the end of the session, veteran actor Tony Quek had everyone reading quite fluently from a short script. We also highlighted the difference between our Singapore accent (e.g. *naik bas, pi pasar*), and the Malaccan accent (e.g. *naik bair, pi pasair*)

We enjoyed two tea breaks that afternoon; one was courtesy of our Eurasian friends (spicy sambal sandwiches and deliciously moist, rich sugée cake) and the other in honour of our own Peranakan heritage (Nonya *bak chang, kueh-kueh & kopi-o*)

Events like these serve to remind us of how much more we need to do to preserve our vanishing patois, so join us as we strive to revitalise our culture through learning, speaking and showing support for the association. Take a break from the stresses of modern living and come, learn to play *cherki* at our July event, and enjoy this traditional Peranakan past time. 🐼

Keep connected and get updated information by sending an email from your account to [<peranakan-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>](mailto:peranakan-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

LEARN TO PLAY CHERKI

Saturday 24 July 2004

2 to 5 pm

The Eurasian Community House,
139 Ceylon Road

Price: \$10 per person, includes
instruction, practice games &
refreshments

RSVP: youth@peranakan.org.sg

DALAM DAPUR

This is the first of an occasional series on Peranakan cuisine. In the book *Rumah Baba* (published by the National Heritage Board), the kitchen is called *perut rumah*, the stomach of the house, its activities underpinning the rhythms of daily life. Even in wealthy households with their own Hainanese cooks or *chong pohs*, Nyonyas were expected to be well versed in culinary skills. It was said that a Nyonya's cooking ability could be gauged from the rhythm of the sound made as she pounded the *rempah*!

Food has always been used to mark births, deaths, anniversaries, religious festivals and the passing of the seasons. Special dishes had their own significance, for example *kueh ee* to mark Tang Chek or the Winter Solstice, and *nasi lemak* to celebrate the *duabelas hari* or twelfth day of the traditional wedding ceremonies.

The early settlements of Malacca and Penang were polyglot communities drawn from a dozen countries, attracted there by trade and opportunities for fortune. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that Peranakan food, even more so than Peranakan architecture, furniture and dress, represents a happy fusion of these diverse cultures. My grandmother, a Singaporean Nyonya who married into a Malacca family, describes a rich cake called '*bludder*', which is probably derived from the Dutch '*brood*' (bread). It was an annual treat for Chinese New Year, and a specialty of the Eurasian housekeeper Mama Joanna. Apart from requiring a special ring-shaped mould, this dish calls for a heart-stopping 1 lb of butter, ¼lb lard and 50 egg yolks. In some respects it is like a brioche, but instead of yeast it used *toddy* as a raising and flavouring agent. Celine Marbeck includes a recipe (she calls it *blueda*) in her book *Cuizinha Kristang*.

- IN THE KITCHEN

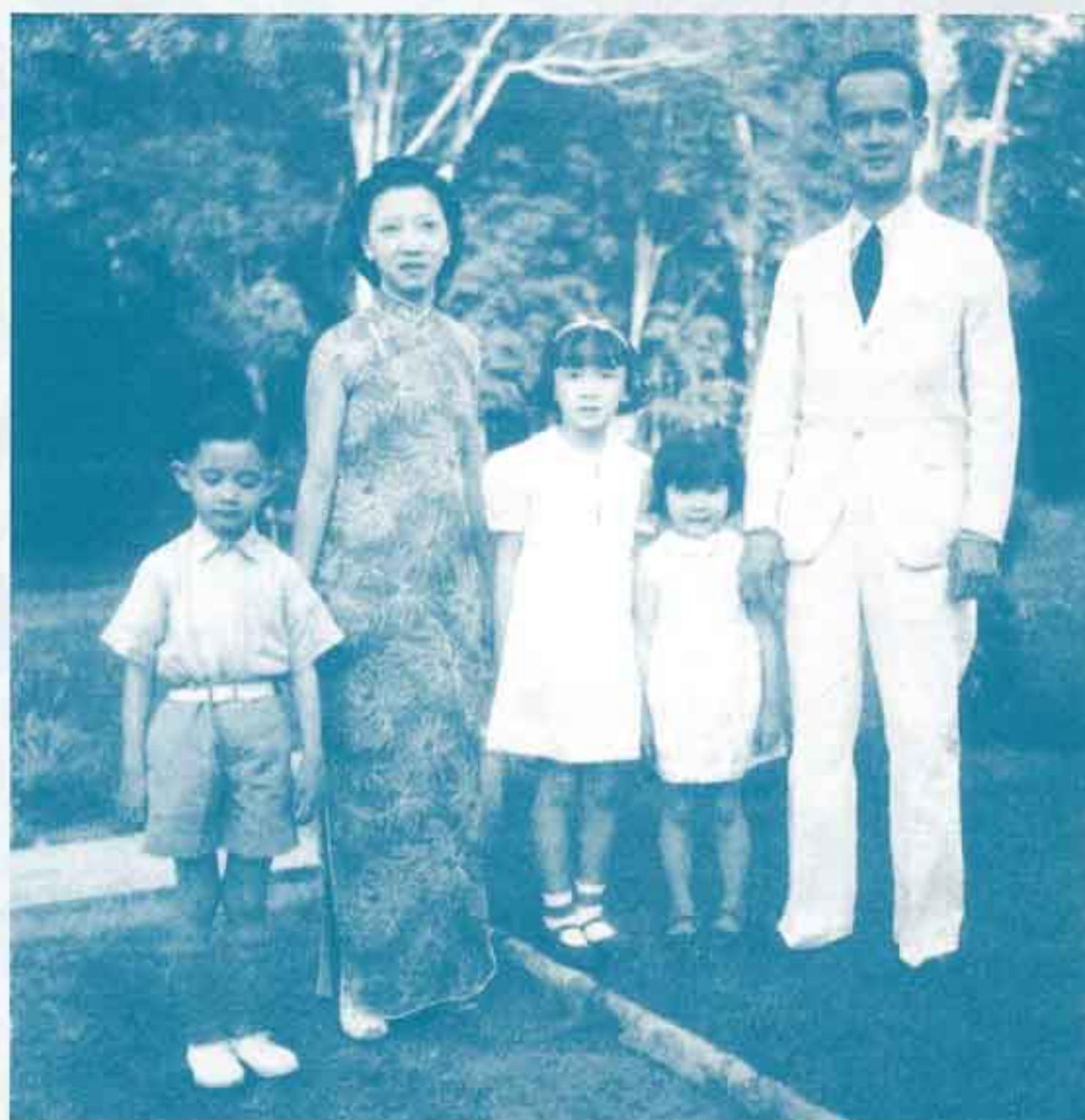
NOREEN CHAN

This is not meant to be a mere collection of recipes, although they will certainly be featured. Nor will it be a series of restaurant reviews, though these will appear from time to time. Rather, I hope to focus on the origins and unique features of our food, in particular those nineteenth nought belum dishes which, unless we take steps to record them, will soon be lost with the women who used to know them by heart. In a way, it is a form of tribute to those generations of nyonyas and bibiks whose unsung efforts delighted their well-fed families and friends. I also hope to bring new light to common ingredients and dishes.

My rather ambitious aims are to inform and entertain, to stimulate discussion and discovery, and above all to celebrate Peranakan cuisine in all its robust and delicious glory. I hope you will join me, *mari lah, dalam dapur...*



My Mama Elsie Chia with her first child, my mother Eleanor Tan, 1930s



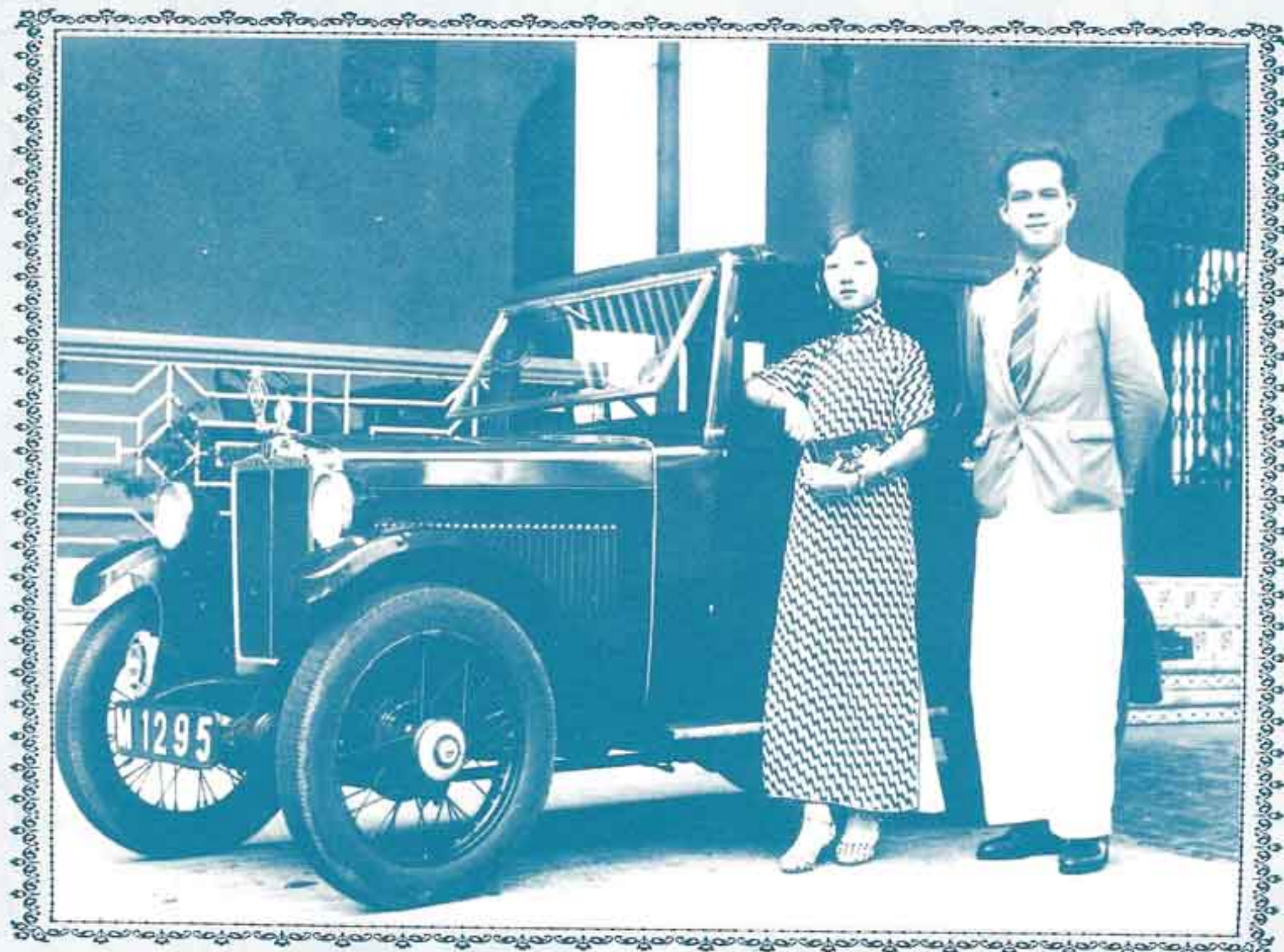
Mama with my Ah Kong, Tan Jin Hoe, and their three children, 1930s

RECIPE COLLECTIONS

One can hardly complain of a shortage of Peranakan recipe books nowadays. In the last year at least two new cookbooks were released, including *The New Mrs Lee's Cookbook* by her granddaughter Shermay Lee (Times Editions) and *Nonya Flavours - A complete guide to Penang Straits Chinese Cuisine* (Star Publications). The latter was launched at last year's Baba Convention in Penang.

If you compare the recipes, you will find that those for the same dish are different between the books and probably from your own family recipe. Therein lies the question of 'authenticity'; which version can lay claim to being the 'most Peranakan'? Probably none. There will inevitably be variations because, to borrow a phrase from Jeffrey Chia of Nonya Bong Kitchen, 'your grandmother is different from my grandmother'.

One of the difficulties of researching the

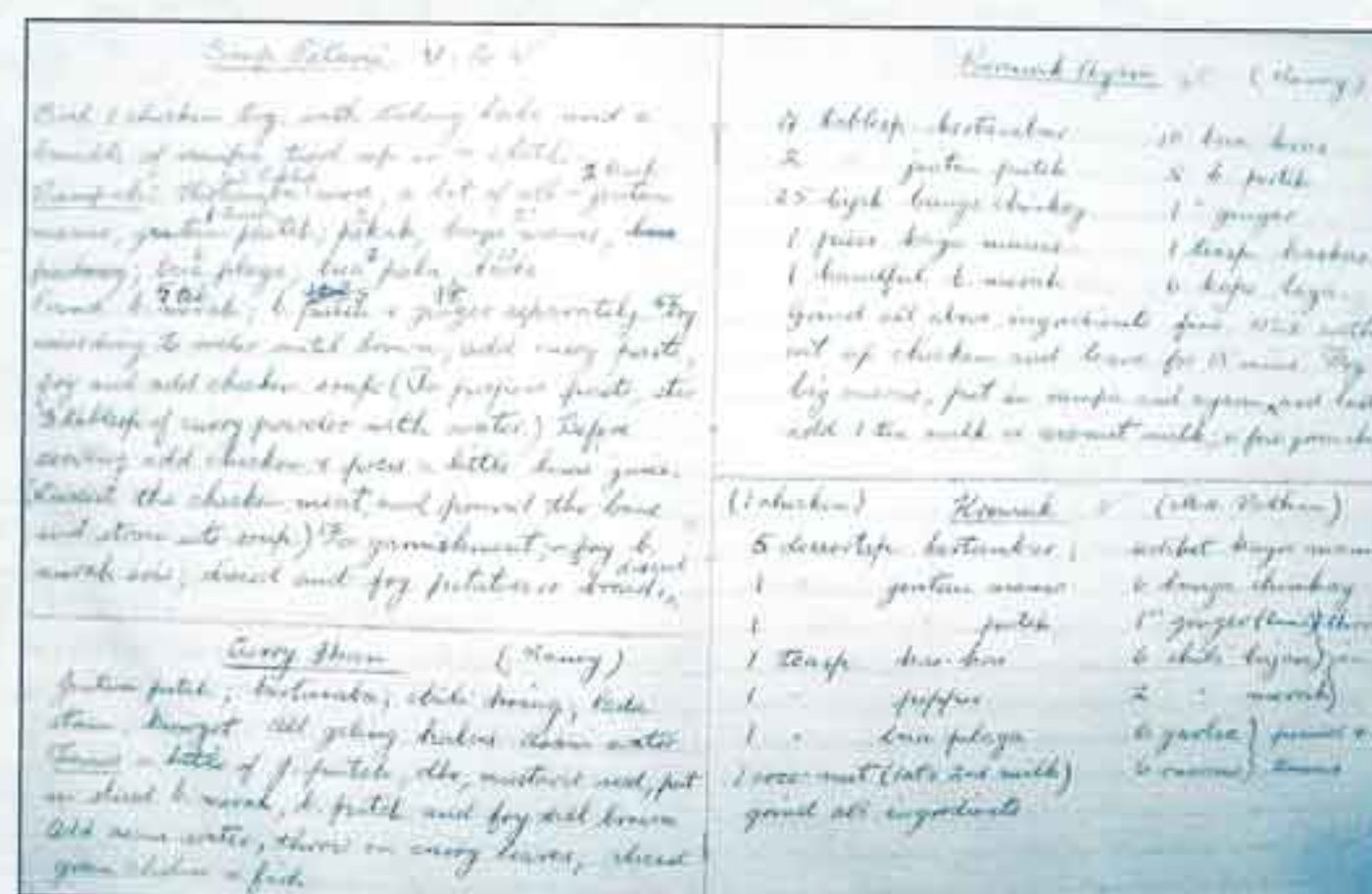


My grandparents, Mr & Mrs Tan Jin Hoe, c.1934

origins and development of Peranakan cuisine is the lack of written recipes. Generations ago, women did not receive much education and learnt everything by observation and practice. Even when recipes were noted down, they often lacked

details such as quantities and cooking times. It was assumed that one would know how the final result should look and taste like, and therefore how to adjust the proportions of ingredients accordingly. In other words, the famous and (to novices) frustrating practice of *agak agak*.

My grandmother's recipe for *babi pongtay* reads thus: '*Babi potong besar2, rebong potong selang seling, heo-ko persiang habis chuchi. Tumis b. putih, b. merah kasi garing, masok tow-cheo, suda wangi masok rebong, babi. Balek2*



A page from Mama's recipe book

*tuang sedikit kuah babi, garem, gula atau terboo, heep kan kasi serup.** Since then my mother has added, in her own handwriting, quantities, as well as the useful '2 teasp dark soya sauce for colour'. And now it has passed on to me.

A collection of family recipes is a treasure trove not only of culinary history, but also a glimpse into the lives and times of the women who compiled and laboriously recorded them. My *kimpoh choh* (maternal great grandaunt) in Melaka, for example, only received one year of formal schooling. Her recipes are painstakingly written in a childish scrawl, with erratic spelling, no punctuation and hardly any details (except for her curry powder recipe which specifies twelve ingredients).

Turning the pages will tell you whether the

bibik's household *chongpoh* (male cook) had recipes worthy of recording, who her friends and relatives were and what she thought of their recipes (comments of 'VG', 'G', how many versions of a particular dish recorded), and most interesting of all, the dishes that might have been common in her day but which are now museum pieces (but more of those in a later issue).

My grandmother's own collection reflects her own life. The early recipes are mostly family favourites, including her maternal grandmother's *pastal*, a Dutch-Indonesian influenced chicken pie. The majority were collected after she married and moved to Malacca, and are from both Malacca relations and her siblings and in-laws. In particular, my *tuah kimpoh* (eldest maternal grandaunt) contributed several Penang recipes which we still use today. Later still, Western-style recipes creep in, as well as those from celebrity cooks like Tham Yew Kai, and magazines and newspapers (e.g. *New Nation* 1982).

But Peranakan recipes are like our patois; unless we actively incorporate them into our daily lives, they will remain something of our parents' and grandparents' generation. The mushrooming of Peranakan restaurants testifies to the popularity of the cuisine, but it would be a tragedy if we had to go to a restaurant to eat food that we used to be able to get at home. The challenge is for us, as a community, to work towards getting from the page to the stove, so to speak. 🐼

*** Cut pork into big pieces, bamboo shoots slantwise, and pick through and wash the Chinese mushrooms. Saute garlic, shallots until brown, add taucheo (preserved soya beans), when fragrant add bamboo shoots and pork. Stir, add a little pork stock, salt, sugar or sugar cane, simmer until the flavour develops.**

MARI MAKAN - LET'S EAT

PERANAKAN BUFFET at PLAZA MARKET CAFE...

NOREEN CHAN

In June 2003, the old Plaza Cafè was renovated and renamed Plaza Market Cafè, in what is now known as Raffles the Plaza. Since then it has built up a reputation for its Peranakan buffet spread, which features a large selection of favourites including *babi ponteh*, *ayam buah keluak* and *chap chye*. In addition there are condiments such as *achar* and (my favourite) *chinchaluk* to whet the appetite, as well as the obligatory *sambal belachan*.

In keeping its international outlook, the buffet also has Asian dishes such as *gado gado*, *rojak*, claypot specialities and Japanese sushi and *soba*. The dinner buffet (6.30pm to 10.30pm daily) costs just \$5 more than lunch, but gets you extras such as *pie tee* and *popiah*, a carvery and 'live' stations with cooks whipping up noodle soups and fried local favourites like *char kway teow* and *orluak*.

Besides a few 'staples' or regular features, there is a constant rotation of new dishes to keep things interesting. These include *itek sioh*, *kuah lada* (*stingray and brinjal in peppery gravy*) and *otak-otak jantan*.

Be sure to leave space for dessert; the hotel pastry chefs turn out a variety of delicious cakes and puddings, but the hot item must surely be its toothsome durian pudding, not some anaemic lightweight mousse but an honest-to-goodness full-of-pulp pudding with kick. It makes non-durian fans wrinkle their noses! 🐼

Lunch Buffet 12.00pm to 2.30pm daily
\$25.00+++

High Tea Buffet 12.30pm to 5.30pm on Sat, Sun and Public Holiday \$23.00+++

Dinner 6.30pm to 10.30pm daily \$30.00 +++

Free flow of soft drinks and juices \$5.00+++

Tea or coffee is included in the buffet price

For reservations, call the Restaurant Reservations Hotline at 64316156

Association members get 15% off on presenting their membership cards.

On the Past, Peranakans and Poppies

In Singapore, California-based Linda Lim has every reason to hog traffic. If anyone were to challenge her with, 'Your grandfather's road ah?' she would have the most chances to say ... "YES!" There are 8 roads named after her forefathers. Here she tells us how a new book on one of them, Chew Boon Lay, impacts her life and family back in California.

Gazing through the window at neon-orange native Californian poppies, my mind drifts back to Poppy Day when I was growing up in Singapore. Back then I only knew poppies to be a deep red color with a black center. My mother would always give a donation to the fund-raiser so we could each have one to pin onto our dresses.

I am an only child who has lived two-thirds of my life ten thousand miles away from the land of my birth. Imagine my excitement this year (2004) when I was handed a most precious gift by my aunt, Evelyn Chew, during a Chinese New Year visit to Singapore. I was awestruck at the aesthetics and stylish presentation. My thoughts dart immediately to the legacy I hold in my hands, which I am able to share with my daughter, a first generation American, and grandson, now 4 years old.

It is only human to desire a sense of connection and belonging beyond our immediate environment and daily routine. In the context of my adult life, I consider it a privilege to know my aunts, uncles, grandparents and great-grandparents; and now to become one in the cycle of life.

Turning each page of this family album awakens memories of my childhood in Singapore. My mother, Mavis Chew, brought me along on frequent visits to spend time with her sisters and sisters-in-law. Many of my playmates were cousins around my age. I grew up in an environment of close-knit extended families on both sides of my parents' families, unlike my daughter. Out-



Linda and her mother, Mavis Chew at Lee Seng Gee's Changi bungalow (top) with her parents (left) and her grandfather Chew Hock Leong (below), c. 1955



side of several long visits to Singapore during her childhood, Jenifer has always called California home. Here, her extended family context consisted of one uncle and grandma.

After graduating from High School in 1989, she was invited by her grandparents for an extended stay in Singapore during which she excit-

edly discovered that there were two MRT stations named after two great-great-grandfathers, Chew Boon Lay and Lim Nee Soon.

On another occasion she told me she had met a new friend, Yeo Han Yong, whom she later found out she is related to! Their friendship also allowed me to become better acquainted with Han Yong's mother Chwee Im, my second cousin, who wrote the family book.

Now married, Jenifer and her husband choose to reside and raise their son in California, a state composed of a largely immigrant population, both from other states in the United States as well as from almost every land beyond North America. I am particularly thankful and proud to have this record to present to my grandson, Gavin, about this seemingly distant aspect of his heritage. At his young age he has already visited Singapore more than once but will not likely do so with any frequency, unlike his mother, since my father recently passed away.

My friends are impressed with this superb collection of stories, artwork, genealogical charts,

and extensive photographs including names of blood relations, some with stories of their contributions to society. It made them to wish to know more about their own ancestors.

I am eternally grateful for the vision and the perseverance of Chwee Im, and my aunt Evelyn Chew, for their successful creative effort.

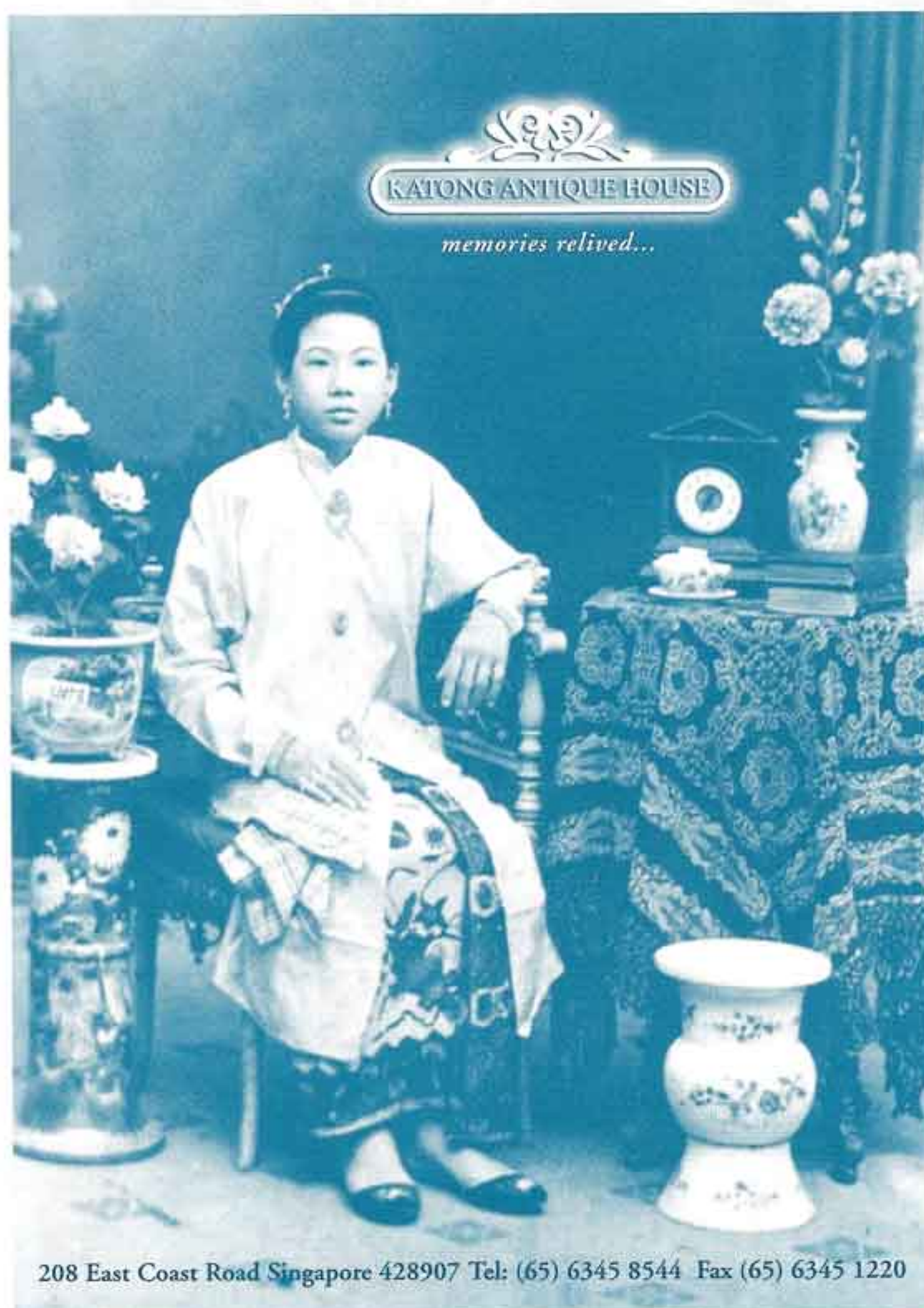
This book adds dimension to my roots and I see where my artistic inclinations originated, as well as those of my daughter. I was familiar with my grandfather, Chew Hock Leong, as a photographer but I had not read any of his essays.

Residing overseas has taught me that beneath the unique trappings of culture our human hearts and desires are more alike than they are different. Although this Family Album is about my family, it is also a universal story of any lineage. Each of us is a product of a blood line yet with a unique legacy of gifts to contribute. My heart is content to know the breadth of my mother's side of family and to appreciate all that went into documenting this information.

As Linda Lim, residing now in California, I am accustomed to poppies being neon orange with penetratingly deep black centers. Picking them where they naturally grow in the wild is prohibited as they are the protected state flower of California. When they bloom abundantly all over the brown hills of the Southern California desert, it is a sign spring has arrived in the desert.

So it is now spring; today I am at home, in the house where I am living in California. With both my parents deceased, I know more than ever that the definition of 'home' is ultimately where the heart is. 🌸

LINDA LIM
26 April, 2004
Corona, California, USA



208 East Coast Road Singapore 428907 Tel: (65) 6345 8544 Fax (65) 6345 1220

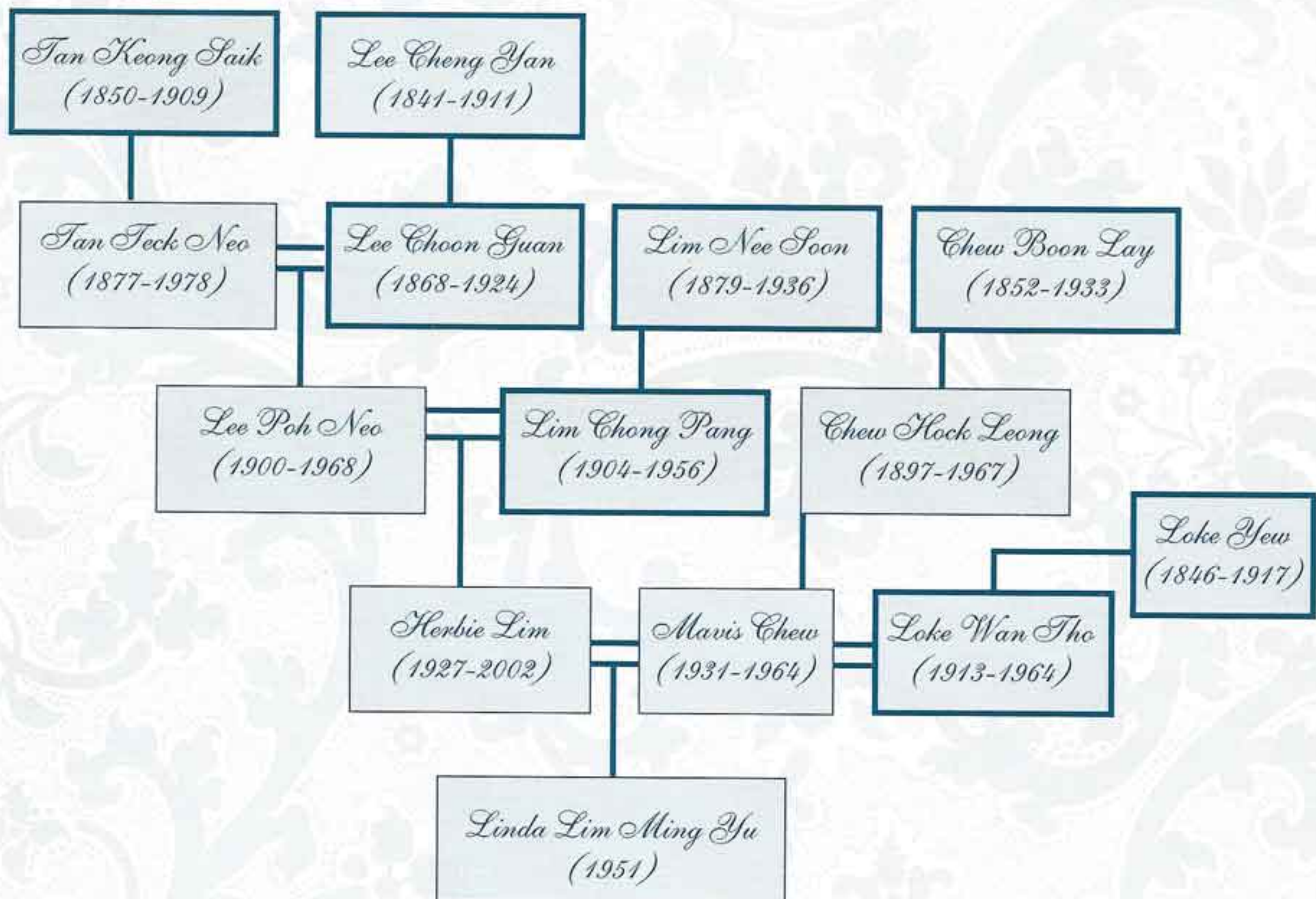
KRIS DECOR
(supplier of pretty Nyonya porcelains)

Christine Ong



295 Bedok South Avenue 3, Bedok Court.
Tel: 6449 9632 Fax: 6448 2326

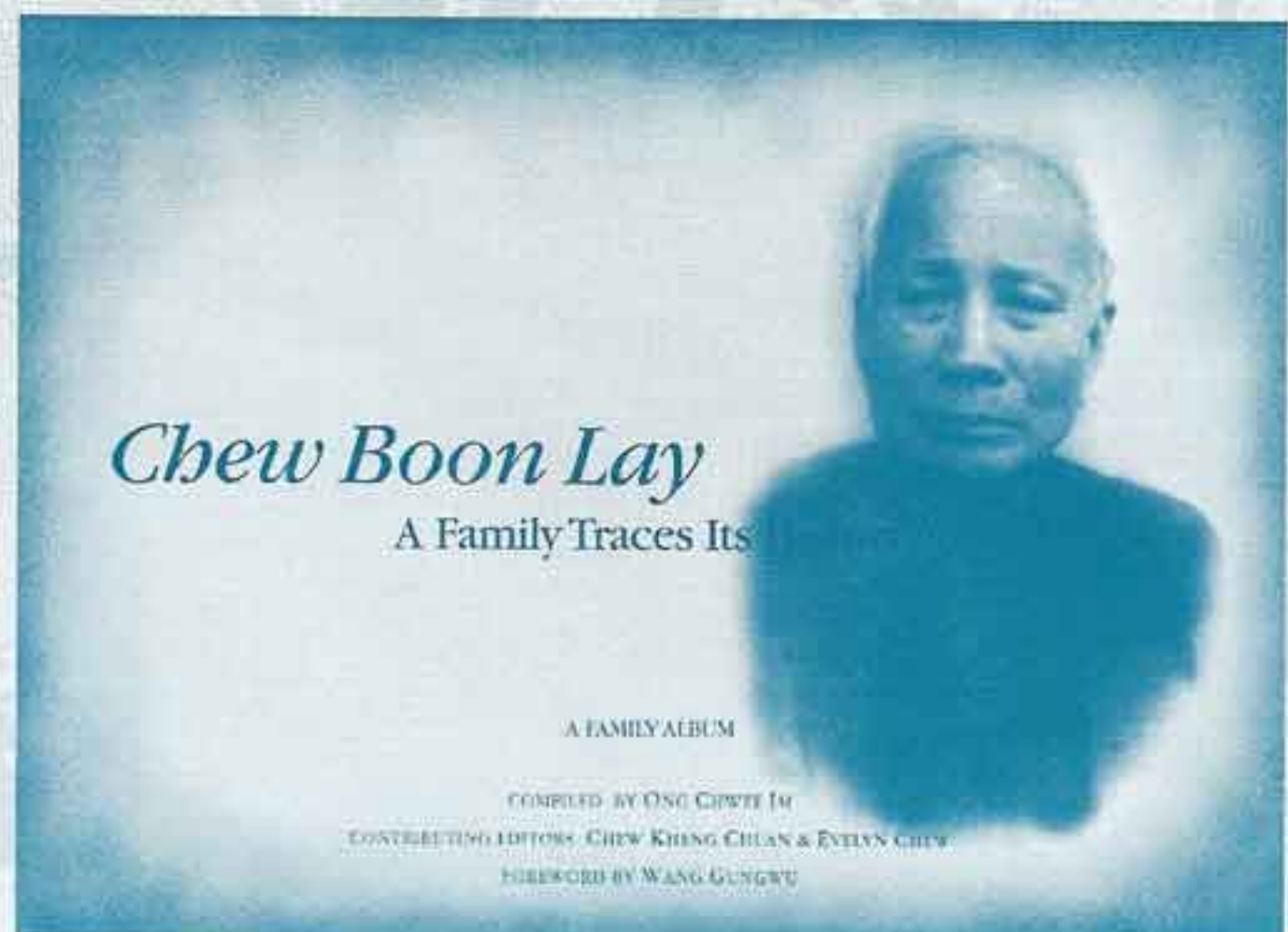
Linda Lim's Family Tree
(ancestors commemorated in road names highlighted)



Chew Boon Lay
- *A Family Traces its History*

Compiled by Ong Chwee Im with a foreword by Wang Gungwu,
published by Ong Chwee Im, Singapore, 2002

Although Chew Boon Lay arrived relatively late in the Peranakan context, he and his family became immediately 'Peranakanised'. His wife and all his daughters-in-law were Nyonyas. He founded Ho Ho Biscuits, made his millions, and acquired huge tracts of land in Jurong, where his name is commemorated in the name of a road and MRT station. This book is a fascinating glimpse into the life, history and achievements of a well-known family and an invaluable addition to the study of the Peranakan community. 🐉



Surat Kahwin

Rare wedding documents belonging to a descendant of Chew Boon Lay

PETER LEE

In the safekeeping of Mrs Roberta Wee is a set of rare and unusual documents related to the Baba wedding. Known in the family as *surat kahwin* ('wedding documents'), they consist of a several sheets of red paper with Chinese characters, red envelopes and two trays made of bamboo frames and curiously-decorated paper.

The documents concern the marriage of Mrs Wee's parents, Pang Choon Jin (1908-1971) and Chew Teck Neo (1912-2001), the second daughter of Chew Hock Seng (1883-1957), Chew Boon Lay's eldest son. The date in the document is the 12th day of the 12th month of the Chinese *yisi* year corresponding to 1929.

The envelopes relate to various aspects of the wedding and marriage, with titles in Chinese such as 'Offering of *Lap Chai*' (the lap chai is the wedding gift), 'Offering of Revolving Fortune', 'Offering of Agreements', and 'Growing Old Together for a Hundred Years'. The red documents written in Chinese characters with black ink relate to the compatibility of the horoscopes of bride and groom, information about their birth dates, wishes for marital harmony, etc.

Of interest is the rather unusual pair of trays, one titled 'Male Documents' and the other 'Female Documents'. The Chinese characters are written in goldleaf on red paper bordered by green, red and yellow bands. On each edge in gold leaf is an 'endless knot', symbol of eternity. On the reverse side is an almost bizarre paper montage of rocks, flowers, and peacock feathers, which perhaps

symbolises the Earth, a feminine symbol. The other tray has on the reverse an illustration of a holy mountain and clouds, which may symbolise Heaven, the masculine symbol.

Cheo Kim Ban hints at these documents in his classic book *The Baba Wedding* (Eastern Universities Press, 1983), when he describes one part of the nuptial negotiations, when an auspicious day was chosen for the exchange of horoscopes. 'Each horoscope gave the date and time of birth of the couple according to the lunar calendar. The horoscopes were written in Chinese on red paper and put in red envelopes for the exchange. These were then sent to diviners who consulted the Tong Soo or a deity to determine whether the young couple was compatible in every way. If the answer turned out unfavourable, the whole matter was dropped without any ill feeling or loss of face to both parties...However should the answer be favourable and both parties wish to proceed with the match, an auspicious date would be chosen for the official engagement which was an exchange of candles as a sign of betrothal' (pg 20)

Clearly these documents, which Mrs Wee has kindly allowed *The Peranakan* to share with its readers, are connected to this arcane world of nuptial arrangements, which may

actually be no different from what Americans today call a 'pre-nup'. This type of legal contract can often be much more complex and esoteric. Some things just never change! 🐉

Photographs courtesy of Mrs Roberta Wee.



Top to bottom: Red Lap Chai envelope, front and back of bamboo 'tray'

Stepping Into a Peranakan World


Katong Antique House gets busy with In-House Heritage Tours

PETER LEE

Peter Wee of Katong Antique House has been very busy lately with his new 'product' - a well-packaged tour of his heritage house and gallery. The 45-minute tour begins with an introduction to Peranakan identity and material culture, and provides a glimpse of traditions and customs through



spaces within a house, such as the reception hall, ancestral hall and kitchen. Guests then get a wonderful opportunity to catch a glimpse of Wee's exceptional collection of Peranakan artifacts, which he

has been accumulating for over 25 years, including perhaps the finest assemblage of rare *binpoh* and *saputangan* (handkerchiefs), sarongs, jewelry, beaded shoes, and porcelain. The tour ends with a wonderful treat - home made pastries with aromatic local coffee or tea. The whole experience costs \$15 a person (minimum 5 people). Naturally custom-made tours and events can always be worked out. 



Peter wee in his gallery upstairs (above) and in the reception (left)

NOTICEBOARD

CALENDAR:

23 July

Peranakan Music & Songs Night

Organised by the ACM Armenian Street and supported by The Peranakan Association.

An occasion where lovers of Peranakan culture can gather and enjoy an evening of nostalgia through music and songs.

Finger food will be served.

7 - 9 pm

\$13.50 for members

\$15 for non-members

For bookings please contact our Hon. Sec. Mrs Lim Geok Huay at 62550704

24 July

Learn to Play Cherki

Organised by the Youth Group
2 to 5 pm
The Eurasian Community

House, 139 Ceylon Road

Price: \$10 per person, includes instruction, practice games & refreshment

RSVP: youth@peranakan.org.sg

17 to 19 September

GSA's Buang Keroh Pungot

Jernih at Victoria Theatre.

Tickets at \$47, \$37 & \$27, available through Sistic from August. Details to follow.

12 November

The Association's 104th Anniversary Dinner & Dance

at Mandarin Hotel.

Details to follow.

10 to 12 December

Towards the Preservation of our Heritage 'Look, Listen and Move a la Peranakan'

The 17th Baba Convention, Malacca. Details to follow.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following eight members whose addition increases our roll to 1,754 members

Mr Cheng Hsing Yao

Ms Heng Cheng Imm

Mr Lee Boon Pinn

Ms Lee En Kooi Elizabeth

Mrs Lee Li-Ming

Mr Song Eng Kee Eric

Dr Robert Bruno Faltermeier

Ms Vicky Yap

OBITUARIES

We extend our deepest sympathies to the families of the following members:

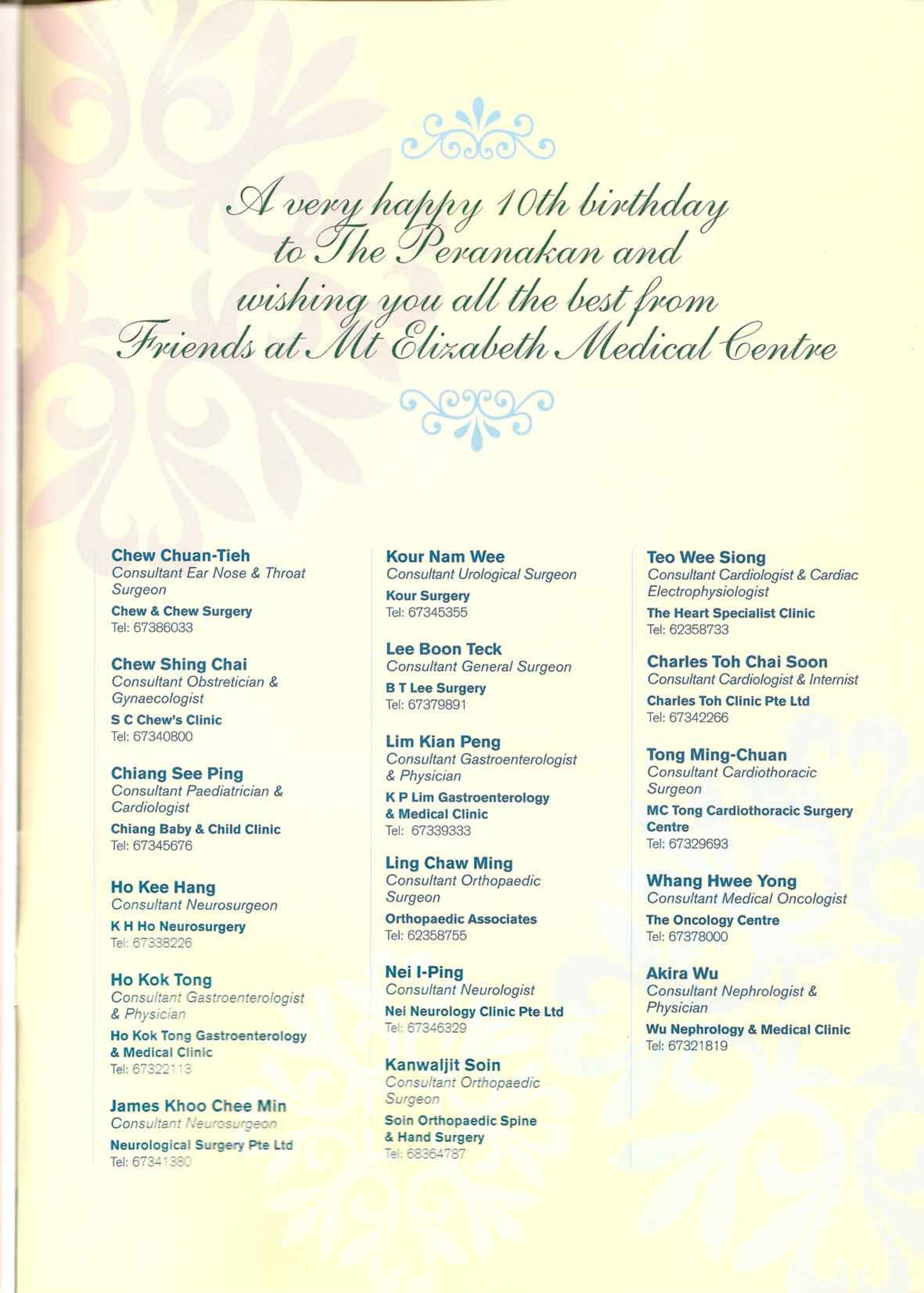
Mrs Boon Kim Wah Goldaline

Miss Khoo Hong Leng Irene

Mr Robert Oh

Mr Raphael Michael Villanueva.

Mr Villanueva was an active supporter of the Association and could always be counted upon to attend and participate in the AGMs. He passed away on 25 May at the age of 70.



*A very happy 10th birthday
to The Peranakan and
wishing you all the best from
Friends at Mt Elizabeth Medical Centre*

Chew Chuan-Tieh

*Consultant Ear Nose & Throat
Surgeon*

Chew & Chew Surgery

Tel: 67386033

Chew Shing Chai

*Consultant Obstetrician &
Gynaecologist*

S C Chew's Clinic

Tel: 67340800

Chiang See Ping

*Consultant Paediatrician &
Cardiologist*

Chiang Baby & Child Clinic

Tel: 67345676

Ho Kee Hang

Consultant Neurosurgeon

K H Ho Neurosurgery

Tel: 67338226

Ho Kok Tong

*Consultant Gastroenterologist
& Physician*

**Ho Kok Tong Gastroenterology
& Medical Clinic**

Tel: 67322113

James Khoo Chee Min

Consultant Neurosurgeon

Neurological Surgery Pte Ltd

Tel: 67341380

Kour Nam Wee

Consultant Urological Surgeon

Kour Surgery

Tel: 67345355

Lee Boon Teck

Consultant General Surgeon

B T Lee Surgery

Tel: 67379891

Lim Kian Peng

*Consultant Gastroenterologist
& Physician*

**K P Lim Gastroenterology
& Medical Clinic**

Tel: 67339333

Ling Chaw Ming

*Consultant Orthopaedic
Surgeon*

Orthopaedic Associates

Tel: 62358755

Nei I-Ping

Consultant Neurologist

Nei Neurology Clinic Pte Ltd

Tel: 67346329

Kanwaljit Soin

*Consultant Orthopaedic
Surgeon*

**Soin Orthopaedic Spine
& Hand Surgery**

Tel: 68364787

Teo Wee Siong

*Consultant Cardiologist & Cardiac
Electrophysiologist*

The Heart Specialist Clinic

Tel: 62358733

Charles Toh Chai Soon

Consultant Cardiologist & Internist

Charles Toh Clinic Pte Ltd

Tel: 67342266

Tong Ming-Chuan

*Consultant Cardiothoracic
Surgeon*

**MC Tong Cardiothoracic Surgery
Centre**

Tel: 67329693

Whang Hwee Yong

Consultant Medical Oncologist

The Oncology Centre

Tel: 67378000

Akira Wu

*Consultant Nephrologist &
Physician*

Wu Nephrology & Medical Clinic

Tel: 67321819



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE