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the peranakan

The celebrated Nyonya Chang

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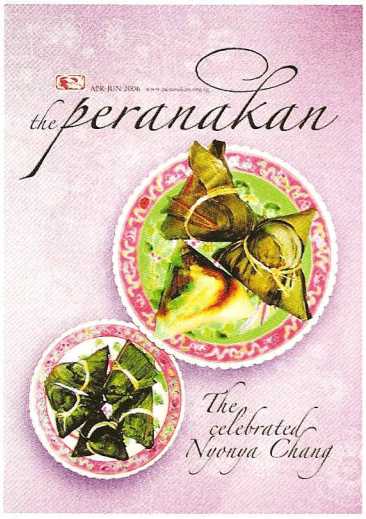

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THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE

APR-JUN 2006
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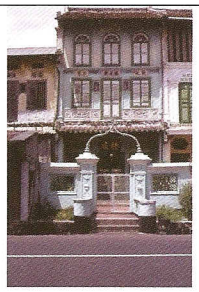
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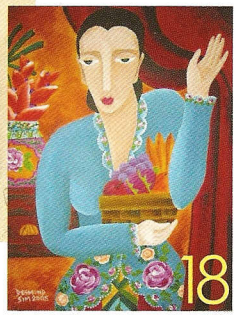
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EDITORIAL

By Peter Lee

We head towards the middle of the year in the company of several important festivals and feastdays — Good Friday (14 April), Easter Sunday (16 April), Vesak Day (12 May) and the Dumpling or 'Dragon Boat' Festival (31 May), not forgetting the Arts Festival (June).

We also have a jolly get-together on 23 April, *Bibik & Baba Makan Extravaganza,* which at press time has already been sold-out at over 40 tables! The event, at The Furama City Centre Hotel features a delicious buffet feast prepared by our member, the chef and TV personality Shirley Tay, as well as a full programme of music and entertainment by our Peranakan Voices. Members attending are asked to kindly turn up with empty stomachs and dancing shoes.

The Arts Festival begins in June and the Main Wayang Company will host a two-day Peranakan event (10-11 June) at the Arts House, as part of the Festival's Asian Showcase. More info can be found at http://www.singaporeartsfest.com/Outreach/asian_showcase.htm. We are all thrilled that, thanks to the National Arts Council, the Peranakans are never forgotten at this national event.

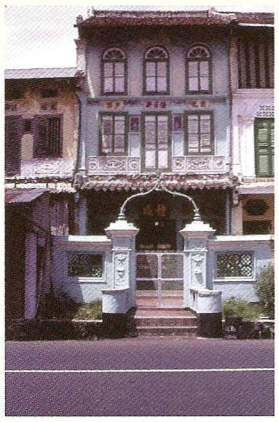
In this issue we focus on something dear to every Peranakan, and to many Singaporeans — the so-called 'Dumpling Festival' where we prepare and consume copious amounts of *kueh chang,* the delicious, aromatic, more-ish, 'high-carb' glutinous rice dumplings daubed on its surface with a quaint but unique blue stain derived from a flower *(bunga telang)*. We are fortunate to have the insiders' take on this subject from Cedric Tan of Kuala Lumpur and Malacca, and William Gwee Thian Hock, who is the author of the *Baba Malay Dictionary*. This book, which the Association co-produced (a five-year labour of love), is now out in the bookshops. News about the official launch will be announced in due course.

We have also been incredibly fortunate in having more and more volunteer contributors, who all share the same vision to document our culture and to record as many memories of the past as possible. Association member Norman Cho, who first contacted us by email, presents a different take on Nyonya costume history with a personal account of his grandmother's style in *Liberating Statements.* Ee Sin Soo, who is now a regular contributor, has been avidly taking notes of every festival, event and Peranakan-related place he has attended or visited. In this issue he reports on a *tok panjang* feast in Penang, while our regular *Dalam Dapor* contributor Noreen Chan takes a break. If you have a story to tell, please don't hesitate to email or call us.

The community was sad to lose so many supporters of the Peranakan culture recently, and we pay tribute to these special individuals — the late S Rajaratnam, Lai Kew Chai and Sally Gan. Our 'veteran' contributor Anthony Oei remembers the former minister in a special essay, as well as the tribute Mr Rajaratnam paid to the community in 1990. We also remember the great Sally Gan, a stalwart of the Peranakan theatre, whose magical presence lit up the stage. She will be sorely missed.

Looking ahead, we are proud to launch a series of improvements to *The Peranakan*. We start with a new feature appearing in this issue — *Shoptalk,* which will showcase exciting finds in the Peranakan shops in Singapore. Look out for more changes in the coming issues! ❋

The Editor of the Peranakan Newsletter and The Peranakan Association disclaim all responsibilities in the articles published herein, and state that the views expressed in them, if any, are that of the writers and not theirs. They assume no responsibility for unsolicited materials or articles published herein and state that the writers of the articles are wholly responsible for the articles veracity and authenticity.



Photographs of 157 Neil Road in the 1970s courtesy of Lee Kip Lin

RESTORING A PERANAKAN GEM

THE TAN CHENG LOCK BABA HOUSE MUSEUM

By Peter Lee

The Tan Cheng Lock Baba House Museum came about by a series of rare circumstances and fortuitous coincidences — a donor looking to make a gift to the National University of Singapore, the owner of a spectacular though derelict Peranakan terraced house who is passionate about the heritage, visionary leaders of the University looking to expand the limits of what a University can be, and a Peranakan Association committee member who happened to know all parties.

A great milestone was reached in the project when in April 2005, the University received $4 million from Madam Agnes Tan, the daughter of Tun Tan Cheng Lock, to purchase, restore and run 157 Neil Road, the 3-storeyed ancestral house of Mr Wee Lin and family. The Wee family began in Singapore with Wee Bin (1823-1868), who became one of the most prominent Chinese shipowners of his day with a fleet of twenty ships. The purchase of the property has just been completed and restoration work will commence shortly.

Although the house will be painstakingly restored to its former glory (it has amazing gilt wood carvings and many original features and fixtures), it will not merely be a static revival of an architectural gem, but also a vibrant centre of the heritage, with celebrations of seasonal festivals, focused exhibitions related to the culture, land cultural and dramatic performances.

At the recent Baba Convention hosted by the Association last November, Christine Khor, Director of the NUS Centre for the Arts that is in charge of the Museum, gave delegates an exciting preview of the museum.

The Peranakan Association is proud to have been involved in this heritage project from its inception, and will continue to cooperate with the University in giving life, breadth and depth to the house. ❋

A video clip introducing the project can be viewed online at http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/baba/index.html.

THE KUEH BAKOL TRADITION

I read with interest the article on New Year cakes by Noreen Chan in the January – March 2006 issue of *The Peranakan,* and would like to share some memories about the presentation and consumption of this typically Peranakan *kueh*.

When *kueh bakol* is presented as an offering to a deity, it is wrapped around the sides with a strip of serrated-edged red paper. A red paper cutting, or more common nowadays, a round red sticker with auspicious words or symbols, is placed on top of the kueh. Sometimes, a *huat kueh* adorned with a red paper or velvet flower is placed on top of the *kueh bakol* on the altar table.

However, when served to be eaten, it is presented in two ways — sliced into squares and dipped in grated coconut; or deep fried in batter. Sometimes a similar-sized piece of yam is attached to the *kueh bakol* before the frying. Usually the *kueh* is sun-dried till hardened after having been used for prayers, and re-steamed till soft again before it is eaten. It is never served whole on a dining table but always sliced into squares.

Traditionally this *kueh* is strictly made once a year, just before the new year season, and is directly associated with a family's good fortune. Making the *kueh* out of season would never result in success; I personally know of a renowned *kueh bakol* maker who tried to make this *kueh* off-season and the cake did not turn out right. A family in mourning cannot buy or make *kueh bakol*, as it is considered extremely unlucky for the family to prepare this *kueh*, and the cake would never turn out well under such circumstances. However, if presented as a gift, such a family may consume the *kueh* without any unhappy consequences.

In the old days, people preparing the *kueh* would light three joss sticks at the stove in honour of the fire god, to ensure that their *kueh* would turn out well. One's hands and body had to be very clean when preparing the cake — a superstition to ensure a successful cake, as it was considered bad luck to fail. Glutinous rice would be ground in a *batu boh* (mill) then pressed in a muslin bag to remove excess water. The flour would be kneaded by hand with plain sugar and left overnight. The resulting dough would be placed in little rattan or tin 'moulds' lined with banana leaf and steamed continuously for 10 to 12 hours, with occasional stirring. A successful *kueh* would turn from white to a beautiful golden brown with a very glossy surface.

Kueh Bakol is used as offering only at specific, important occasions — on the ascension of the Kitchen God to make his annual report to Heaven on the 24th day of the 12th month; at the family altar on the eve of the new year; and on the birthday of Ti Kong (Emperor of Heaven) on the evening of the 8th day of the new year. This is why the *kueh* is also known as *kueh besar*. ❋

G T Lye
Singapore

106TH AGM

By Chan Eng Thai

The 106th Annual General Meeting of the Peranakan Association was held at the RELC's Paterson Room on 25th March 2006 with forty-five members in attendance.

The President of the Association Lee Kip Lee in his opening speech noted that interest in Peranakan Culture remained in the fast paced society of ours and he urged members of the Association to participate fully in the activities of the Association to be living proof of the vibrant Peranakan Culture.

He announced that plans were underway to introduce programmes such as sporting activities to cater to the young at heart and the physically young members of the Association.

The meeting then proceeded with the stepping down of the entire Committee for the year 2004/2005 and the election of the new Committee for the year 2006/2007 with Thomas Tan as scrutiner assisted by Claire Seet.

Our erstwhile President, Lee Kip Lee was elected again unanimously which showed the members support for him and his dedication towards the preservation of our Peranakan Heritage.

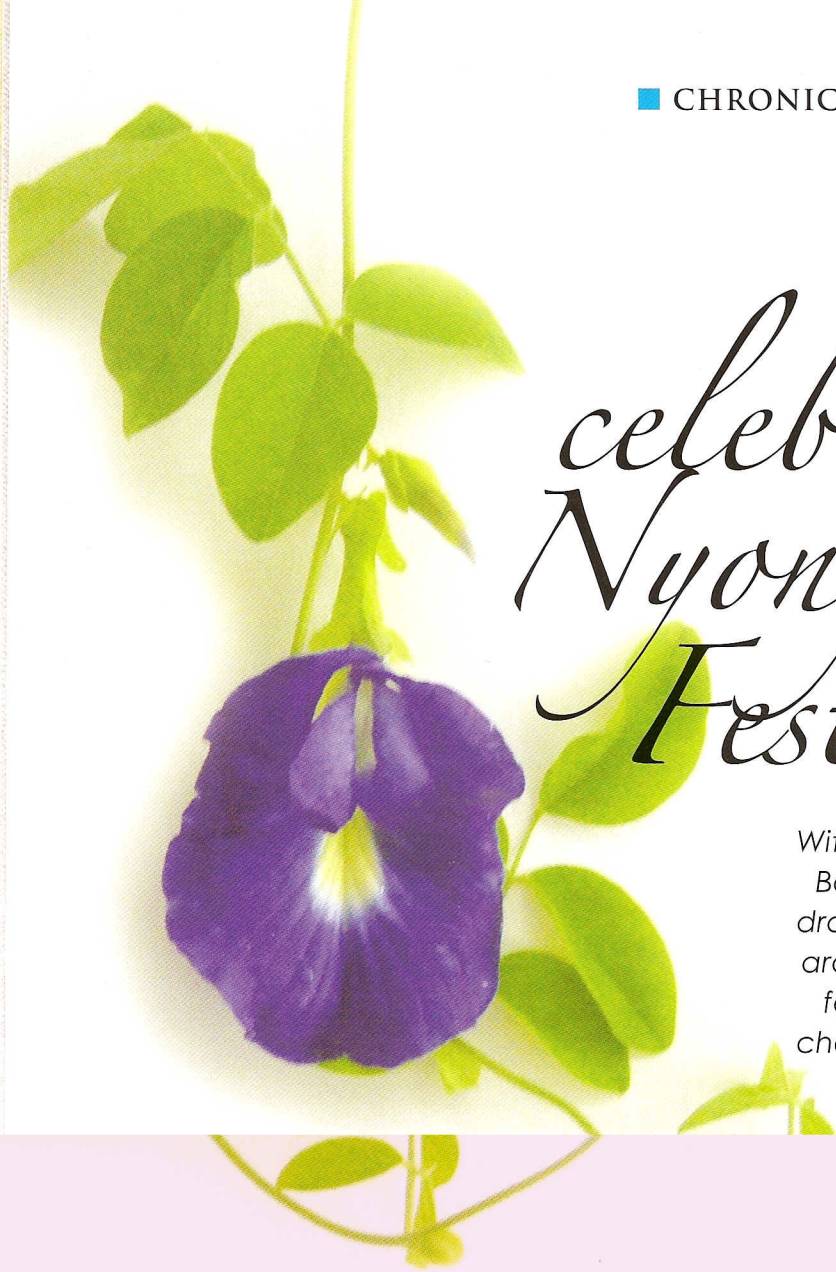
Also returned unopposed were the 1st Vice President Peter Wee, the 2nd Vice President Ong Poh Neo, the resilient Honorary Secretary Lim Geok Huay with Peter Lee as the Assistant Honorary Secretary and Mr. Gavin Ooi as Honorary Treasurer.

The previous Committee members comprising Alan Koh, Bebe Seet, Stephanie Tan, Mark Lionel Tay and Chan Eng Thai were also re-elected unopposed. Francis Chia was the new committee member elected unopposed, he being a familiar face in the Association activities and a long standing member of the Peranakan Voices(PV) as well as the leader of the PV's band.

The new Committee led by the President Lee Kip Lee then presented themselves to the members, and thanked them for their confidence in him and his team. He remarked that "hopefully members would not be *jelak*" of him and assured them that he as well as the new committee would serve the Association to the best of their abilities.

The 106th Annual General Meeting of The Peranakan Association then ended with an invitation to all present to partake in the *makan kechick* of *kueh chuchi mulot* and *bee hoon chap chye* with *teh* and *kopi!*

The small number of members present at the AGM were stalwarts of the Association and hopefully more members would take a keener interest in the Associations' activities and offer themselves for election at the next such meeting. ❋



The celebrated Nyonya Chang Festival

With the heat of summer come the Dragon Boat Festival and a flurry of activities like dragon boat races, celebrated by Chinese around the world. For the Peranakans, the festival centres on the delectable kueh chang (rice dumpling) while some still follow quaint customs, as recounted by William Gwee and Cedric Tan

the origin

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s country ravaged, he chose
the river on the 5th day of the

death, the people wasted no
earch for his body using boats
on head at the bow. They beat
scare away the river dragons
others threw glutinous rice
vater to distract the fish from

ual has evolved into an annual Dragon Boat race and the tradition of making pyramid-shaped glutinous rice dumplings. To this day, the Chinese continue to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival albeit in different forms from region to region, community to community while retaining the essence of the original. The Babas, being Chinese in spirit and origin, celebrate the Festival in their own way but do not participate in Dragon Boat activities.

The Baba community is familiar with two types of dumplings, both made with glutinous rice. One is the *kueh chang abu or kee chang* (ash dumpling), a plain dumpling without filling. The *abu* refers to the alkaline *ayer abu* (lime or ash water) that colours the dumpling yellow. The other is *kueh chang babi* (dumpling with pork filling), popularly known as the *nyonya chang*.

Nyonyas normally prepare dumplings in excess of their own consumption and prayer needs, giving a small number to friends and relatives. Households in mourning are not expected to make dumplings but can receive

William Gwee on

Years ago, my fa
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300 B.C. the patr
Qu Yuan was banishe
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death by drowning in
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On news of his tragic
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and serpents while
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disturbing his body.

Centuries later, the ritu

the 5th day of the 5th month was considered inauspicious, fraught with threats of adversity when rats, snakes and creeping pests could threaten people's well-being during the height of the summer heat. Disinfecting the home on the 5th day, some families sprinkle a Chinese herbal solution to draw out creepy crawlies from their hiding places. Though it is perpetually warm all year long in this region, the Peranakans maintain some quaint summer practices to check these pests and maintain good health at home.

Daon nyah

Two posies of four types of leaves known as *daon nyah*, banded with red paper, would be hung upside down at the front and back doors. The leaves are the blade-like sweet flag *(ascorus calamus)*, coral-like mugwort *(artemisia vulgaris)*, weeping willow *(salix sepulclaris)* and possibly fig twigs *(ficus mysorensis)*. The calamus is mildly sedative and can be drunk as tea. The mugwort has worm control effect and can stimulate blood circulation during acupuncture or induce pregnancy. The weeping willow has a chemical used in aspirin. These posies supposedly act as a talisman against the 5 Gods of Plagues.

Realgar wine

Another unique custom is realgar wine. Realgar is a compound of arsenic and sulphur which turns orange-red when mixed with rice wine. It is also known as ruby sulphur, being similar to sulphur except for the colour. It is commonly used as a reddish pigment in Chinese painting and in alchemy. On Duan Wu morning, a bowl of realgar wine is placed on the altar to be blessed. At noon, each family member takes a drop of this wine and the rest is sprinkled, using a pomegranate twig, at all doorways, thresholds and corners of the house. In the story of *Lady White Snake*, the heroine transforms into a snake while asleep after being cajoled by Xu Xian to drink the wine. So the belief is that any bad spirits in human form will be exposed this way. Actually, the realgar also wards off snakes, scorpions and spiders.

Egg up right

Some Peranakans swear by any holy book that an uncooked egg can defy gravity and stand upright without support on this day, apparently something to do with the earth's magnetic forces.

Cooling water

Uneaten *kee chang* can be left to dry naturally. Boil the water and drink it to treat urinary tract problems. As Duan Wu day is supposedly near or at the peak of summer, the family is reminded to take medicine i.e. *sio hup* or even *ayer badak sumbu* to balance the body with additional electrolytes. For the fun element, some Peranakan families even indulge in Thai Songkran-like water dousing at home, with the same idea of releasing body heat during the hottest period of the year, after consuming the delicious *changs*.

Magic hour

Others believe that the 5th day possesses a magic hour, at noon, when nourishing foods will be at their efficacious best and bathing ensures cleansing to rid all spiritual ill fortunes. Water at this hour is said to have curative properties. Even rain water is said to cure eye ailments when collected punctually at noon. ❋

Golden Bak Chang

Go try Bistro 21's deep fried nyonya chang. It's a hot seller at this Peranakan restaurant which opened just in December last year The golden brown glutinous rice dumpling, filled with fine pork cubes and sugared winter melon seasoned with coriander, is crispy on the outside yet moist and succulent on the inside.

You'll be surprised it's not oily as the oil does not stick to the glutinous rice. Best eaten hot from the kitchen, it is not recommended for take away as the cold chang becomes slightly chewy.
Price: $2.80 per chang.

Bistro 21
is located at #01-54, Millenia Walk, (next to Burger King). Open from 11 am – 1 am daily. Tel: 63334514

LIBERATING STATEMENTS

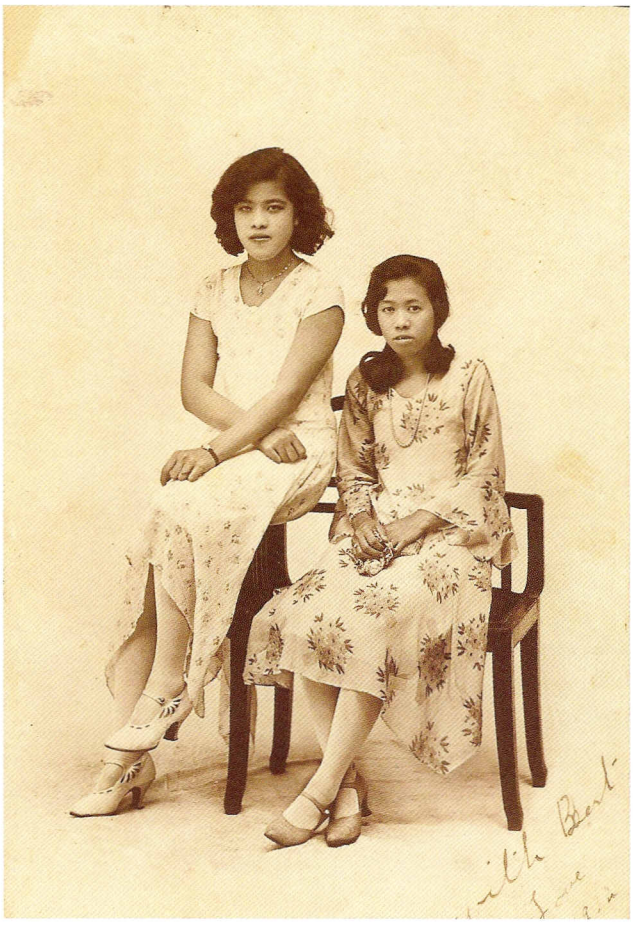
Who would have thought the nyonyas of the swinging 20s and 30s were more liberal than we imagined. Stuck to the sarong kebaya stereotype? Think again!

By Norman Cho

My late paternal grandmother, Yeo Koon Neo, was born into a family of 14 children – 7 boys and 7 girls – in 1913. She was the second youngest. As the baby of the family and her mother's favorite, she often got things her way. *Bijik mata mak,* indeed! She was free to make her own fashion statement ...

The *baju panjang* experiment

Yeo Koon Neo was miles away from her sisters who wore the frumpy traditional *baju panjang, baju kebaya* or *baju Shanghai.* Her dress sense developed when she was about 11. Soon to be a teenager, she was tired of the usual *baju Shanghai* she wore for years. Her mother's attire became material for her experiments: the *baju panjang*, accessories like the *chochok sanggol tiga-batang* (Singapore-style 3-hairpin set) and the *kerosang* (a set of 3 circlet brooches for the blouse). But just three days of pulling up her hair tightly into the *sanggol* (chignon) was a tedious and cumbersome experience that forever turned her off the *baju panjang!*



Yeo Koon Neo (right) in 1932 with a friend in Western attire.

The *anak darah*

In her teenhood she went through a variety of styles, from the *baju Shanghai* and the occasional *sarong kebaya* to western-style dresses as she grew older

In her late teens she became more adventurous. Loving a very westernised lifestyle, she unabashedly wore skimpy swimsuits to the Chinese Swimming Club, even going to the extent of borrowing her brother's pants and long-sleeved shirt for an outing. Gender bending *a la* Greta Garbo!

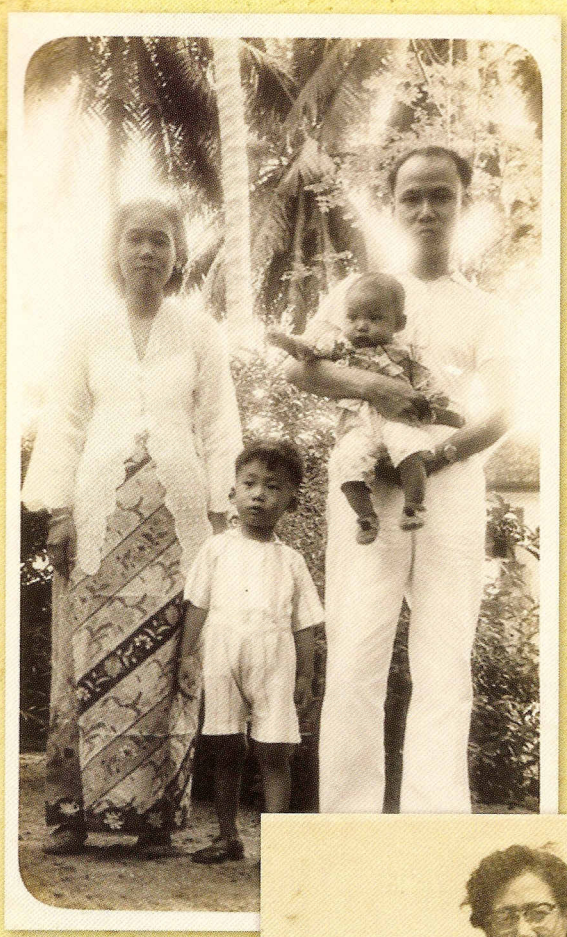
Nyonya manis* in *kebaya

Grandmother married at 22 and moved to Malacca to be with my grandfather. There, she found the need to blend into the Peranakan community as Malacca was still very conservative in the 1930s. She reverted to the *kebaya* but still had her personal style. Notice in the family portrait (opposite) the wide sleeves and exaggerated taper of the hem? She purposely fastened the *kerosangs* low, plunging the neckline.

The Shanghainese rage

After two years in Malacca, grandmother persuaded her husband to move to Singapore where she could be closer to her family. Swinging Shanghai then dictated fashion trends. The Shanghainese *cheongsam* and *samfoo* became the rage in Malaya. The top of the *samfoo* was a blouse with a mandarin collar and Chinese knotted buttons on one side across the collarbone.

As she entered her twilight years, she alternated between the *samfoo* and the *baju kebaya*. The samfoo evolved into a simpler collared blouse buttoned down the centre. Still steering away from tradition, she had happy pictures of herself taken during an outing to the park while mourning for her deceased mother, which was considered taboo. ❊



Mr & Mrs Cho Kim Leong with sons Charles (standing) and George.

Yeo Koon Neo in samfoo, with son Charles, She wore a long gold chain with the loket pound (old US$10 gold coin pendant) and the seven-day bangles. She had six bangles on her wrist, signifying that the picture was taken on a Saturday.

A white kebaya and black sarong for mourning.

Now, who says that nyonyas in the good old days were prudish and stuffy? There were, rather, quite a few ladies ahead of their time.

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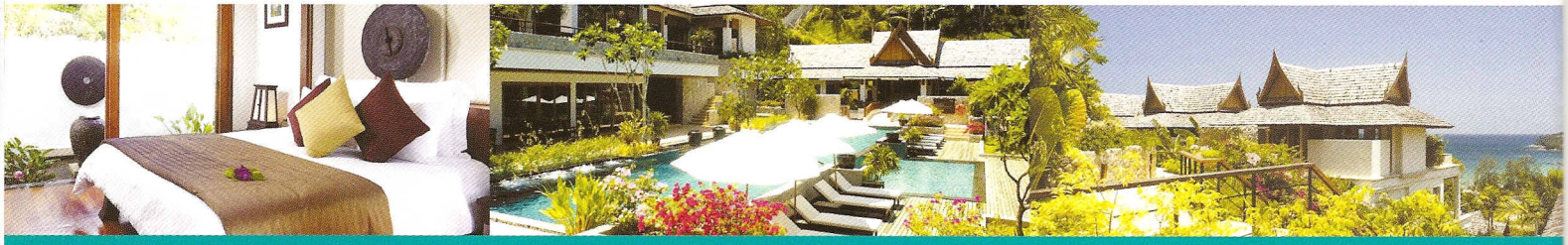

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TOK PANJANG PENANG-STYLE

Christopher Lim and Ee Sin Soo recently enjoyed a lip-smacking Sunday lunch specially prepared by the nyonyas of the State Chinese Penang Association (Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang). Here's why.

Clubhouse of the State Chinese Penang Association.

The sumptuous spread at the Association hall evoked Penang's old world charm, accentuated by the whirring ceiling fans with the ever-popular *dondang sayang* music playing in the background. There was no fine dining aura but things were surprisingly pleasant in the balmy afternoon.

The nyonya committee of the Ladies Circle had laid out a mouth-watering feast that afternoon of 19 March 2006. Their *Tok Panjang* had an appetising selection of *hong bak (babi hong), ju hu char, babi chinchalok, perot ikan, achar awak and kari kapitan.* The *rempah* for the *hong bak* was thick and rich. The *kari kapitan,* interestingly, was topped with croutons.

The various leaves, vegetables, chillies and *belachan* in the *perot ikan* lent a distinctive pungent smell. Surprising how different elements could merge together into a single dish; sweet-sour and hot-spicy, leaving us sweaty-faced. The slices of pork in the *babi chincalok* were tender and bathed in pink, garnished with fried garlic and shallots. We rounded off the meal with delicate *kueh talam, bengka ubi* and spongy pink *huat kueh.*

The food was done with such finesse, upholding true blue Penang Peranakan culinary traditions.

RECIPES

Both recipes are from the book *Nyonya Flavours*, a compilation of traditional favourites from the Penang Peranakan Association.

KARI KAPITAN (KAPITAN CURRY CHICKEN)

Ingredients

1 kg	meaty chicken pieces
1 tbsp	tumeric powder
1 tsp	salt to taste
1 cup	oil for deep frying
2 onions,	skinned, halved and sliced

Spice Paste (grounded)

350g	(20 -30) shallots
10g	(2 cloves) garlic
20g	(2cm) ginger
20g	(2cm) galangal
10g	(1 cm) turmeric
10g	(3) candlenuts
50g	(2 stalks) lemongrass
75g	(6) fresh red chillies
20g	(10) dried chillies - soaked
20g	belachan - toasted
5g	(8 -10) chilli padi (optional)
1 cup	thick coconut milk from 1 grated coconut milk
1 tbsp	finely shredded young kaffir lime leaves
1 tbsp	brown sugar
2 tbsp	lime juice

Garnishing

2 tbsp	fried shallots
2 sprigs	mint leaves
croutons	

Method

Marinate the chicken pieces with turmeric powder and salt overnight. Deep fry the chicken in hot oil until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper towels. Set aside.

Heat half of the frying oil in a wok to saute the onion and spice paste until fragrant. Add in the chicken and cook for 5 -7 minutes over a medium flame. Add the coconut milk. lime leaf and brown sugar. Simmer until chicken is tender. Add the lime juice and mix well.

Dish out and garnish with fried shallots and croutons or mint leaves. Serve hot with bread or rice.

CHIU CHU KUEH (BENGKA UBI)

Ingredients

1 tbsp	extra butter for brushing tray
1 piece	banana leaf for lining tray
650g	tapioca, peeled and grated
200ml	thick coconut milk (from 1 grated coconut)
1/4 tsp	salt
6 tbsp	sugar
1	egg
1 tbsp	tapioca flour
1 tbsp	butter

Method

Grease a 20 x 20 cm(8 x 8") square tray with butter and line with banana leaf. Combine all the ingredients in a mixing bowl and blend together with a hand whisk. Pour into the tray.

Bake in a preheated oven at 180°C for 30 - 40 minutes until cake is set. Turn up the heat to grill the *kueh* at 250° for 5 -10 minutes, or until crust is browned and aromatic. Remove from the oven and leave to cool for at least 6 hours or overnight, before cutting into 2 cm thick squares. ❊

Left to right: Babi Chinchalok, Babi Hong & Bengka Ubi & Kueh Talam

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Body
Hair
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Waxing

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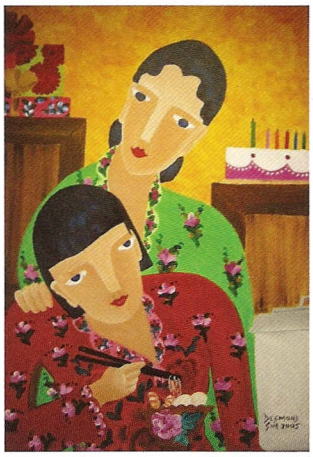

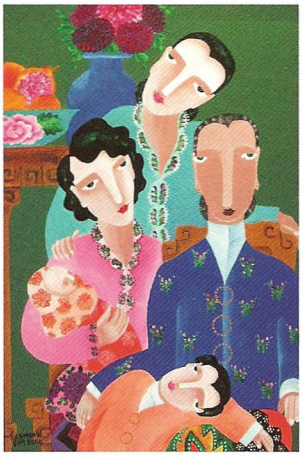

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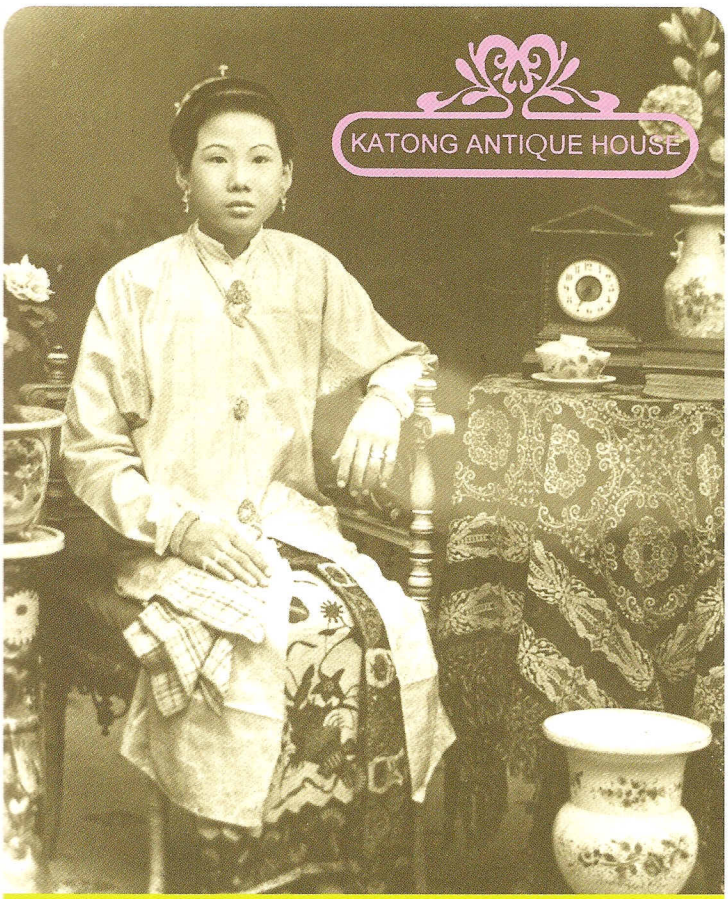

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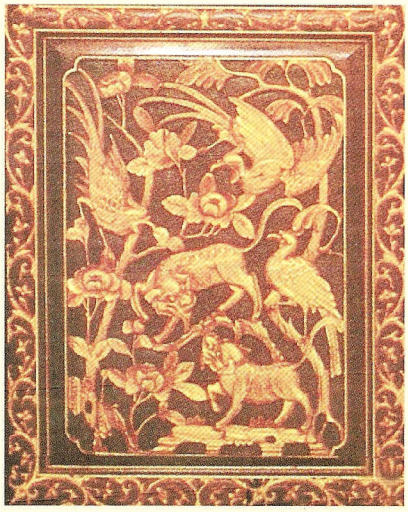

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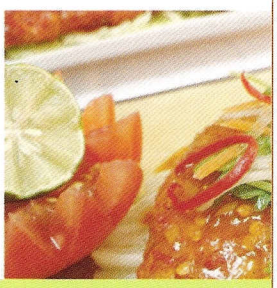

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FIRST-EVER PERANAKAN FESTIVAL

By Emeric Lau

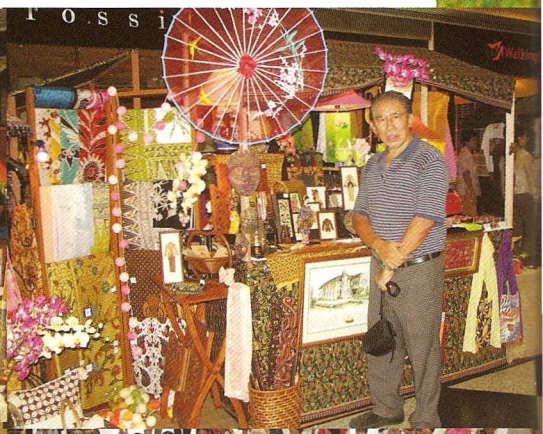
Singapore's first Peranakan Festival opened at Millenia Walk on 18 November 2005 evening with a colourful cornucopia of Peranakan music and comedy, coupled with the well-established craft and food fair that achieved a successful run throughout.

The public was treated to daily performances by Francis Hogan and fashion shows by Rumah Bebe and Alvin Quah, culminating in a traditional Peranakan wedding procession specially staged on 24 November.

Along Orchard Road, a Baba Bazaar at OG Orchard Point heightened public awareness of our special cuisine, *kueh-kueh* and all manner of Peranakan craft. It was also food galore as Hotel Phoenix and Furama Hotel featured special meals, cooking workshops and even Peranakan-inspired Christmas dishes!

As usual, the Baba Convention from 24 to 26 November was well attended by Peranakans from Malacca, Penang, Phuket and Singapore. On 27 November The Asian Civilisations Museum, at Armenian Street came alive with a flurry of activities such as a bazaar and children's workshop, fun dressing, singing and a play.

The festival, organised to commemorate the Association's 105th anniversary, closed with an appreciation high tea, a perfectly relaxing way to end 10 activity-filled days! ❋



HIGH ROLLING BABA STYLE!

By Christine Ong

It was truly an evening to remember, this celebration by the sea!

Taking a light-hearted poke at Singapore's two upcoming casino resorts, The Peranakan Association's 105th anniversary Dinner & Dance at Neptune Theatre Restaurant was suitably themed *Baba Las Vegas*.

The venerable entertainment hall came alive on 25 November 2005 as its brilliantly-dressed guests revelled in all the glitz, glamour and extravagance. It was a full crowd with more than 750 members and friends from Malacca, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Phuket and Indonesia (Padang) who were in town for the Baba Convention.

Babas, *nyonyas* and bibiks sang, swung and *joget*-ed to the timeless classics dished out by the Melodians. Out in the foyer, glittering stalls bedecked with colourful *kebayas*, *kerosangs* and all things Peranakan chalked up roaring sales. ❋

WEDDING GRANDEUR

By Ee Sin Soo

Weddings are generally elaborate affairs, but the Peranakans outdo most other Asian cultures when it comes to a no-holds-barred traditional ceremony complete with sartorial trimmings.

Such a wedding was the highlight of the Peranakan Festival, a procession elaborately staged by Cedric Tan and his team on November 26. The bride (Tay Swee Ling) was a picture of nonya modesty despite her elaborate ceremonial finery. The bridegroom (Aaron Loo) was a contrasting picture of understatement in his clean-lined long Chinese gown and short jacket.

Shielded by red silk parasols, the bridal couple was escorted by Pak Boyan male bearers and porters, the Sangkek Um (Francis Hogan), Pak Chindek (Thomas Tan), Bukak Kun (KT) and pretty nyonyas from the Gunong Sayang Association.

Seronee music, laughter and busy chatter marked the procession as it slowly found its way into the atrium of Millennia Walk. Dozens of shoppers stopped, curious, even taking photos. Cars going into the carpark slowed down to wave and even cheered!

At the atrium, another Sangkek Um (GT Lye) and the Master of Ceremonies (Cedric Tan) were awaiting the couple to begin the ceremony. The bride knelt down gracefully as the *Bukak Kun* guided her and played bridesmaid of sorts, ensuring that the folds of her heavy skirt were tucked nicely to prevent her from tripping. The Pak Chindek played the best man, offering tea to the leaders and spouses of The Peranakan Association.

Although a condensed version, the mock wedding went a long way to providing Babas and non-Babas with an insight into the intricacies of Peranakan culture and celebration. ❊

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FROM DREAMS TO REALITY
SPOTLIGHT ON HERITAGE INITIATIVES

By Peter Lee

On 25 November 2005 delegates of the Baba Convention got together for an interesting exchange of ideas and experiences in heritage promotion. Entitled *Menimpi Menjadi Betul* (From Dreams to Reality), the seminar, which had over a hundred participants, focused on Peranakan heritage initiatives in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. After the welcome note from Convention Chairman Chan Eng Thai, eminent representatives from two new participating organisations made short addresses to delegates: Anchalee Tephabutra of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation, and Lee Su Kim of the newly-formed Persatuan Peranakan Cina Kuala Lumpur. This was followed by four lively sessions.

Our Association's Peter Wee led the first discussion where Christine Khor of the Centre for the Arts, NUS, introduced the new Tan Cheng Lock Baba House Museum at 157 Neil Road (opening in 2007), and Kenson Kwok of the ACM showed plans for the Tao Nan Building, which will soon be transformed into a dedicated museum of Peranakan material culture. In the second session, Chan Eng Thai introduced individuals from Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand who were promoting Peranakan culture in their own ways: Alvin Yapp, who is creating a range of contemporary, Peranakan-themed gifts and souvenirs in Singapore; Cedric Tan who has painstakingly preserved the minutiae of the Baba Wedding in all its glory and has re-enacted ceremonies and created Peranakan events in Malaysia and Singapore; Pranee Sakulpipatana, the Phuket historian who has been pivotal in the promotion of Peranakan heritage in her native Phuket with large-scale events that have gained widespread attention in Thailand. After that session, Wolfgang Müller-Wittig of the Centre for Advanced Media Technology, NTU, demonstrated his Centre's work in creating virtual environments, and showcased a virtual Baba house, where one could 'tour' its interior with computer technology. In the final session food writer Sylvia Tan hosted a lively exchange on Nyonya food heritage with cookbook author Tan Gek Suan, restaurateur Gladys Chee, and lawyer and antique recipe archivist Louis Tan, who shared with audiences the challenges, inspirations and goals of preserving and promoting Peranakan food heritage.

In the short space of an afternoon, delegates were able to have a complete snapshot of heritage initiatives in the three participating countries, and the seminar provided a platform for fruitful exchanges and meetings of likeminded individuals.*

■ SHOPTALK ■

FINDS FROM THE EAST COAST

Top row: Kebaya, new with rich embroidery and kerawang (piercework), peacock motif, ready-to-wear, ***$550, Katong Antique House***

Manek (beaded) green handbag ***($650)*** and shoe ***($480)*** set, Japanese glass beads, ***Rumah Bebe***

Manek (beaded) golden beige handbag ***($650)*** and shoe ***($450)*** set, tubular glass beads, ***Rumah Bebe***

Second row: Kerosang rantai (chain link brooch set) with Swarovski crystal set in 18K gold plated nickel ***$80, Rumah Bebe***

Sarong buckles, gold and silver plated metal, ***$25, Rumah Bebe***

Sarong buckles, coconut shell, ***$15, Rumah Bebe***

Below: Kebaya, vintage Swiss brocade in green, original condition, more than 50 years old, ***$150, Katong Antique House***

Kebaya, vintage rubia in grey, original condition, about 80 years old, ***$180, Katong Antique House***

Kebaya material, new with rich embroidery and kerawang (piercework), each at ***$250, Katong Antique House***

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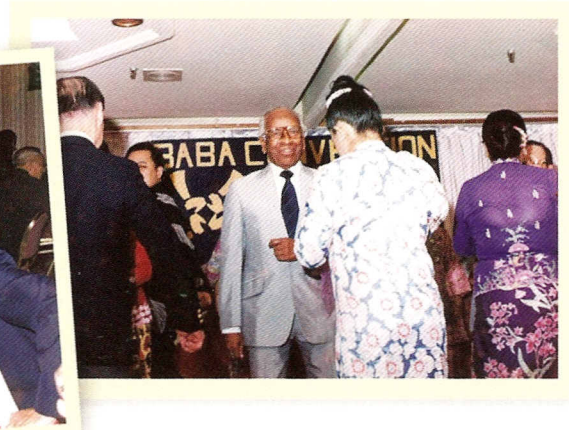

THANK YOU, MR RAJARATNAM

By Anthony Oei

Singapore paid tribute to the late Mr S Rajaratnam for his immense contributions, including putting the nation on the world map and writing the Singapore Pledge. He was Minister of Culture, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Prime Minister (Foreign Affairs) and Senior Minister before he retired from politics in 1988 after 29 years.

Let us remember him also for the tribute he paid to the Babas in 1990 for their role in Singapore's stupendous socio-economic development after independence in 1965. On 8 December 1990, at The Peranakan Association Convention on its 90th Anniversary, he spoke on "Babas: The First Singaporeans", noting that Singapore is what it is today because of the Babas, who waged a battle against the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and won.

His definition of a Baba was not "the orthodox one" but "is idiosyncratic and different from the academic one." To him, being a Baba was an attitude of mind with the ability to be "future-oriented." Meaning, almost anyone who settled in Singapore could be a Baba, be it Chinese, Indian or Eurasian. The Malays were different because they had always been in Singapore.

"These English-speaking, educationally modern and highly qualified Babas" had formed the core of the People's Action Party (PAP) and achieved victory over the CPM in the 1960s.

He revealed that for the PAP, the battle against the CPM was deadlier than the fight against the British. The communists were the oldest political party here, having been on our shores after World War 1. They were trained, lethal and were supported by China and the former Soviet Union.

He expressed confidence in the future of the Babas, whose existence in Singapore could be traced back more than 600 years. **He assured that they should not worry about becoming extinct like the dodo bird as the Babas were not a "deculturised" people. They had the ability to "innovatively transform" their motherland culture into one that was "distinctively Sino-Malay" with the capacity to assimilate Western culture.**

Thank you, Sir, for your kind words and confidence in our future. ❋

Indeed, the Babas have played a large role in Singapore's domestic affairs for a long time. In my previous article, "Peranakan Power in Early Singapore" (The Peranakan April-June 2005) *I wrote that the Babas had a big hand not only in socio-economic development but also in politics.*

In the early 20th century, The Peranakan Association, then known as the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) proposed a self-governing Malaya to give locals the opportunity to determine their own future. It can be said they planted the seed to fight for independence after World War Two.

Today, our Association leaves politics to the politicians. We dedicate ourselves to social issues, i.e. preserving and promoting Baba history, culture and tradition. These social programmes are essential for nation-building. They enrich the nation's colourful multi-racial and multi-cultural fabric, cultivate understanding and tolerance, and strengthen community bonding.

Individually, we Babas and Nyonyas are active in various aspects of life, including business, industry, politics, government, music and drama where our community displays much creativity and enterprise.

OBITUARIES

A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO JUSTICE LAI KEW CHAI

By Lee Kip Lee

I first knew Kew Chai in 1971 when he joined the legal firm of Lee & Lee at 10A Malacca Street where my office was also located.

I still recall that he was a new member of the firm when I asked him to prepare my son Dick's first composer's copyright agreement. He had to bring the work home as, being only recently graduated, he was not fully-conversant with the terms and conditions of such an agreement. He quickly rose to become a leading figure in the legal world and judiciary.

Our bond became closer also because his wife Dorothy was the niece of my good friend Tan Seng Hai and was the daughter of my friend Yip Tong San.

My foremost recollection of him is his sincerity and his congenial, ever-smiling face which greeted me whenever we met. When I persuaded him to become a member of The Peranakan Association, he readily agreed.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs Dorothy Lai and her family on their irreplaceable loss and share with them their grief.

REMEMBERING NYONYA SALLY GAN IN HER GLORIOUS DAYS

1935 – 2006

By Maurice Wee

Sally Gan, to her nieces, nephews and fellow friends, was affectionately known as Mak or mother. Born on 7 April 1935 to an influential Peranakan family, Sally lived a splendid life to the fullest. She breathed her last on 8 February 2006, after a brave battle with colon cancer.

Sally was always gracious, cheerful and young at heart to her fans. She was an icon in theatre and best remembered for her hilarious portrayal of the Cantonese black-and-white servant in many Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) productions. The 71-year old veteran actress had acted in 17 GSA plays, the last being Kipas Cendana (The Sandalwood Fan) in 2003.

To her fans and comrades, Sally was a chanteuse who sang beautifully both dondang sayang and western classics, as well as lagu joget popularised by the late P. Ramlee and Saloma.

Peranakans in the Making of Singapore's Identity and History

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7.00 pm to 10.00 pm
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We welcome our new members

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Ms. Susan Fong Thin Foong
Mr. Kam Gene
Mr. Kamis Bin Ahmad
Mr. Michael Lee
Mr. Leong Lian Wah
Mr. Victor Michael Loo Lay Pin
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Ms. Doreen Quan,
Ms. Miki Tampo
Mr. Tay Tatt Chew
Mdm. Stella Teo Siok Neo
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Our deepest condolences to the families of

1. Ms Sally Gan
2. Justice Lai Kew Chai
3. Mr Bob Tan Siew Lee
4. Mdm Irene Wei

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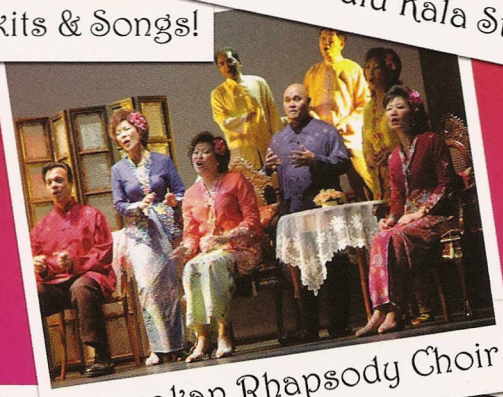
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