



JAN - MAR 2006 www.peranakan.org.sg

peranakan



NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

WE SPECIALISE IN PERANAKAN ANTIQUES SUCH AS:
BEADWORKS, EMBROIDERY,
FURNITURE, EPERGNES,
PHOTOGRAPHS, NYONYAWARE,
SILVERWARE, JEWELLERY

WE ALSO PURCHASE PERANAKAN
AND ALL TYPES OF ANTIQUES WITH
FAIR AND ATTRACTIVE PRICES
CALL US FOR A QUOTE



Brown-and-Gold Kitchen Cabinet

GUAN ANTIQUES

31 Kampong Bahru Singapore 169353 Tel: 6226 2281 Open daily: 11am - 7pm

COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Lee Kip Lee

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Peter Wee

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Ong Poh Neo

HONORARY SECRETARY

Lim Geok Huay

ASSISTANT HONORARY SECRETARY

Peter Lee

HONORARY TREASURER

Gavin Ooi

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chan Eng Thai

Alan Koh

Bebe Seet

Stephanie Tan

Christopher Tay

Mark Lionel Tay

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

MANAGING EDITOR

Lee Kip Lee

EDITORS

Linda Chee

Peter Lee

CONTRIBUTORS

Noreen Chan

Anne Chia

Norman Cho

Ee Sin Soo

William Gwee Thian Hock

Christopher Lim

Dr Lye Wai Choong

Maurice Wee

CIRCULATION

Lim Geok Huay

ADMINISTRATION

Low Whee Hoon

PUBLISHED BY

The Peranakan
Association

Raffles City, PO Box 1640
Singapore 911755,
Tel: 6255 0704

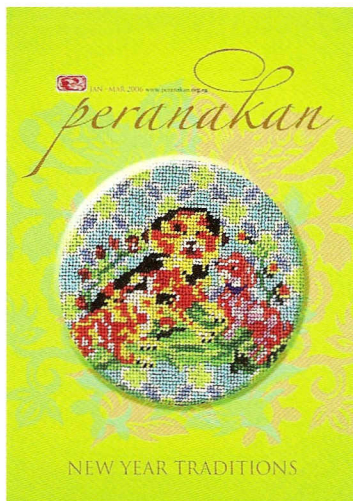
DESIGNED BY

FLIP Media Pte Ltd
www.flipmedia.com.sg

PRINTED BY

Lithographic Print
House Pte Ltd
Sue Yee
Mobile: 9616 2558

For Advertising rates
please contact
Alvin Yapp: 9338 2234
MICA (P) 027/08/2005



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

JAN • MAR 2006
www.peranakan.org.sg

CONTENTS

4 Editorial

5 Calendar

CHRONICLES

7 Chinese New Year: A Peranakan Twist

12 The Singapore Chinese Mandarin
School and its Baba Connection

16 My Grandma The Nyonya

DALAM DAPUR

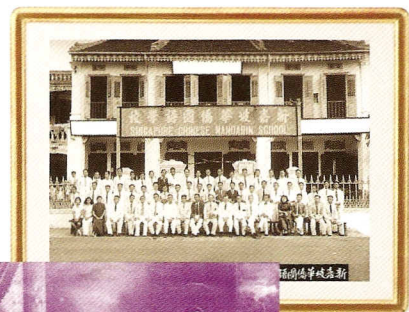
17 Sweet Temptation-Kueh
and Cakes for the
Festive Season

PERANAKAN YOUTH

20 Collecting My Heritage

22 Events

Noticeboard



BLUEDA NEW YEAR!!

By Linda Chee

a week before the big day. Each cake packed in a pink paper box, the blueda's powerful nose of toddy gave a kick to the senses even with a tip of the lid. Every visitor on the first two days of New Year was most welcomed, simply because my brothers and I could partake of the blueda as gracious hosts sharing in the enjoyment. One year, alas, to my dismay, the precious blueda was missing. I was told toddy was banned so our mysterious supplier had to stop production.

It has been a sad two decades or more since, but a lingering taste that I still yearn for. Editing this New Year issue, I was thus delighted to come across Noreen Chan's "Dalam Dapur" recipe for blueda, or bludder, on page 18. Serendipity tells me I will find my beloved blueda, soon. If you do know of anyone who takes orders, I will be so grateful to be contacted at my mobile 65-97937179.

What more excitement awaits every New Year, which many of us refer to as Chinese New Year since it follows the lunar calendar? This is a hectic time, indeed, for every household. Baking, cooking, turning the household upside down to rid of old things, shopping for new clothes, making a fresh start. Dr Lye Wai Choong brings fascinating insight into the New Year celebrated by the Peranakans way back to the time of Singapore's British founder Sir Stamford Raffles. Did you know that children bore the brunt of a nyonya's kueh if it did not turn out right? Or why Raffles was so miffed by the Lunar New Year? Read more on the oddities and anecdotes researched by Dr Lye in "A Peranakan Twist" on page 7.

As the clock ticks on and the Year of the Dog unfolds on January 29, I've had a bit of time to reflect on the blend of cultures that have, over generations, created the Peranakan enigma. Or, may I say it, confusion. Just like Norman Cho in "Collecting My Heritage", page 20, I was a pretty confused kid growing up. Though I look Chinese, I was brought up speaking English and Malay. I feel very at home with Malay, Indian and Eurasian friends and food. I never learnt Mandarin in school, get laughed at for my mis-intonations, and I positively glaze over when Chinese friends banter in hua yu.

On the other hand, I am very proud to have inherited a unique culture that I'm hopeful of being sustained as Peranakan consciousness continues its outreach — in so many ways, through so many champions of our special heritage.

HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR!

A GUIDE TO THE PERANAKAN CALENDAR

Babas Ee Sin Soo and Christopher Lim have drawn up a calendar of Peranakan observances, religious and cultural celebrations. A closer look shows a cultural symbiosis, absorption and assimilation of local practices to the baba nyonya way of life.

2006			Events	
Chinese Lunar month	Lunar Day	Gregorian Calendar		
		Date	Day	
12th	24th	1-Jan	Sun	New Year's Day
		2-Jan	Mon	New Year's Day public holiday
		10-Jan	Tue	Hari Raya Haji
		23-Jan	Mon	Kitchen God Ascends to Heaven for annual report to Jade Emperor
12th	29th	28-Jan	Sat	Sembahyang Chiah Abu
12th	29th	28-Jan	Sat	Chinese New Year's Eve
1st	1st	29-Jan	Sun	Chinese New Year First Day
1st	2nd	30-Jan	Mon	Chinese New Year public holiday
1st	4th	1-Feb	Wed	Welcoming back of Kitchen God
1st	5th	2-Feb	Thur	God of Wealth's Birthday
1st	8th	5-Feb	Sun	Evening : Sembahyang Tikong-Worship of Jade Emperor
1st	9th	6-Feb	Mon	Jade Emperor's Birthday
1st	15th	12-Feb	Sun	Chap Goh Mei: Amek Api or Lantern Festival
2nd	2nd	1-Mar	Wed	Tua Pek Kong's Birthday
2nd	19th	18-Mar	Sat	Goddess of Mercy's Birthday
3rd	8th	5-Apr	Wed	Cheng Beng: 104 days after Tang Chek
		14-Apr	Fri	Good Friday
		16-Apr	Sun	Easter Sunday
		1-May	Mon	Labour Day
		12-May	Fri	Vesak Day
4th	15th	31-May	Wed	Kueh Chang Festival
5th	5th	21-Jun	Wed	Summer Solstice
6th	19th	14-Jul	Fri	Goddess of Mercy's Enlightenment
7th	1st-15th	25 Jul-8 Aug		Festival of Hungry Ghosts
7th	Loon Guek			Extra 7th Lunar Month
8th	15th	9-Aug	Wed	National Day
		6-Oct	Fri	Mooncake Festival: Sembahyang Guek Neo
		21-Oct	Sat	Deepavali
		22-30 Oct		Kew Ong Yah: Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods
9th	1st - 9th	24-Oct	Tue	Hari Raya Puasa
9th	19th	9-Nov	Thur	Goddess of Mercy's Ascension into Heaven
10th	1st until before Tang Chek	21 Nov-21 Dec		
		1-Nov	Wed	Baya Niat
		2-Nov	Thur	All Saints' Day
		21-Dec	Thur	All Souls' Day
		22-Dec	Fri	Informing ancestors of Tang Chek
		24-Dec	Sun	Winter Solstice - Tang Chek, Gelek Kueh Ee
		25-Dec	Mon	Christmas Eve
		31-Dec	Sun	Christmas Day
				New Year's Eve and Hari Raya Haji

BDF ●●●●●
Beiersdorf



clinically
proven

For Sensitive skin!

Eucerin® pH5 is clinically proven* to heal and regenerate sensitive skin faster.

Discover the healing power of **Dexpanthenol**, found exclusively in the highly effective **Eucerin® pH5**.

Why is Dexpanthenol the best solution for sensitive skin?

- Absorbs quickly to speed up healing and skin rejuvenation.
- Proven to instantly relieve itching and skin inflammation.
- Provides long-lasting moisturising effect.

Eucerin® pH5 is 100% soap free, pH-balanced, extra mild and highly recommended by dermatologists, making it safe and gentle enough for the whole family.

Experience the faster solution for your sensitive skin today!

*Presto, S. et al: Skin regeneration by medical skincare products with 3% Dexpanthenol, Dt. Derm : 47,12 (1999) : 946-949.



For more information, consult your dermatologist or doctor, or call our hotline at 6252 2288.

Eucerin®

THE DERMATOLOGICAL SKINCARE PROGRAM
www.eucerin.com

CHINESE NEW YEAR: A PERANAKAN TWIST

By Dr Lye Wai Choong

The Chinese New Year, which follows the lunar calendar, has been celebrated for a millennia. The Peranakans who were Southern Chinese immigrants had steadfastly held to their ancient practices; in fact their celebrations during the New Year period were at one time more traditional than those of their counterparts in China. In 1930, the Nationalist Government of China declared January 1 as the official Chinese New Year day. According to the January 20, 1936 issue of Penang's *Straits Echo*, there was some confusion as to when Chinese New Year should be celebrated. The papers reported that the Straits born or Malayan born Chinese who formed the conservative and old fashioned type of the Chinese community continued to observe the Lunar New Year.

Preparations for the New Year began weeks before the actual day. In every home, an auspicious date was selected from the Chinese almanac for the traditional "spring cleaning" day. "Spring cleaning" should be performed not more than a month before the Lunar New Year day. It was not merely a day to clean up the home but also had a religious purpose of driving out unwholesome spirits. Among Penang Peranakans, the use of bamboo leaves was believed to be most effective for the latter purpose, although leaves shed during the cleaning created more of a mess than otherwise. Even with the advent of vacuum cleaners, bamboo leaves were still used ceremonially to clean the home of evil forces.



The Straits Echo, 20 January 1936

1
as
by
the
ate
the
re-
ate
No-
ng
or-
55
sw
42
nd
n-
nd
40
nd
or
5-
36

CHINESE NEW YEAR. Fixed Hours For Cracker-Firing.

The following ordinance appears in the Straits Settlements Government Gazette published on Friday:—

The Chief Police Officer, Penang, authorises the letting off of fireworks on the following fixed days and hours during Chinese New Year:—

From 11.30 p.m.	23-1-36 to 1.30 a.m.
24-1-36.	
From 5 a.m.	24-1-36 to 7.00 a.m.
24-1-36.	
From 11.30 p.m.	31-1-36 to 1.30 a.m.
1-2-36.	
From 6.00 p.m.	7-2-36 to 8.00 p.m.
7-2-36.	

No fireworks will be permitted in or near any public road adjacent to a hospital and it is expressly forbidden to let off fireworks in the following roads and lanes viz:—

Hospital Road, Race Course Road, Gaol Road, Barrack Road, Babington Avenue, Residency Road, Western Road between its junction with Scotland Road and Gaol Road, Keck Chuan Lane, New Lane, Irving Road, Macalister Road between Manning Street and New Lane, Madras Lane, Kinta Lane, Lorong Susu, Brick Kiln Road, Jahudi Road, Scott Road between Gottlieb Road and Cantonment Road, Wright Road and Burmah Road between Gottlieb Road junction and Cantonment Road junction.

A
finding
he reti
last, w
ed to
was st
the bo
subseq
Police
A fe
of a C
Transf
who fi
the m
Follow
H. Fre
mortur
animal
The
mortur
as tha
The
parent
as his
beach
his bo
At 1
before
on Sa
Ah Ho
lated
at the
disapp
of De
corpse

*A report on permitted times
for setting of fire crackers,
Straits Echo, 1930s*

Homes were given a new coat of paint, gardens manicured and blossoming plants displayed. The late author Cheo Kim Ban described in his book *The Baba Wedding* how in the first half of the 20th century, children were made to clean the ornate carvings of the altar tables and mother-of-pearl furniture using pieces of cloth that were wrapped around the end of a chopstick.

A few weeks before the New Year, relatives gathered together to make traditional New Year delicacies or kuehs. The kuehs that are still familiar to us are kueh bangket, kueh belanda or kueh kapit in Penang (love letters), kueh bolu, pineapple tarts and agar-agar. Other auspicious but less familiar kuehs of the Malacca Peranakans are wajek, dodol and oneng-oneng, signifying the presence of multiple generations. Unlike the use of plastic containers today, the kuehs were stored in tins and sealed tight at the edges with glued paper.

However, the most important kueh for the New Year is the kueh bakol or ni kueh. While the other types of kueh were used for serving visitors during the New Year, the kueh bakol was mandatory for worship. It was usually prepared days before the New Year, and the process was tedious. In the past, rice grains were grounded to flour using stone grinders. Water was added to the flour to form a paste and this semi-liquid paste was sieved multiple times to achieve a fine consistency. The fine thin batter was poured into a rattan container lined with banana leaves. They were stacked inside a large iron wok and steamed over many hours. Charcoal and wood were burnt continuously to maintain a consistent fire so that the resultant kueh bakol would turn out the right colour and consistency. Because there were so many variables involved, there were many occasions when the kueh turned out imperfect. The superstitious Nonyas would then blame the failures on some untoward remarks or actions that would be considered taboo or pantang. Children would usually

bear the blame, for example, a kid saying that the kitchen was too hot would lead to an overcooked kueh or a remark that it was too light may result in a pale kueh. Fierce Nonyas would give a child a slap to ensure that any pantang would be broken.

Other essential ceremonial kuehs for worship include huat kueh, kueh koo or kueh ang koo, kueh bee koh. Among Penang Peranakans, the Nonyas had couplets for these kueh for example, they would say pai huat kueh, huat keh huay, meaning if one worshipped using huat kueh; one would prosper with wealth. Finally, on New Year's Eve the auspicious banner or 'chye-kee' would be hung over the main entrance of the house. In wealthier homes, gilt wooden carvings of couplets espousing auspicious proverbs would be set on each side of the door.

With all preparations in order, celebrations for the New Year would actually begin on the Eve. On the night before New Year's Eve, lighted joss sticks were placed at the front door to inform the Door Deities that the ancestors would return the next day for their New Year's Eve feast. This is imperative or the ancestors would not be allowed entry into the house. On New Year's Eve, the offering table was laid out with traditional New Year Peranakan food. Tea and wine were served,



New Year offerings at the Altar



*A young girl dressed for Chinese New Year, c. 1900 (left)
Ostentatious ornaments that would have been worn at the New Year (right)*

if the ancestors preferred coffee, a cup of their favourite beverage would also be placed on one side of the table. Cigarettes or cheroots would also be offered if the ancestor was a smoker. In essence, it was one of the few feasts throughout the year to honour one's ancestors.

The highlight of New Year's Eve would be the family reunion dinner. To Penang Peranakans, the reunion dinner was known as Wooi Lore, which means 'surrounding the family hearth'. All generations of the family gathered around a table to indulge in a feast.

The head of the family was believed to be specially blessed if he had a large following of descendants. Food with auspicious meanings had to be served. The elders would recite auspicious proverbs while the younger members of the family ate. By this time, the whole house would have been ablaze with lights to await the arrival of the New Year.

The arrival of the New Year coincided with the offering of prayers. The auspicious time for worship was carefully selected from the almanac and was usually within an hour before midnight. Exactly on the hour and minute, the main doors of the house were opened. Candles and joss sticks were lit, fruits, flowers and tea offered to the Jade Emperor (Ti Kong), followed by the other household, kitchen and the earth Deities. The front of the altar table would be covered with a beautiful altar cloth or tok wi. Three main offerings were essential; they were sugar cane cut into equal lengths and stacked on top of each other into a shape of a pyramid, kueh bakol with a huat kueh on top and bananas. These three offerings symbolized hock, lock, siew which were good luck, wealth and longevity.

This was followed by the firing of crackers to drive away all evil and welcome the good. In the past the din created from fire-crackers must have been very annoying to the non-Chinese. In February 1823, Raffles had been so disturbed with fire crackers during the New Year that he wrote, "I have the directions of the Lieutenant-Governor to request you will take immediate measures for preventing the Chinese from continuing the practice of letting off fireworks..." According to Vaughn who wrote in the Pinang Gazette of 1849, the Chinese New Year was ushered in by the "noisy accompaniment of discharges from great and small guns, crackers, etc. and the beating of gongs". The hazards of letting off fire crackers was also pointed out by him, "when on New Year's Eve unruly Chinese youths found sadistic pleasure in throwing lighted crackers under the noses of horses ridden by Europeans, setting the animals helter skelter down the streets." In 1936, the Chief Police Officer of

Penang authorised the letting off of fireworks only on fixed days and hours during Chinese New Year, which was seldom obeyed. Finally, after the reunion dinner, it was customary for the family to visit the temples and thank the Gods for the rewards of the past year.

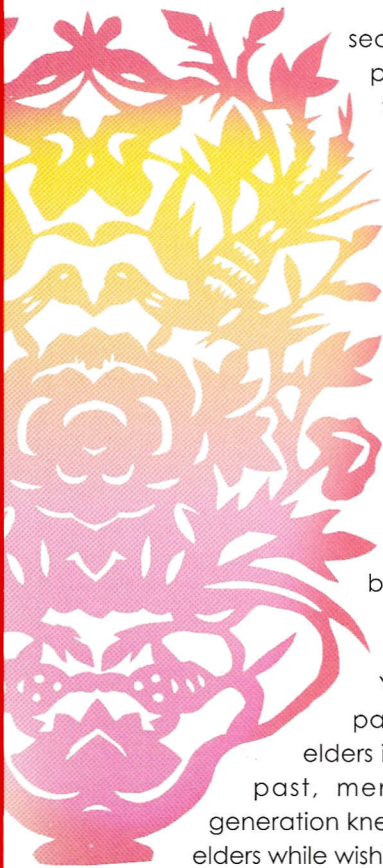
On New Year's day or chay it, it was mandatory to wear new clothes. The wealthy Peranakans would be dressed in their finest attire and bedecked with jewellery. Even their children were not spared and were adorned with gold, intans and semi precious stones. In January 1879, an Englishwoman by the name of Isabella Bird stopped over in Malacca during the New Year celebrations. She described the visit by four children of a rich Chi-

nese merchant to Captain Shaw. She wrote "The girl wore a yellow petticoat of satin with broad box pleats in front and behind, exquisitely embroidered with flowers in shades of blue silk, with narrow box pleats between....Over this was a short robe of crimson brocaded silk... with the same exquisite floral embroidery in shades of blue silk.



New Year kueh (left)
A porcelain kwa chee box (right)

The child wore a crown on her head, the basis of which was black velvet. At the top was an aigrette of diamonds....the centre one as large as a six-penny piece. Solitaires flashing....blazed all over the cap, and the front was ornamented with a dragon in fine filigree work in red Malay gold set with diamonds. I fear to be thought guilty of exaggeration....that this child wore seven necklaces all of gorgeous beauty....the first necklace was of diamonds, the



second of emeralds, third of pearls, the fourth of hollow filigree beads in burned red gold, the fifth of sapphires and diamonds, the sixth a pendant of a gold filigree fish and the seventh a massive gold chain." Isabella Bird's description was very close to photographs from that era by G.R Lambert except that the diamonds were likely to be intans and the emeralds were jade beads.

The morning of the New Year commenced with the paying of respects to one's elders in order of seniority. In the past, members of the younger generation knelt and offered tea to their elders while wishing them panjang umur or long life. In turn they would be rewarded with a red packet or ang pau. The process would continue until the youngest members had performed their filial duties. Then it was time to visit the senior relatives of the extended family. At each house, the elders were addressed appropriately otherwise it would be considered kurang ajar or bad upbringing. New Year delicacies were served with drinks in each home. However, the Peranakans were taught to exhibit modesty and were unlikely to eat anything unless they were literally coerced by the host or hostess. A comical scene involving 'push and pull' tactics would occur whereby the hostess would try and cajole the guest to eat and drink but the guest would politely but persistently refuse.

Repeated persuasion by the hostess was a sign of good hospitality whereas repeated refusal by the guest was a sign of good upbringing. Succumbing to eating or drinking liberally may be tantamount to gluttony. Among Penang Peranakans, the hostess would entice the guest to eat by using auspicious homonyms such as chiak leng geng, ho boey keng ('eat longans, achieve good results'), chiak tor tau, chiak lau lau ('eat groundnuts, gain longevity') and chiak ang chu, ban soo ho ('eat red dates, all things will turn out well'). The guests would take a piece so as to fulfill the auspicious greeting.

The round of visitations would continue until all the relatives had been visited, otherwise the visits would continue the next day. However, the third day of the New Year was a day of rest because it was considered inauspicious to make any visits on that day. The Peranakans did not practise the custom of giving oranges to the host during their visits. Many pantangs or taboos

were observed during the first and second days of the New Year. No sweeping was allowed lest good luck be swept away and brooms were hidden away. Ideally, one should not cut objects with knives or scissors because they might cut short one's life span. The hair should not be washed or good luck might be washed away. Finally, those who had a recent deceased relative or was still in mourning were not allowed to celebrate the New Year and forbidden from visiting any relative or friend.

The rich Peranakan merchants would open up their homes for guests to visit. In 1879, Bird recorded that the Governor of Malacca drove out in state to visit the leading Chinese merchants and at each house was offered cakes, twelve dishes of candied and preserved fruits, mandarin tea (the price of this luxury was from 25s to 45s a pound) and champagne from the finest Rhenish vineyards. Similarly, Vaughn wrote that the prominent Hoo Ah Kay, also known as Whampoa, of Singapore was "besieged" for eight or nine days during the New Year by hundreds of people of various nationalities and the road to his mansion was jammed from morn till eve by numerous carriages heading to his "hospitable" gates.

During the evenings of the New Year, family members and relatives gathered to have fun. In the wealthier homes, Felix Chia recounted the ronggeng musicians who played to their way into the hearts of the pantun loving Babas and Nonyas. Gambling was also the Peranakan's favourite pastime and the New Year period served as an opportune moment for them to gamble their hearts away.

The next event during the New Year period falls on the ninth day of the New Year. The ninth day of the New Year is the birthday of the Jade Emperor (Ti Kong Seh) Prayers commenced around midnight of the eighth New Year day. Although it falls during the New Year period, this celebration should be considered more as a religious festival.

The final celebration commemorated the end of the New Year. For the Chinese, the fifteenth day of the New Year was referred to as yuan xiao. However, locally this day was known as Chap Goh Meh or literally the fifteenth night. Special dishes such as nasi pulot and pengat were cooked. Pengat is a sweet dessert consisting of yam, sweet potatoes and bananas in coconut milk symbolising fertility and abundance. The conservative Peranakans would make another visit to the temples to round off the New Year. At night, homes were illuminated again and lanterns hung out. Feasts and dance parties were organised. Professional musicians and bands were hired to provide entertainment. Keronchong parties were a hit at the turn of the century.

In Penang, the celebration of Chap Goh Meh became a rare opportunity for young men and ladies to revel. It was a unique occasion for home restricted maidens to

leave the house for a night out. The Nonyas would be dressed in their splendid kebayas and sarongs complemented by exquisite kerosangs, diamond studded hairpins, earrings, necklaces, rings, paired bangles and anklets. Delicate gold-and-silver embroidered slippers covered their dainty feet. It was a night for the Peranakans to exhibit their wealth. Although it may be an exaggeration, the Straits Chinese Magazine of 1905 recorded that the estimated value of the jewellery was no less than \$30,000,000. The eligible brides would sit in carriages and rickshaws and be accompanied by chaperons. They were taken for a ride around town, which would include the crossing of seven or nine bridges symbolising the changing of one's luck for the better. Meanwhile the young male spectators would be sitting in front of their homes under bright lanterns to watch the ladies ride by. It was said that this allowed a fleeting opportunity when there could be love at first sight. Subsequently, the professional matchmaker could be employed to make the necessary marriage negotiations. Another unique custom of the Penang Peranakans involved making wishes by throwing auspicious things over a bridge into the water. For examples, the throwing of oranges would lead to finding a good spouse (tim ho kam, tan ho ang) and throwing drums would lead to a good wife (tim loh kor, tan ho bor).

With the climax of Chap Goh Meh, the 15-day New Year festivity came to an end. The door banner or 'chye' was brought down and the Peranakans looked forward for their wishes to be fulfilled throughout the year. ❧

References

Isabella Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, John Murray, London, 1883

Cheo Kim Ban and Muriel Speeden, *Baba Folk Beliefs and Superstitions*, Landmark Books, Singapore, 1988

Felix Chia, *The Babas Revisited*, Heinemann Asia, Singapore, 1994

J D Vaughn, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements*, Mission Press, Singapore, 1879

C S Wong, *An Illustrated Cycle of Chinese Festivities in Malaysia and Singapore*, MPH, Singapore, 1967

KRIS DECOR

Supplier of pretty Nyonya Porcelain



(fine repros from China)

295 Bedok South Avenue 3,
Bedok Court (S) 469296

Tel: 6449 9632 Fax: 6448 2326

Email: Christineong@krisdecor.com

enquiry@krisdecor.com

krisdecor@yahoo.com.sg

TONG MERN SERN ANTIQUES ARTS & CRAFTS

WE BUY JUNK AND SELL
ANTIQUES. SOME FOOLS BUY
SOME FOOLS SELL



51 Craig Road (Off Neil Rd) Singapore 089689
Tel: 62231037 Fax: 62255979 HP: 98184745

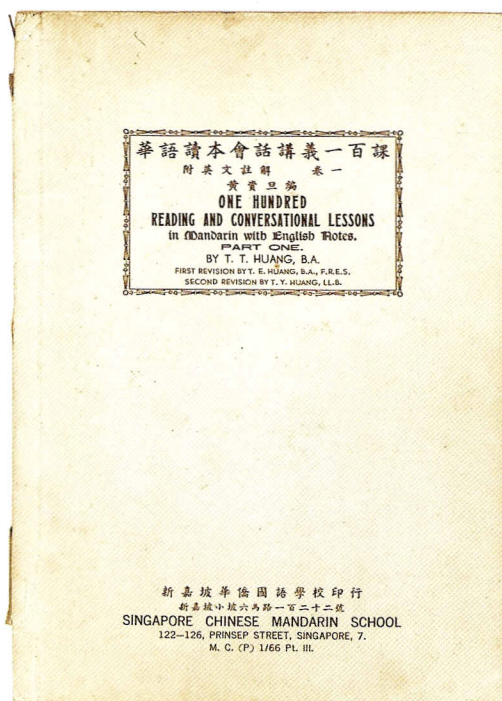


THE SINGAPORE CHINESE MANDARIN SCHOOL AND ITS BABA CONNECTION

By William Gwee Thian Hock

Babas and nyonyas were generally perceived as being unable to speak Chinese at all, managing only a smattering of spoken Hokkien or Cantonese dialect. Any Peranakan capable of reading and writing Chinese was rare. However, a change came about in the 1930s when some babas and even nyonyas went to school to study Mandarin in their free time.

It began in my mother's former childhood home. No 74 Prinsep Street was once owned by my maternal grandfather, Seow Ewe Lin. My mother Leong Neo, the youngest of his six children, was seven years old in 1919 when the



Graduates of the SCMS, 1936 (top) and a typical textbook from the School (above)

family moved into this home where she grew up until 1927 when she married and moved to Cuppage Road. Although the Prinsep Street dwelling had a single address, it actually comprised three two-storey terrace houses which only in later years were separately addressed.

This 3-in-1 dwelling conveniently housed grandfather's family of 10. They comprised maternal great grandmother, grandfather (already widowed), his four sons, two daughters-in-law, his two daughters and a domestic staff of three cooks, two servants, two slaves and a watchman. Maternal grandmother had

passed away even before the family moved into Prinsep Street.

Mother became an orphan when grandfather died of tuberculosis a few years before she married. Great grandmother then took over as matriarch to head the household. After mother married and was the last grandchild to move out, great grandmother found the house too large for herself. She sold the house and moved into a smaller home at Emerald Hill Road, where she spent the rest of her days.

Around this time, a Chinese scholar Huang Tse Tan, BA, noticed many Singaporean Chinese (then popularly then known as Straits Chinese) were unable to speak, read or write Chinese. Apart from the Babas, other local-born Chinese who were educated in English, spoke a Chinese dialect at home but could neither read nor write Chinese. There were also the dialect-speaking but non English-educated Chinese who possessed a very low level of Chinese education.

From childhood home to school

Huang decided to remedy the situation and embarked on a campaign to bring Chinese education to these people. He bought over mother's childhood home. Huang found it just right for a school to cater to working adults. He founded and became the first principal of The Singapore Chinese Mandarin School, which opened its doors to students in 1931.

Huang listed a dozen objectives, the main of which was to impart written and spoken Chinese to local Chinese as well as foreigners who might be interested to study Chinese. Students of any nationality above 15 years of age were welcome to enrol for courses at Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced levels. Each course would last about a year, taught in Mandarin and explained in English.

The curriculum included subjects such as Chinese reading, Mandarin conversation, phonetics, formation of sentences, letter writing, essay writing, Chinese history and geography. Students were required to attend two

lessons each week, each session lasting about two hours (5.15pm to 7.00pm or 7.15pm to 9.00pm). They had a choice of three classes: Class A on Mondays and Thursdays, Class B on Tuesdays and Fridays, and Class C on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The fee was \$2 a month.

A year before the school commenced, Huang authored and published a bilingual textbook specially for the school, titled "One Hundred Reading and Conversational Lessons" in Mandarin with English notes.

A second textbook was published between 1931 and 1932. However, the third and fourth textbooks that appeared in 1933 and 1934 respectively, bore the name of Huang Tse Yen, LLB as author. This may have been due to health reasons which had prevented Huang Tse

Tan from authoring them.



Office of the SCMS, c.1930s

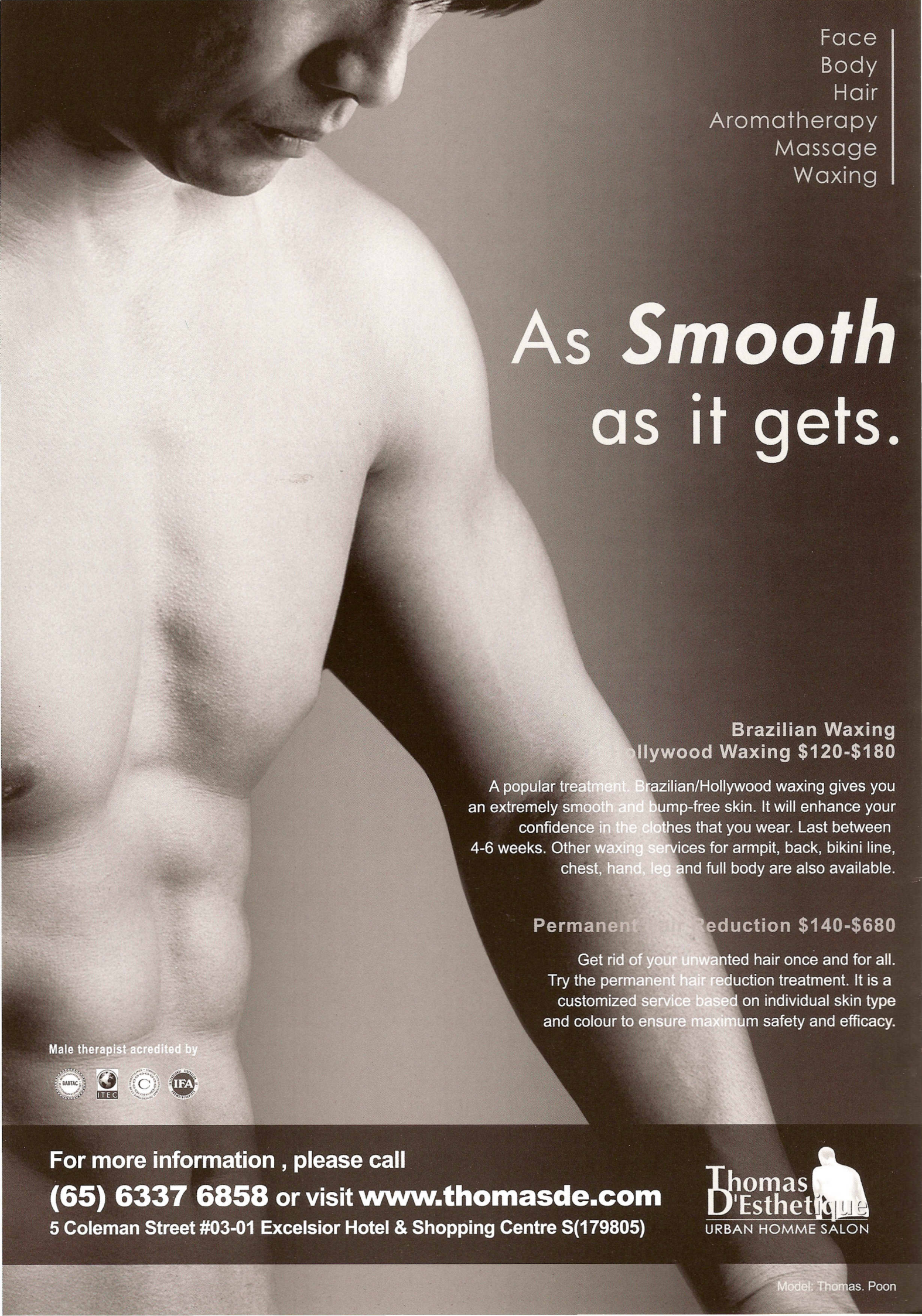
A 1938 souvenir magazine of the school contained a photograph of him with the caption: "The Late Mr Huang Tse Tan, BA, (Former Principal and Founder)". The four different textbooks written in the same format were used by the school's students at different levels of their study. Book 1 (Part 1) was for Beginners, Book 2 (Part

2) was for Intermediate and Books 3 and 4 (Parts 3 and 4) were for those in the Advanced classes. All these books went into several reprints, for instance Book 1 had its 18th edition in 1970. Huang Tse Tan's successor, Huang Tse Yen, published the school's textbooks Parts 3 and 4, and became the school's next principal. He kept alive his predecessor's dream of promoting the study of Mandarin and tirelessly steered the school from strength to strength until it finally closed doors 40 years later.

Prominent Baba students

Despite running only evening classes, the school attracted an endless stream of students and was obviously a prestigious institution. By its seventh year, it counted among its many patrons some of the most prominent Singapore Chinese personalities of the day, including Dr Lim Boon Keng, Seow Poh Leng, Aw Boon Haw, Lee Kong Chian and Dr Chen Su Lan.

Apart from Mr and Mrs Huang Tse Yen themselves, the



Face
Body
Hair
Aromatherapy
Massage
Waxing

As *Smooth* as it gets.

Brazilian Waxing Hollywood Waxing \$120-\$180

A popular treatment. Brazilian/Hollywood waxing gives you an extremely smooth and bump-free skin. It will enhance your confidence in the clothes that you wear. Last between 4-6 weeks. Other waxing services for armpit, back, bikini line, chest, hand, leg and full body are also available.

Permanent Hair Reduction \$140-\$680

Get rid of your unwanted hair once and for all. Try the permanent hair reduction treatment. It is a customized service based on individual skin type and colour to ensure maximum safety and efficacy.

Male therapist accredited by




For more information , please call

(65) 6337 6858 or visit **www.thomasde.com**

5 Coleman Street #03-01 Excelsior Hotel & Shopping Centre S(179805)

Thomas
D'Esthetique
URBAN HOMME SALON



Model: Thomas. Poon

school's teaching staff were of high calibre. They included Huang Tse En, BA, F.R.E.S., and Tsiang Ke Tsiu (Chiang Ker Chiu) a prolific author of teaching textbooks such as "Mandarin Made Easy" and "Progressive Mandarin Reader" and books on different Chinese dialects. Tsiang was actively involved with another teaching institution at 56 Short Street called the Chung Hwa Mandarin Institution which was founded in 1939. This institution offered Mandarin for the Cambridge Examination and also Hokkien and Cantonese language lessons.

The highlight of the School's success story was its steady stream of students and especially its ability to attract Babas and non-Chinese students to sacrifice after-office hours twice a week to go to class. Some students gave up after two to three months while others persisted for three to four years or even longer. Those who gave up early were probably Babas and English-educated Chinese who might have found Mandarin beyond their ability to cope with. The non-English-educated locals who prematurely abandoned their Mandarin study might have found the English medium of instruction a disappointing stumbling block.

Close to 1,400 students of both sexes crossed the school's threshold within the first seven years. Their ages ranged from 15 to 65, with 19 years old being the majority. They came from diverse walks of life, ranging from clerks, to doctors, lawyers, detectives, magicians, police inspectors and even a professor from Raffles College (Prof Alexander Oppenheim). Their nationalities were as varied; almost akin to that of a mini-League of Nations! There were Chinese (1372), British (21), Indians (12), Eurasians (9), Ceylonese (9), Dutch (9), Siamese (4), Swiss (4), Germans (3), Malays (3), Javanese (2), Australians (2), Czechoslovakians (2), a Korean (1) and a Jew (1).

The school seemed to have had a special appeal to the Baba community. Babas and nyonyas responded to the call to study Mandarin although there was, frankly, little reason for them to do so because, at the time, it was English and not Mandarin that would open every door in colonial-ruled Singapore. Undoubtedly, deep inside, the Babas were and are still Chinese.

My father, Gwee Peng Kwee, his peers and relatives were among those who had spent some time in the school. Although father did not complete the course, he managed a little spoken Mandarin. This was rather surprising because later on he became fluent in the Hokkien and Teochew dialects, both of which he had picked up after his struggle with Mandarin.

Other Baba contemporaries who also studied at the school were practically the who's who of the Baba community of the 1930s, such as Khoo Teng Eng, Tan Soo Wan, Chia How Ghee, Khoo Eng Teck, Chan Wah Keng and many more. (It is said that former President, the late Dr Wee Kim Wee, had also once been a student at the school.)

A nyonya mosaic

In later years, when I had the privilege to meet the school's retired long-serving principal Huang Tse Yen, he mentioned with well-deserved pride that his former pupil, Chan Wah Keng, stopped reading English newspapers after coming under his tutelage and only read Chinese newspapers thereafter. Wah Keng's son, my former childhood schoolmate Thai Ho, revealed to me that his father had persisted with his Mandarin study in the school long after he was well past the prescribed courses and was the sole student in the class right up to the eve of the school's final closure in the 1970s. Huang Tse Yen, the educationist, must have indeed been a very powerful source of inspiration! Nyonyas also gave their support and in the school's early register there were already three obvious nyonya names on record: Lim Chee Neo, Lim Chye Neo and Wee Hock Neo.

In the early 1980s when I embarked on my project to write a book about my mother's childhood in her Prinsep Street home, and needed photographs of the premises to serve as illustrations, I was shocked and disappointed to discover that the building had been demolished a couple of months earlier. After a difficult search, I managed to establish contact with Mr Huang Tse Yen. He had already retired by then.

On my first visit to his home, I brought my mother along. We were very warmly welcomed by Mr Huang and charming and gracious Mrs Huang. After learning of my reasons to have photographs of the school building and the fact that my mother had grown up in that same building, Mr and Mrs Huang responded instantly and generously. They gave me all the photographs still in their possession.

Without this gift, my book "A Nonya Mosaic", published in 1985, would certainly have been much poorer in quality. Not many months after my mother passed away in 1995, this scholarly gentleman, who had so diligently pioneered the study of Mandarin particularly among the Babas for the best part of his life, also departed from this world. In a way, this brief article is my humble and belated tribute to him. ➤

■ CHRONICLES ■

MY GRANDMA

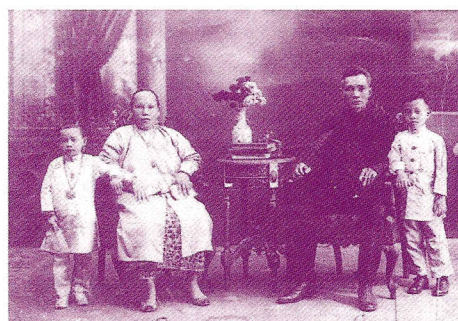
THE NYONYA

Anne Chia relates her family background, many aspects of which were quite typical of Peranakans in Singapore during the early 20th century.

Grandmother Sim Guek Kee was the daughter of a goldsmith, Sim Liang Siak, had a shop in Upper Circular Road which was part of a row of 18 shop houses called chap peh keng ow. At that time my grandmother only stayed at home as girls were not allowed to attend school.

She was betrothed to my grandfather, Chia Ah Thia, who was a rich Chinese businessman who came from China at a young age. At that period, around 1912 – 1914, my grandfather owned rubber plantations and carp-rearing ponds in the Bukit Panjang/Mandai area. He later acquired many landed properties in the area off 10 milestone Bukit Panjang Road, so much so that the road was named Lorong Ah Thia, after him.

When my father Chia Cheng Nam was born, my grandfather bought houses in Buffalo Road. My father and the family stayed in No 2 Buffalo Road. Just around the corner, at the junction of Serangoon Road and Buffalo Road, my grandfather also owned a drinking bar named Tai Soon at 61, Serangoon Road, where office workers as well as labourers came for a drink or two, after office hours. I remember the big wooden name plaque (cheow pai) bearing the bar's name.



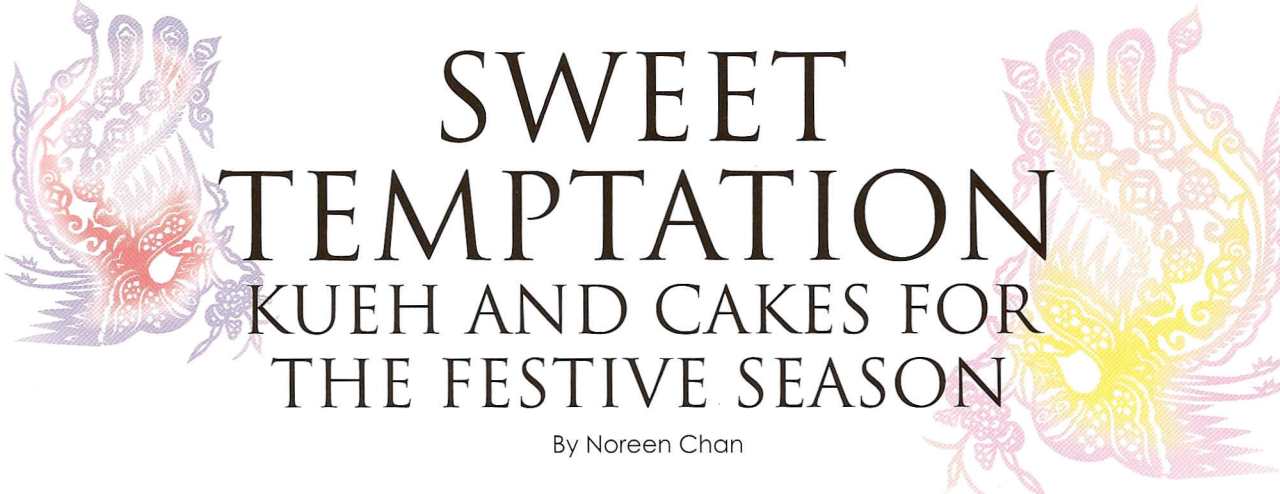
As people hardly had photographs taken, there is only one family photo showing my grandparents, my father and his sister, Chia Ah Nya. Grandmother is clad in a baju panjang; my grandfather and father in baju tutop. My father studied at the Anglo-Chinese School in Barker Road and my aunt Chia Guek Cheng at the Methodist Girls' School in Mount Sophia Road. He must have been around 8 years old then.

My father, now 91, is a retired civil servant. He can still remember vividly his boyhood days, especially the weekends he spent fishing at Mandai farm accompanied by a male servant.

He married my mother, Lau Chiew Fong, a Cantonese on 3 June, 1937, the same date King Edward VIII gave up his throne to marry Wallis Simpson, a divorcee. I never forget their wedding anniversary date that way. My mother schooled at Fairfield Girls' School in Neil Road. When they married, he was residing at 82, Emerald Hill Road. My mother lived a few doors away at 88, Emerald Hill Road. She related to me years later that after picking her up, the bridal car had to make one big turn through Cairnhill Road!

My grandmother died in 1941, before the Japanese invaded Singapore, and my mother had to sell most, if not all, of my grandmother's heirlooms as we were very poor during the Japanese Occupation. I remember the last to go was the sitting room furniture which was sold to our neighbour. As children, we did not know the value of grandmother's beaded slippers, her bronze serai (betel nut) containers nor her beaded purses. Only one piece of souvenir is now left. That is a Chinese porcelain vase, two feet tall, depicting Chinese scholars studying to become government officials. 𠵼

*Anne Chia sings with The Peranakan Voices,
the choral group of The Peranakan Association.*



SWEET TEMPTATION

KUEH AND CAKES FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

By Noreen Chan

Once Tang Chek (the winter solstice) is past, households look forward to the approaching Spring and the Lunar New Year. The run-up to this major festival would be marked by activities like spring-cleaning, the taking out and airing of the chai kee, and of course, cooking and baking. In my family, every available pair of hands would be roped in to prepare the archar awak, from a recipe by my Penang-born Tua Kim Poh, in quantities sufficient to give away to friends and relatives, and still keep us well supplied for the fifteen days of the New Year.

My late grandmother would preside over the kitchen, where she marshaled a small team for the baking marathon. Mama had always been well known for her cakes and biscuits. Her father had a special kitchen built so that she and his other daughters could bake. Unmarried girls were not allowed in the main kitchen, as my greatgrandmother would admonish, "Anak dara tak boleh masuk dapur, ada tiga kepala doll!" referring to the Hainanese chong poh or cooks who were employed to feed the large extended family.

After she married and moved to Melaka, her skills did not go to waste. In fact, every Lunar New Year, she would bake nonstop, as many as 15 to 20 cakes, most of which would be given away. Kueh lapis, kueh belanda (love letters) and pineapple tarts – the latter baked in Dutch ovens using charcoal – would be prepared, keeping her busy until the early hours. Whenever festive gifts arrived from friends and family, the bakul (baskets) would be returned filled with Mama's baked creations.

The New Year was bonanza time for us children, as

we could gobble up any biscuits that did not meet Mama's exacting standards. "Vinger biscuits", peanut cookies, kueh bunga melati and delectable kueh jari that melted on the tongue, were packed into red-topped glass bottles (carefully washed and recycled year after year). The final touch was the piece of red paper that would be stuck into the cover, which meant we had to wait until the morning of Chueh It (first day of the New Year) before we could have any more.

Our festive visits were somewhat of a logistical exercise, what with six children to herd around a packed itinerary. We always made an early start – it was not unusual for the door to be answered by relatives still in pajamas! – and we always remembered households for their food. There was always Mak Cho Payong's cheokwa (agar agar) at "Fairwinds" in Padang Terbaka; my Koh Teoh Larry's parents served homemade longan tea; Sah Ee Poh always had ham on the bone; See Ee Poh's house would have a mouthwatering spread of cakes (they still do, as well as the hardly seen kueh teloh blanak).

I have since taken over the baking tradition, but only manage two or three varieties compared to the half dozen of before. With festive cookies available everywhere for only a few dollars a container, it is tempting to take the easy way out. But somehow, homemade cookies, even if slightly misshapen, have something extra that makes them special. This year will be the first Lunar New Year without my Mama Elsie, but I am sure she will be keeping an eye on the kitchen to ensure that we "bekin barang seronoh" while we carry on the family traditions.

Here are some traditional cakes and goodies associated with Chinese New Year:

Kueh Bakol

Known as "nian gao" in Chinese, this is made from rice flour and steamed in moulds lined with leaves. It has a characteristic golden caramel colour and chewy, sticky texture. Tradition had it that Datuk Dapur (the Kitchen God) would be offered this confection so that when he ascended to Heaven to give his annual report of the household's doings, he would only say good things! It is placed on the family altar as an offering to the deities, including the Sembahyang Ti Kong (held on the eighth night of the New Year).

The preparation of this dish is associated with many pantang larang or taboos e.g. menstruating women should not go into the kitchen, nor should there be angry words said near it. If the kueh bakul is not successful that year, some misfortune will befall the family.



When fresh, the kueh bakul can be cut into pieces and rolled in steamed grated coconut. Slices can also be dipped in batter and fried, either alone or with thinly sliced yam.

Peanut Cookies

No more excuses about lack of time or baking skills. This was the first biscuit I learnt to make as a child, when my job was to roll out the little balls of dough and put them neatly in rows on the baking sheet. I did not graduate to using the cookie press (handmade in Melaka by one of the tinsmiths who used to be found along Second Cross Street) until much later.

4 oz shortening (available as Crisco® brand from supermarkets or buy from Phoon Huat)
5 oz castor sugar
1 egg
2 tsp vanilla essence
4 oz peanuts, dry roasted and coarsely ground
1 level tsp baking powder
6 oz plain flour



Preheat oven to 160°C. Cream the shortening and sugar together, beat in the egg and vanilla. Sift flour and baking powder together and fold into the mixture along with the ground peanuts, to make a firm dough. Form small balls and place onto baking sheets, pressing down slightly to flatten. The biscuits will spread during baking. The peanuts can be substituted with other nuts like cashews.

Bludder

Described by Celine Marbeck as "Blueda" in her book "Cuizinhia Kristang", in my Melaka great-grandparents' home this was an annual specialty of Mrs Lopez or Mama Joanna, a Eurasian lady who would come to help out over the Chinese New Year period. It is of Dutch origin and probably derives from the Dutch word for bread "broed". It was always baked in a special mould – usually of copper or brass – with deep spiraling grooves that needed to be properly oiled to prevent the batter from sticking.

The toddy was used as a raising agent and added a characteristic flavour. A workable substitute would be the alcoholic "juice" from tapay pulut. The quantities of eggs and fat appear frightening to our cholesterol-conscious minds, but as Mama pointed out, you only ever ate a little of it and anyway "bukan hari hari makan, satu taun satu kali sehaja".

1 lb self-raising flour
1 lb butter
¼ lb lard
1 kati sugar
50 egg yolks
1 small glass toddy
1 spoon brandy

Beat sugar and egg well until creamy. Knead the flour with a little salt, water, butter, lard and toddy to make a dough. Pour the eggs into the dough slowly, beating all the time. Keep the dough overnight. Add flavouring and brandy before baking.

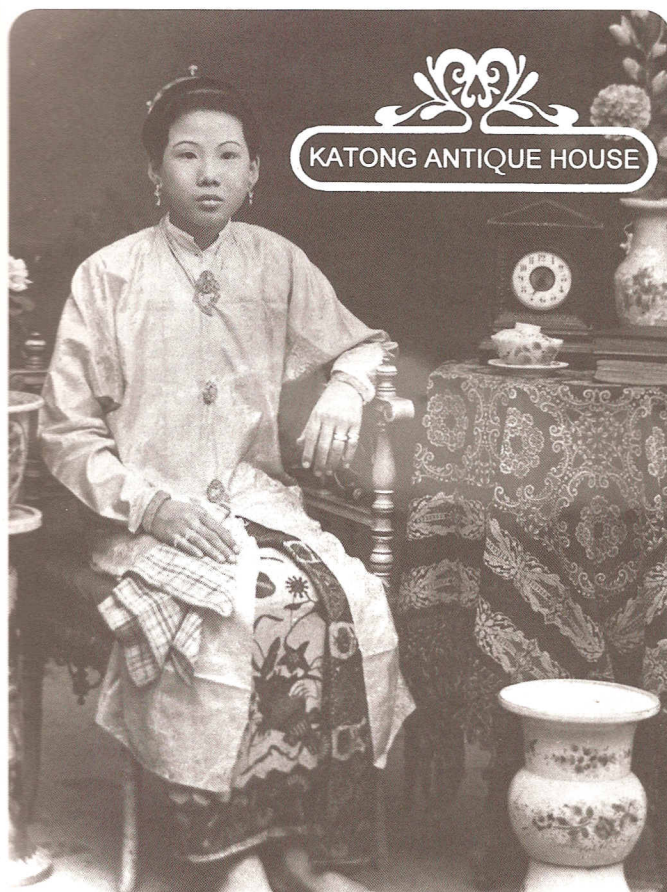
Kueh Teloh Blanak

A rarity, one of those fast-disappearing dishes that seem to belong to two generations ago. Probably best described as crispy sugar-coated dough strips, which doesn't begin to describe its charm.

Sago flour is added to eggs (the usual proportion is 3 egg whites and 1 egg yolk) with a pinch of salt and some baking powder, to make a soft dough. Roll into length about the thickness of a pencil and pinch off ½ inch (1-1.5 cm) lengths. Meanwhile, fill a kwali with oil, heat up and allow to cool. Drop the pieces of dough into the tepid oil and allow to heat up again over a high flame. The little dough strips will expand and rise in the hot oil, as they brown lift out and drain well.

To prepare the syrup : To ½ cup sugar add ½ cup water and boil slowly until it spins a thread. Lower the heat and add the fried teloh, turning well until all the pieces are evenly coated and the sugar hardens. Lift out, cool and keep in airtight containers.

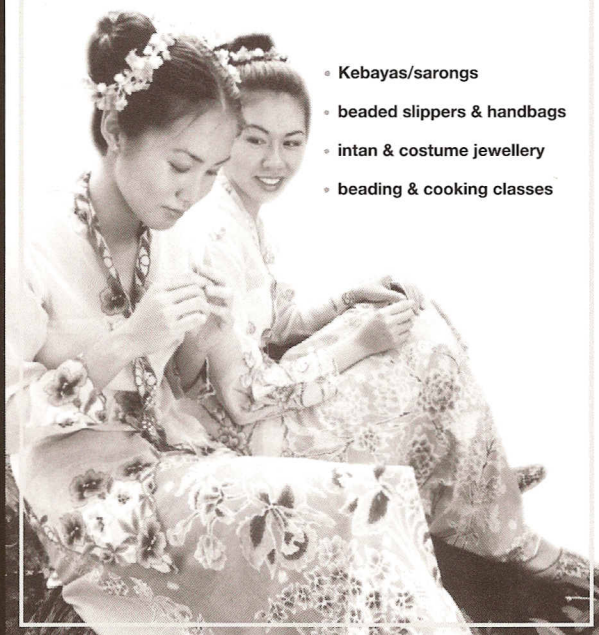
Kueh Teloh Blanak



KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

208 East Coast Road Singapore 428907
Tel: 63458544 Fax: 63451220

Rumah Bebe
A PERANAKAN HERITAGE HOUSE



- Kebayas/sarongs
- beaded slippers & handbags
- intan & costume jewellery
- beading & cooking classes

• 113 East Coast Road • telephone: 62478781 / 98162177
• email: contact@rumahbebe.com • website: rumahbebe.com

WITH COMPLIMENTS OF

JAN TAN & CHAN
ADVOCATES & SOLICITORS
NOTARY PUBLIC
COMMISSIONER
FOR OATHS

WE PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE LEGAL
ADVICE & SERVICES

133 NEW BRIDGE ROAD #15-10 CHINATOWN POINT
SINGAPORE 059413

TEL: 65388280 FAX: 65388281
E-MAIL: JanTChan@singnet.com.sg

PeraMakan
Restaurant & Catering

Traditional & Contemporary Peranakan Cuisine

At PeraMakan, we pamper you with genuine home-cooked Peranakan food to bring you back to the nostalgic times of your childhood.

Try our most popular mouth-watering dishes:

Ayam Buah Keluak, Ayam Panggang, Ayam Kapitan, Itek Sio, Penang Nyonya Pork Ribs, Beef Rendang, Ikan Panggang, Sotong Panggang, Seafood Masak Nanas, Seafood Otak Otak, Nangka Masak Lemak, Cheh Hu, Jantung Pisang Kerabu, Fried Mee Siam

End your meal with our delicious desserts:

Apom Balik, Apom Berkuah, Chendol & Bubor Cha Cha

Cut this out to enjoy \$10 off our Ala Carte Menu
(min spend \$50)

Valid for weekdays only till 28 February 2006
Call 63457565 for reservations

We are at

92 Joo Chiat Road, Singapore 427386
(5 mins walk from Joo Chiat Complex)

Lunch: 11.30 am to 3.00 pm

Dinner: 6.00 pm to 10.00 pm

Mondays to Saturdays including P. Holidays

We are closed on Sundays

COLLECTING

Norman Cho 34, is a true-blue Peranakan descending seven generations from Malacca. He recounts his triumphs and travels as a starry-eyed lover of things Peranakan since his teens.

MY HERITAGE

I became aware of the Peranakan material culture when I was a child barely six years old. Visiting my grandmothers and grand aunts, I would ask what their strange artifacts were used for. The reply was they were traditional stuff used by the Babas. My young mind hardly understood. What was a Baba?

Growing up, I felt different from my classmates and neighbours. I spoke no dialect. My elders wore sarongs. Chinese nor Malay? I was pretty mixed up. Only during my teenage years did I learn a scratch on what the Peranakans were about. From my history textbook.

With the passing of the older generation, familiar items in my relatives' homes were slowly but surely disappearing. When they converted to Christianity, altar tables topped with ancestral portraits and paraphernalia were sent to the temples. When they moved from huge bungalows to HDB flats, inherited furniture had to go. Old photographs, sarongs and blue-and-white porcelain were discarded as karung guni (trash). Such a sorrowful sight!

"What if I can salvage them?"
Thus began my love affair with all things Peranakan.

The "O" level prize

I always wanted to own artifacts that defined my heritage. But I had no clue as to how to acquire them. When relatives parted with an old photograph or two, I took over. In 1987, when I was 16, I did well for my "O" level exams. My uncle rewarded me with \$100. Enriched, I visited a Peranakan fair at an antique shop with my mum. She thought it was ridiculous to pay a princely \$100 for a pair of famille rose teacups, antique or not. No matter: They were my first Peranakan acquisition!

My next gratification was a silver sireh (betelnut) set at

a garage sale. To prevent tarnish, its previous owner had applied thick lacquer, which turned yellow over the years. I spent three evenings scraping off every bit of the vile layer, uncovering the smooth, fine engraving on each contour. My heart marveled at this regal beauty from the atelier, Jingfu.

Almost every weekend I was scouring antique shops or garage sales. Other days I visited relatives to see what they had. I was literally obsessed! But through comparing original pieces in their homes, I was able to train my eyes to what was fine and genuine, and what was not. I bought reference books, not only to read but also to pore with a magnifying glass to study the pictures in detail.

Alamak! Money no enough

My first love is porcelain, followed by silver then jewellery.

Peranakan porcelain is pure seduction: The lively colours and vivid details of phoenixes in flight or at rest. Peonies in stages of bloom. All so sensual to me. My eyes later opened wide to jewellery at the "Gilding the Phoenix" exhibition in 1993. I was thunderstruck. Whimsical designs of flowers, animals and figurines encrusted with bedazzling intan and belian (diamonds). The craftsmanship of yore was spectacular! Soon I found myself visiting shops and relatives to collect jewellery.

The fun in collecting is in the process of looking and meeting fellow collectors, and exchanging knowledge. Finding something rare and owning it is always a joy; to acquire something cheap that you fancy is indeed a bonus! There were times that I bought duds. I was disheartened even as they were invaluable lessons learnt. But, as a teenager with shallow pockets, I couldn't afford too many mistakes.



Gold and intan pendant



Silver dish (above) and silver sireh set (right)

"In collecting, be objective. We must never be too egoistic. Many a time, pride gets in the way of logic and objectivity. This is an open invitation for mistakes to come a-knocking at your doorstep. Even institutions like the museums are not immune to making mistakes."

Each weekend was costing me an arm and a leg. What to do? I still needed the pieces to bring home to study. Soon I was running out of storage space. More importantly, money. As a young adult still in National Service (NS), my obsession for collecting was growing. Alas, I realised I had to part with my older acquisitions to buy new ones. My garage sales were sad moments indeed. But what sweet sorrow was the parting when I could bring happiness to others?

Practical tips for new collectors

Now that I am gainfully employed, I can comfortably retain my beloved pieces. And as a seasoned collector, I know that replicas are often sold as the real McCoy.

Here are some cardinal tips for new pundits:

- If unsure, don't buy
- Buy from reputable dealers or directly from homes
- Be cautious of rarity
- Study your pieces and compare with authenticated pieces
- See and feel the items
- Visit museums, shops and seek advice from established collectors

Porcelain

- Old Peranakan porcelain have inclusions, are rarely pure white (ie) bone china and have a grainy texture
- The colour of old famille rose should be bright or pastel but never garishly luminous
- Don't be deceived by shopmarks

Silver

- Old Peranakan silver that is tarnished has black patina with a tinge of blue and gold
- Look for natural signs of wear and tear, like scratches

- The work on embossed or chased silver should not look stiff

- Don't be deceived by shopmarks

It is a known fact that replicas have been artificially tarnished to look deceptively old. But oxidizing agents make them appear "flat", (ie) totally black or reddish, lacking in dimension. Naturally tarnished pieces are tinged with blue and reddish-gold on top of the blackened layer. Pretty much like the iridescence that reflects light when diesel floats on water.

Old pieces can be buffed to look good as new, like when nonyas clean their silver belts for that special dinner outing. Pawnshops also polish old silver to appeal to customers though to collectors, the shine can be an eyesore.

Jewellery

- The workmanship should not be stiff
- The edges should not be sharp, except perhaps where the contours are sharply angled
- Details are very fine
- Natural signs of wear and tear – scratched, dents, tarnish – are evident

Admittedly, old pieces can also be poorly or roughly made. These would be the cheaper run-of-the-mill ones for daily use, or for nonyas of moderate means.

You are never too old to start collecting ... or too young. But nothing beats experience. Talk to other collectors and dealers. Visit shops, museum and collections, supplement with books that offer academic references to boost your knowledge.

Behind every collection, there is a humble beginning and a fabulous story. I have told mine. When will yours

CULTURE SPEAK @ THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

There was no lack of public interest at a recent talk given by Peter Wee on Peranakan culture, reports Maurice Wee.

Housewives, students, expatriates and tertiary academics – though a diverse crowd, they listened alike with rapt fascination to Baba Peter Wee's discourse on the Identities of Peranakan culture.

The National Library auditorium was packed that Tuesday evening of 12 October. And no wonder. The audience revelled as Peter, the first vice-president of the Peranakan Association and owner of Katong Antique House, spoke about his family roots in Malacca: Renowned Babas like Tan Keong Saik and Tan Cheng Lock who had streets named after them in Singapore and Malacca.

Many in the crowd were surprised to hear that the Peranakans of Malacca and Singapore were similar even today in

terms of food, celebrations, attire and customs. Today, said Peter, the Peranakan culture is very much preserved and evolving.

With the strong support and encouragement from the National Heritage Board (NHB), which works closely with other bodies like the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the Peranakan legacy is well promoted through numerous platforms such as exhibitions, workshops, talks and books.

Peter's talk was peppered with anecdotes and titles of books for those eager to know more. The questions came generously, especially from locals who probably wanted to find out about their own heritage. As usual, Peter's talk went beyond the specified time and ended at about 9.30 pm, the audience leaving happy with a dose of Peranakanspeak.

NOTICEBOARD

A big welcome to our new members

1. Ms Ang Marilyn
2. Mr Edwards Geoffrey Allan
3. Ms Goh Janice
4. Mr Lim Olthii
5. Mrs Lim Sah Neo
6. Ms Ngoh Eileen
7. Mr Tan Say Kiong Tony
8. Mr Wee Chin Soon Alfred

Our sympathies to the families of the following members who have passed on:

1. Tan Sri Tan Chin Tuan
2. Mrs Jean Seah Siew Chin

106th AGM

Our AGM will be held on Saturday, 25 March 2006 at RELC, Orange Grove Road. Further announcements will be made.



P & M
Antiques

**We specialise
in Straits
Chinese silver,
porcelain,
antique
furniture
and
reproduction
furniture**

Philip Siow
82 Jalan Hang Jebat, Melaka
Tel: 606 2818535
H/P: 6012 6119696

A TREASURE TROVE OF VINTAGE COLLECTIBLES

Peranakan beaded items, silver, advertising signs and posters, books, cigarette lighters, tins, clocks, toys, photographs, gramophones, cameras, and many more exciting finds



THE HERITAGE SHOP

93 Jalan Sultan #01-01
(opposite Sultan Plaza)

Tel/Fax: 62237982

HP: 96861071

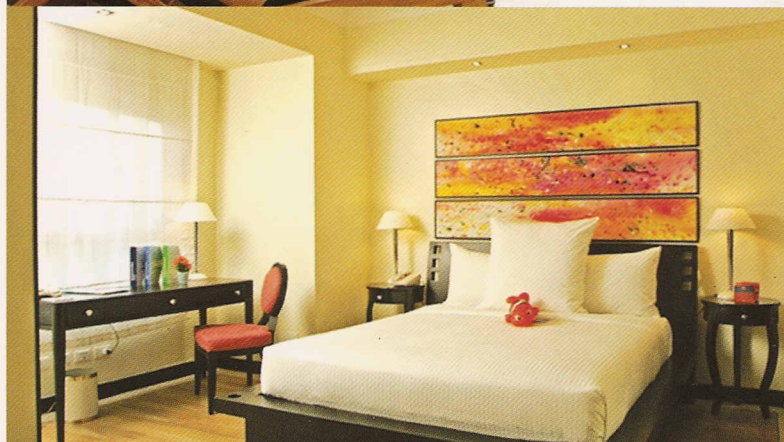
Email: theheritageshop@gmail.com



Hilton

Cebu Resort & Spa

Escape to paradise



For enquiries, call **6438 8822**

or visit our website www.tradewindstours.com

77 Robinson Road #33-01 SIA Building, Singapore 068896

Tradewinds
TOURS & TRAVEL
A member of the Singapore Airlines Group

(TA831)



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE