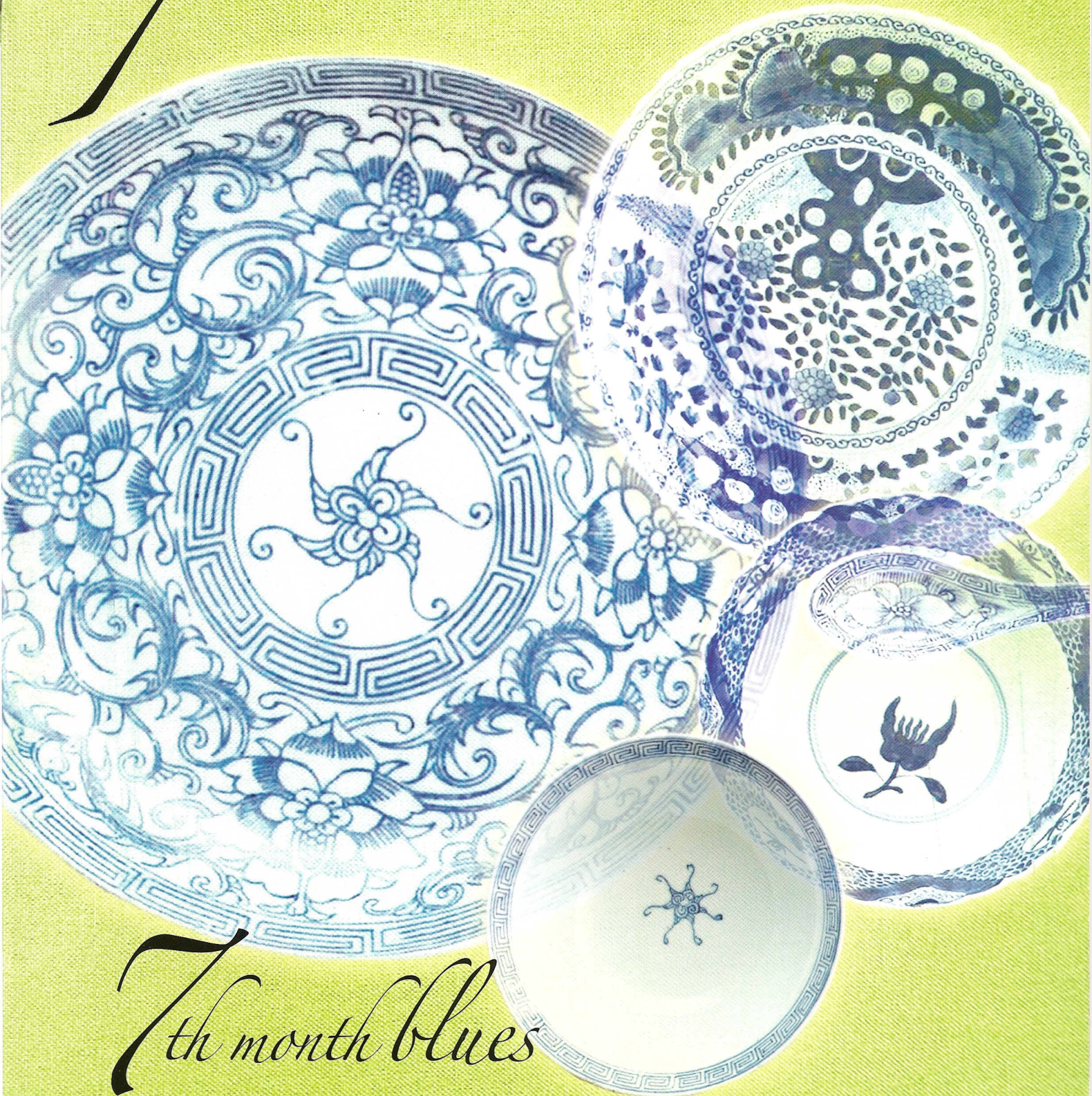




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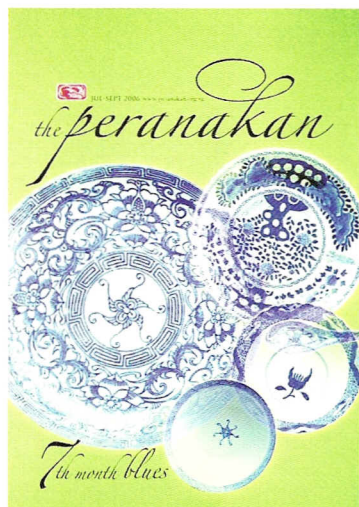
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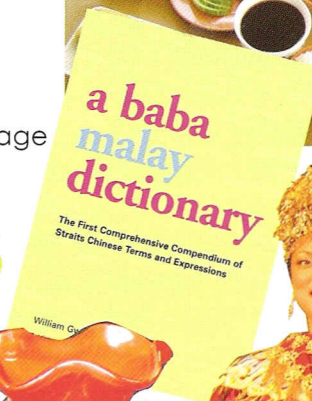
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# HANTU AND THE MOON

By Linda Chee

Greetings.

Many Peranakan families will soon get busy to mark two important events on the Chinese lunar calendar – the Hungry Ghost Festival on the 7th month (*chit guek* or *bulan tujuh*) and the Mid-Autumn or Moon Cake Festival, the month after (*bulan lapan*).

2006 has been especially auspicious and a rare quirk of the lunar calendar. Apparently, and I gleaned these nuggets from the web, it is the 4,703th year on the calendar and lasts a rare longer-than-usual 385 days. The extra days are two lunar springs and two seven months (*loon chit guek*). The first day of spring was at the start, last January. The other spring at the very end, will be early next February. Double springs last occurred in 1944. It seems this phenomenon has happened only 12 times since 221 B.C and it is the most auspicious year to wed in two centuries!

Now that half a year has gone, soon comes the double seven months, not seen since 1968. The leap or extra lunar month is a complicated cosmic adjustment once every three years in a

12-year zodiac cycle to align the lunar and solar calendars. This year it happens to be on the 7th or ghost month. But no worries about double trouble from ghosts galore. They only haunt you on the first 7th month then trot back home to hell the next.

While the ghosts are on earth, beware and pay heed to a litany of don'ts...don't move house, don't get married, start a business, swim, go on holiday... or even die, *kusmangat!* Thankfully, we can start the 8th month in a more elegant fashion with the Moon Cake Festival. Celebrate abundance and togetherness. Sip tea and nibble on moon cake. Recite poems in praise of the glorious full moon on the 15th night.

After all those moon cakes, time to look forward to The Peranakan Association's social event of the year in October – the annual Dinner & Dance. I've just got word on the theme – Peranakan Bandstand! See page 26 for details and get your joget shoes ready...

The next Baba Convention is planned for Phuket, probably from 1 to 3 December. More details in our next issue, the PA

website and through e-mail. Coming back to the magazine, I happily say that contributions have been forthcoming from younger Peranakan writers such as Ee Sin Soo, Norman Cho, Lye Wai Choong and Lovelynne Chong. They give new perspectives to old traditions, even as our more senior Peranakans continue to provide prolific insights into our culture and heritage. *Terima kasih berjuta.*

We invite more readers, especially young Peranakans, to write for our magazine. We also welcome letters if you have any feedback or an opinion to share. Contact us at [enquiries@peranakan.org.sg](mailto:enquiries@peranakan.org.sg). No worries if you are short on the Peranakan patois. Refer to the newly published Baba Malay dictionary.

Finally, we thank readers for your encouraging comments, some of which are featured on page 6. We have taken note. Articles are more focused, concise and we have introduced more colour. Also from this issue, a new guide to Peranakan places of interest in Singapore, on page 28.

Keep those comments coming!✉

*The Editor of The Peranakan Magazine 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 are wholly responsible for the veracity and authenticity of their articles.*



# LET US SUPPORT NTU'S WEE KIM WEE LEGACY FUND

By Lee Kip Lee  
President, The Peranakan Association



**T**he late former President of Singapore, Wee Kim Wee, was a dear personal friend with whom I had for many years been in constant contact with. I first met him through a mutual friend, my classmate Khoo Teng Soon, who was then the managing editor of The Straits Times. Kim Wee was his colleague. However we only got to know each other better when I became a committee member of the Association, and later its President.

Kim Wee took a great interest in Peranakan matters, and avidly followed what was going on through the magazine. I received many letters of support from him, commenting on stories in the magazine and reminiscing about the people mentioned. In one of these communications, he said, "Not many people realise that Peranakans have acted as a bridge to bring about understanding and harmony over more than a century and we are still continuing to do that job today."

He was a courageous man who took his illness in stride. His emails described his declining health in an extremely matter-of-fact way, without any self-pity or despondency. He last wrote to me on April Fool's Day last year, a month before his passing, enquiring when my brother's binjai tree would fruit again, as he had not had buah binjai for some time.

On 24 April this year, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) announced the launch of the Wee Kim Wee Legacy Fund. Their media studies faculty will be renamed the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information. Income generated from this fund, targeted at \$25 million, will be used to support the vision and aims of the school. The government will be matching the grant dollar for dollar. So far more than \$16 million has been raised. The chairman of the fund-raising committee is Mr Kwee Liong Keng of Pontiac Land, and its patron is none other than President S R Nathan.

The fund and the school are appropriate ways to commemorate our former President, who in his young days was a passionate journalist. He was also a diplomat for many years as well as the Chancellor of NTU from 1991-1993. I hope our members will be able to reciprocate not only the support that the late Dr Wee gave to our Association, but also his inspiring leadership, humility and humanity during his tenure as President of Singapore. Let us carry on building this 'bridge of understanding and harmony'.

*A cut-out donation form can be found on page 28. For more information, please visit [www.ntu.edu.sg/weekimwee](http://www.ntu.edu.sg/weekimwee).*



## OUR READERS SAY...

"Wow, the ad in the magazine was very effective. So many people came to the restaurant for the Mother's Day promotion, some armed with The Peranakan magazine. We actually ran out of food after lunch. I had to go to the market to replenish for dinner time. It is truly a pleasant surprise and testimony that Peranakan culture is alive and thriving in Singapore. A big thank you to the people behind The Peranakan magazine."

- Ng Geng Whye, owner,  
Nyonya Bistro @ Kampong Bahru

"The magazine has many interesting articles. My favourite is The Celebrated Nyonya Chang by Cedric Tan. It brought back memories of more than 30 years ago when my Mama made the nyonya kueh chang babi. The many steps needed just to prepare it...I really miss Mama's kueh chang."

- Anne Lee, operations manager

"Striking concept for magazine cover. Interesting & informative."

- Desiree Belletty,  
accounts manager

"The magazine provides great insights into the Peranakan culture. It is a great platform for me and my family to keep in touch with the culture and heritage of this small but rich and vibrant community."

- Eunice Yap, marketing director

Write to us!

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# THE MONTH OF HUNGRY GHOSTS

By Lye Wai Choong

*Chinese around the world celebrate the Festival of Hungry Ghosts on the 7th moon of the lunar calendar, usual in the month of August. The festival is an ancient tradition dating back to as early as the 3rd century during the Six Dynasties.*

**T**he Hungry Ghosts Festival can be traced back to a Buddhist sutra (Ullambana Sutra) in which a Buddhist monk, Mogallana, tried to save his deceased mother from retribution in Hell for her misdeeds. Whatever food she tried to eat turned into burning charcoal. The filial monk pleaded with the Buddha for mercy and was told to make offerings of food and five kinds of fruit on the 15th day of the 7th moon to the Buddhist monks and to his ancestors of seven generations. He complied dutifully and his mother was saved from starvation.



*The King of Devils.*

As midnight strikes, the gates of purgatory open to free the hungry ghosts to roam Earth for 30 days. Believers make offerings as an act of compassion in return for good fortune and protection from misfortune.

Many temples set up makeshift altars and stages to receive donations and offerings. The main deity is the King of Devils, accompanied by guardians from Hell such as the Ox-Head and Horse-Head spirits who are believed to lead sinners who die to a place in Hell.

## **Filial piety**

Mogallana asked the Buddha whether other filial sons could follow this good practice. Thus, the Ullambana or Hungry Ghosts Festival was born. Ancestral worship gained popularity during the Tang and Song dynasties and has been widely practiced since by Chinese communities worldwide.

In Penang, the festival has become the second most important after the Lunar New Year and is known as *Phor Thor* in Hokkien, or 'saving suffering beings from torment'.

The festival begins on the last day of the 6th moon.

Any day will do for offerings and prayers but usually not after the 15th. Besides food offerings, large quantities of silver paper money are burnt to be spirited as "wealth". Traditional paper money has been creatively supplemented by items like paper passports, credit cards and vehicles.

## **Wayangs**

Entertainment is not forgotten. In the old days, Chinese operas (*wayangs*) were staged into the wee hours of the night to entertain devotees and spirits alike. The noisy wayangs would go on until month's end. Imagine the din from the clashing of cymbals and gongs. In the 1910s, Dr Wu Lien Teh, an Anglicised Penang Straits Chinese,

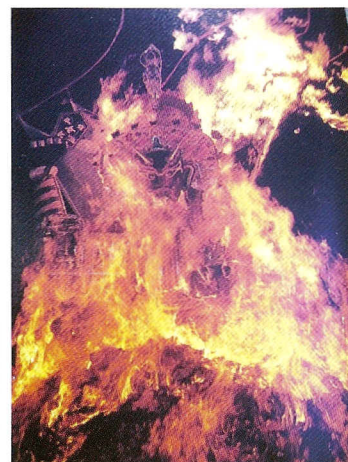


condemned the practice as wasteful and antiquated, writing: "The 15th day of the 7th moon is a red-letter day for the ghosts of Penang. Along the whole length of Beach...and Bridge Street, and on both sides, there was an almost uninterrupted row of decorated tables covered with the usual paraphernalia for those unseen

friends. Wherever one turned one's eyes on that day, the same sights met one...the fumes from countless joss sticks, the din arising from the combined voices of the crowd, the unintelligible



Even paper mahjong sets are offered for some fun in the afterworld.



The King of Devils in flames.

chanting of the priests. " The 30th August, 1933 issue of the Penang Straits Echo reported the *Phor Thor* lasting three days and nights opposite the Kuan Im Teng temple at Pitt Street. ☞

### Peranakan ancestral worship

The Peranakans, predominantly immigrants from southern China, practice ancestral worship unless they convert to Christianity. In the past, the extended Peranakan family would gather together to worship their ancestors. Days before the event, daughters-in-law supervised by the matriarch would start peeling onions and garlic to cook the essential curries. Rice was ground into flour to make *kueh*. If a relative had just passed away, the *kueh* was usually white, blue or green depending on the number of years since the demise. Even the *kueh ku* was black if death occurred within a year. For children, the communal preparation was fun as cousins could play together all day. So long as no one got in the way of a grandma, mother or aunty, no ear was pulled or thigh *chubit* (pinched).

On the last day of the 7th moon, the Peranakan family would send off the hungry ghosts with a prayer and small offering.



### Blue-and-white

Coloured famille rose porcelain is never used by the Peranakans for ancestral worship. The Peranakans serve the food offerings in blue-and-white wares or so-called batik wares, also known as kitchen ching. These blue-and-whites were not made specifically for the Peranakans; they were the lower-end Chinese export porcelain commonly used in South-east Asia as well as by early Chinese migrants in San Francisco. Though the exception, some blue-and-white wares may have been commissioned by the Peranakans. ☞



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# PASAL HANTU-HANTU (GHOSTLY ENCOUNTERS)

*What better time for hantu-hantu stories than during the Festival of Hungry Ghosts, when the "residents" of Hades are free to roam Earth for 30 days.*

**Norman Cho** writes on the lighter side of the Peranakan netherworld.

**A**lready fastidious to a T with Chinese customs and traditions, the Peranakans also absorbed much from the culture of their adopted homeland in the Malay Archipelago. The result? A double whammy of superstitions and beliefs.

No wonder that *hantu* or *antu* (ghost in Peranakan patois) feature prominently in the Peranakan vocabulary. It is not uncommon to hear a bibik (elderly nonya) call another bibik *si anuh* when she actually means bibik *si hantu* (literally, speaking of the devil)! Mothers chide their children, exclaiming *jahat macham Iblis!* (naughty like the Devil).

## GHOST STORIES

As a child, I was always excited to listen to my grandmother's *cerita* (stories) *hantu-hantu*. Everything may escape my ears but not her ghost stories.

### To see spirits

My grandmother said if you wet your eyes with the tears of a dog, and wear the *kopia kang-satay* (farmer's hat) where you peep through the weave-holes, you can see spirits. If you can't get this *kopia*, try any holey basket or *tudong saji* (bamboo food cover).

### Gamblers' luck

60 years ago, my grandmother's brother, the *hantu judi* or *puak-kwee* (compulsive gambler) of the family, heeded the advice of a friend on the surefire way to win *chap-ji-kee* (a kind of lottery). He tied seven coloured strings tightly to

the bud of a fruiting banana tree to "extort" winning numbers from the tree spirit by suffocation.

At almost 10 at night, he burst into the house screaming and dived under the bed! Interrogated by my great-grandmother, he confessed that on tying up the banana bud he almost immediately heard the tree screamed. She chided him to release the bud the very next morning. His luck was numbered, nonetheless.

### Beware of the cat

In the 1930s, the neighbourhood ice-seller returned home one day to find his mother had died. Her funeral wake was held at their kampong home. At night, nobody noticed a cat entering the house. The belief was that if a pregnant cat jumps over a corpse, it will rise from the dead. Suddenly, the mother's corpse sat up. Pandemonium! In the confusion, someone grabbed a bolster and threw it at the corpse. It fell backwards and was dead again.

### The grim reaper

This was my grandmother's own encounter in 1945 near the end of the Japanese Occupation. Grandfather had been sickly. One morning, she saw two shadowy figures entering the main door of the bungalow, carrying a long chain. One was thin and tall, the other short and stout. She screamed and ran out the back door, followed by shocked family members. When they returned to the house, my grandfather had departed. I suspect she had seen the Angels of Death, *Hei Bai Wu Chang*. But she had no knowledge of Chinese mythology! ☹



## HANTU GLOSSARY

My grandmother said there were many types of hantu. Here are just some. As bulan tujuh (7th lunar month) is around the corner, be safer than sorry.

### Pontianak

Spirit of a woman (mostly Malay) who dies at childbirth. Attracted to pregnant women and newborns. Insatiable lust for men, sucks life-blood from their genitals. Destroyed by nailing her head with a nail embedded with candlenut. When a nyonya says she *kasi dia, gua punya paku buah keras*, it is a derogatory reference to the other party as hantu (a pontianak, to be precise).

### Hantu polong

Spirit without a body, with bloodied entrails hanging as it flies. Known to stain white sheets left to dry at night and may get trapped by bamboo poles and clothes lines. Now you know why mothers say don't hang clothes at night.

### Hantu jerangkong

The fiercest, ugliest hantu who will savagely attack humans.

### Hantu tetek

Spirit with big breasts. Targets children by suffocating their faces between her breasts, ie *kena sumbat tetek*.

### Hantu galah

Tall and slender. Clamps you tightly with his long legs, like a pair of chopsticks, until you die of suffocation. Emerges from the earth. Best to avoid by lying flat on the ground.

### Hantu tak kepala

Headless spirit in search of its missing head. Likely to be a victim of decapitation.

### Hantu laut

Spirit of a victim drowned at sea. Seeks more souls for company...

### Hantu pokok

Banana and kapok trees are known to be the favourite playground of the spirits.

### Hantu perempuan

Female ghost who loves to sit on a swing at night. So best not to be on a swing at night.

### Wangi malam

If you smell but see no fragrant flowers at night, beware of spirits out at play.

### Datok bakol

Apparently, an aunt of mine knew how to invite the basket spirit to manifest itself on her *bakol siah*. She dressed up the *bakol* with a *baju*, rattled some chants and the basket would tremble. Relatives would scribble numbers on paper and put into the basket. Whichever number fell out would be used to buy *chap-ji-kee*. Too bad she is no longer around. I could have retired young.



# MOON FEVER

*As a child, **Ee Sin Soo** was greatly fascinated by the tales, superstitions and beliefs surrounding the Mid-Autumn Festival in the 8th month, when families gather for reunions and devotees flock to temples to worship the moon deity.*

**S**ince ancient times, the Chinese believe the moon is at its largest and brightest in mid-autumn, on the 15th night of the 8th lunar month (*bulan lapan*). The full moon is a symbol of reunion, abundance, harmony and luck.

With the harvest just done, it was the perfect occasion to celebrate what also came to be known as the Moon Cake Festival, a time to indulge in moon cakes galore and to regale children with tales of the "lady on the moon". Or to scare them with a litany of superstitions.

## LUNAR LEGENDS

### • The Moon Goddess Chang Er

Hou Yi, the archer and his beautiful wife, Chang Er, were sent by the Jade Emperor to earth as mortals to rectify the problem of his 10 disobedient sons being 10 suns shining all at once. Hou Yi shot nine suns with his magic arrows. The last sun promised to separate night from day and was spared. But the Emperor was furious. He barred the couple from returning to Heaven and Chang Er was unhappy that her immortality was not restored.

Hou Yi sought out the Royal Goddess on Kunlun Mountain, who gave him a pill to be taken on the 15th night of the 8th month, to ascend to Heaven. If halved and shared with Chang Er, both could live forever. The couple agreed. Three days before the 15th day, Hou Yi left for Tianshan Mountain to obtain the jade elixir of

eternal beauty, as a surprise for Chang Er. When the day came, he had not returned. In Chang Er's impatience, she swallowed the pill and ascended to the sky.

When Hou Yi arrived with the elixir, he watched helplessly from earth but he could not bear to shoot his wife. For abandoning her husband, Chang Er was banished to the cold Moon Palace to spend eternity alone, as the Moon Goddess.

### • The Jade Rabbit

Three sages disguised themselves as old men, begging for food from a fox, a monkey and a rabbit. The fox and the monkey gave them food. The rabbit, who had nothing, offered his own flesh by jumping into a fire to be cooked. Impressed by his sacrifice, the sages transformed him into the immortal Jade Rabbit.

The rabbit is seen pounding the elixir of immortality with a pestle and mortar beneath a grove of cassia trees. Legend has it that Hou Yi summoned the furry creature to be Chang Er's pet for the lonely days at the Moon Palace.

This is my favourite tale. As a child, I imagined my own toy rabbit pounding *sambal belachan* instead of the elixir.

### • Wu Kang the helper

Wu Kang was a useless chap who went to the







# SUPERSTITIONS AND BELIEFS

Try out one or two as a lark. Who knows!

mountains to be mentored by an immortal. Bored by the learning, he asked to go to a more exciting place. The furious immortal banished him to the Moon Palace. He could only return to Earth if he could chop down a huge cassia tree. Wu Kang chopped day and night but the magic tree restored itself with each blow. Wu Kang became Chang Er's helper, cooking and brewing wines for her.

## • The Moon Cake

The Chinese rebel leader Liu Fu Tong hatched a plot to overthrow the Mongols ruling China in the 13th century. Pretending to honour the Emperor's longevity, he was allowed to give moon cakes – which the Mongols did not eat – to friends during the Moon Festival. The special cakes had a message inside on the revolt on the 15th night of the 8th month. The plot was a success. Today, the mother of all cakes is eaten to symbolize the end of the Han Dynasty and the new reign of the Ming Dynasty. ☞

- To have perfect skin, cut a pomelo in front of the moon. Peeling off the thick pomelo skin symbolizes the removal of facial scars or pimples.
- To get rid of facial imperfections, peel off the skin of boiled mini yams.
- Never point at the moon during an eclipse or your ears will be cut off.
- Never point at the moon or your fingers will be crooked and your ears sliced off.
- Make your requests to the Heavenly Matchmaker deity, the Old Man under the Moon, who presides over earthly marriages. Pray to him for a 'red matrimonial thread' or, for women, apply rouge before him to find a quick match.
- To turn ordinary objects into gold, gaze at the moon to sight the Eight Immortals leaving the moon palace on mid-autumn night in a dragon boat.
- A lunar eclipse is considered a bad celestial sign. Beat drums and gongs to scare the heavenly dog or the dragon trying to eat up the moon, so the moon will be puked out.
- If the moon is ringed with a halo, it will rain.

Cantonese children were taught this song to urge people to dispose of offertory food after prayers.

*Siew yee um sat ling kok* If you don't throw away the water caltrops after burning incense

*Lei ah mah sang chye moh tau hock* Your mother would give birth to a son without a scalp

*Siew yee um sat farn* If you don't throw away the rice after burning incense

*Lei ah mah hor pau lan* Your mother's purse would be torn







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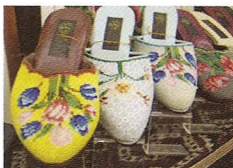


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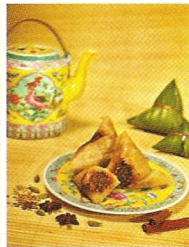
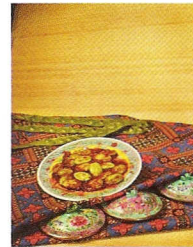
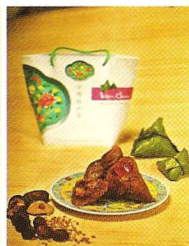
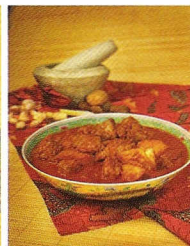
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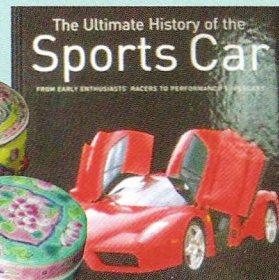
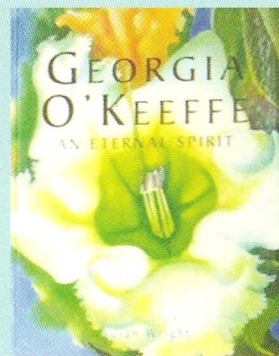
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# SEMBAYANG GUEK NEO

By Ee Sin Soo

*Worshipping the Moon Goddess at a vegetarian convent (chai tng perumpuan) in Singapore.*

On 18 September last year, the 15th day of the 8th month, I joined KT and his family for the Sembahyang Guek Neo, or prayers to the Moon Goddess, at the Sian Teck Tng Vegetarian Convent at 57 Cuppage Road. We were accompanied by the Kor Tai (Mother Superior) and his aunt, Poh Lan Ko.

A long altar was set up in the courtyard for devotees to pay homage in the Taoist tradition, praying to have their wishes fulfilled. Four groups of offerings went on the altar:

- A huge urn for joss sticks, flowers on each side, lotus roots, *bunga rampay*, oranges and apples.
- A mirror, hampers of cosmetics, perfumes, shampoos and other toiletries to be blessed for devotees' use, presumably to enhance their beauty and attractiveness to their beholders.
- Mini yams, pears, oranges, peaches, apples, grapes, plums, bananas, water melon, *buah lai*, pomelos, groundnuts, *mee suah*, rock sugar and homemade mooncakes with assorted fillings.
- Toiletries, starfruits, oranges, apples, grapes, a

pomelo, five bowls of vegetarian food, a bowl of sandal wood, teacups of tea and water, a mound of rice, candles and lacquer containers filled with sandalwood sticks and powder.

As the nuns get older, the altar offerings have been simplified, though no less auspicious, and always featuring the deity's favourite foods.

This time, though, mounds of *pek kweh* (gingko nuts) were missing. Usually, there would also have been water caltrops (black nuts shaped like buffalo heads with horns called *ling kok* - symbolising going overseas, starting out and being successful). Moving with the times, the toiletries reflected current popular brands.

Different dialect groups would have other offerings like mooncakes made of rice flour and sesame seed or soft *dodol*-like ones with sesame seeds. But the tradition practised here had a slight Peranakan twist with the *bunga rampay*, *mee suah* and rock sugar.

The nuns kindly took me on a tour of the convent and I was treated to tea and their home-made mooncakes. Simply delightful! ☺



Standing L to R: Ee Sin Soo, Tan Ban Huat, Terence Cheah, (the late) Uncle Robert Tan, Janice Tan and Christopher Lim.  
Seated L to R: Aunty Rosemary, Po Lan Ko, Kor Tai.  
On table: Delicious home-made mooncakes served fresh.

KT (at end of table) praying at Cuppage Temple.





# GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

By Noreen Chan

**F**rom the time of Confucius, it was customary for children to show respect for their deceased parents by going through an appropriate mourning period. It was believed that the spirits of the departed continued to require the basic necessities such as food, money and shelter. Those deprived of such comforts would become hungry ghosts, causing mischief when let loose on the world of the living. This is why people *sembayang hantu* or make offerings during the 7th moon to propitiate wandering spirits. It is also considered bad luck to begin a new business venture, get married or move house during this time.

## **Tuaha or mourning rituals**

Following a death in the family, rituals for the departed person were held on the 7th, 49th and 100th day after the death. The 1st anniversary would also be marked, sometimes with a *khong teck* or special prayers and ceremonies held in a temple.

It was customary for Peranakan families to mourn for three years. Even the colours of the clothes worn were restricted – first year, black; second year, black and white; third year, blue for six months and green for the next six. No gold could be worn. So women used silver jewellery decorated with jade, pearls or onyx (or diamonds if they were wealthy).

Nowadays most people will *buka tuaha* (stop mourning) after 100 days. In traditional families, engaged couples might face the difficult choice of getting married within the 100 days, or put off the wedding for three years!

## **Remembering the departed**

It was customary to honour the *nenek moyang* (or ancestors) on the 14th day of the 7th month with no fewer than 12 dishes. Nowadays four is

the more usual number. In my grandmother's time, a typical selection might include:

1. *Pongteh Babi*
2. *Pongteh Ayam*
3. *Chap Chye Anchor*
4. *Chap Chye Bulat* (similar to ordinary chap chye, except that a small head of cabbage or kobis is left whole)
5. *Char Bek* (kidneys cooked with ginger)
6. *Hati Babi* (minced liver and pork balls, flavoured with coriander and wrapped in caul)
7. *Pong Tauhu*
8. *Kaki Babi* (pig knuckle)
9. *Purut Babi* (pig stomach)
10. *Sarang Burong* (literally, bird's nest – shredded pork skin cooked with garlic)
11. *Char Tee Hee* (pig lung, usually finely sliced and cooked with shredded bamboo shoots)
12. *Babi Tauyu* (belly pork cooked with soya sauce)

These would be in addition to the *sam seng* – a whole chicken, duck and piece of pork – and achar, fried fish and a prawn dish like *udang goreng assam*. A table would be set up with all these offerings, fruit, a small stand with rock sugar, settings with rice and often wine or tea. Of course, only blue-and-white porcelain was used, as these were prayers for the deceased.

## **A personal touch**

Regular readers of this column will know that my grandmother passed away last August, on the 3rd day of the 7th month. We prepare for her *see ki*, which falls in late July. During *Cheng Beng*, a separate table – besides the two for my parent's ancestors – was set up for her. As a "first-timer", she had the privilege of having her favourite dishes cooked for her, with durian and kopi-o!







# AN IDENTITY MILESTONE

The very first comprehensive compendium of our language is out in the bookshops!

By Peter Lee

It has been an eight-year labour of love for the author, William Gwee Thian Hock, who began meticulously compiling by hand, a long list of Baba words more than eight years ago. By the time Uncle Gwee showed the list to me, it had been meticulously typed up by his friend, Carolyn Lim Swee Lian. I brought the draft back to our committee, which unanimously agreed to support the publication of this comprehensive word list. Six years and many, many revisions later, the book is finally out in the shops.

Why so many revisions? Uncle Gwee is a perfectionist, and one does not write a dictionary overnight. In fact we had to put a stop to it, otherwise it would be a never ending process. I hope that this book is merely a milestone in an ongoing endeavour, and that God-willing we will see many more editions of this treasure. Many issues had to be worked out with him, such as standardizing the Baba Malay spelling, the difficulty in translating some words, and the almost impossible task of researching the etymology and origin of many words.

One fascinating aspect for me, as the editorial coordinator of the project in its early days, was to find the Chinese characters for the Hokkien words, many of which were no longer in use. This would not have been possible without the assistance of two volunteers who generously gave many hours of their time to find the necessary words — Robert Tan Chew Beng and Liew You Choo.

"A dictionary had never been done before and I thought it was such a pity that we have a language but we don't have a dictionary," explains the author, a sprightly, reserved man who lives in a lovely East Coast house almost engulfed by a profusion of flowering plants. "I also want to encourage people to use the language. I feel it is necessary to standardise a Peranakan style of spelling that I feel reflects the way we pronounce the words. It helps to give us our sense of identity."

The author also emphasised, "Two simple facts were especially motivating for me: firstly, dictionaries help to keep a language alive, and secondly, a culture dies when its language is abandoned."

When the draft was almost ready, it was shown to Eric Oey of Periplus Publishing. He was enthusiastic about it, as his company has been publishing dictionaries of Asian and 'obscure' languages for some time. The Association committee felt that a publisher with such

international standing as Periplus would ensure the dictionary would reach a wider, global audience. ☺

Copies of William Gwee's earlier work, "Mas Sepuloh - Baba Conversational Gems", are also available at our Association office (price:\$10).

**Name the author and the publisher of the Baba Malay Dictionary. Five dictionaries to be won for the first five correct entries to be received by email to [inquiries@periplus.com.sg](mailto:inquiries@periplus.com.sg).**



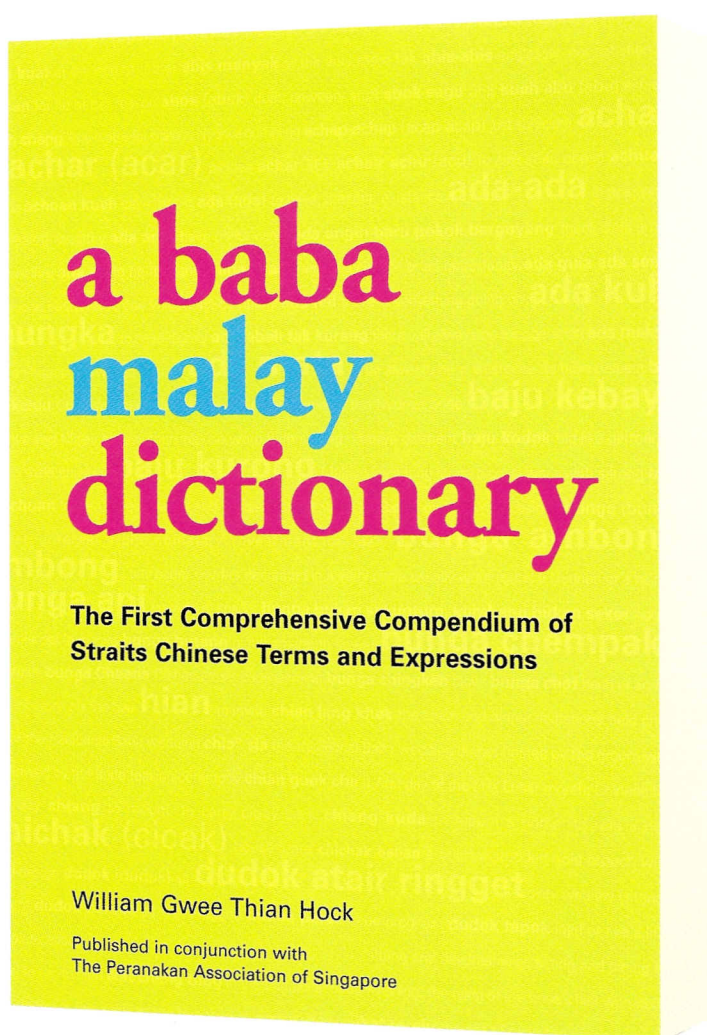
*William Gwee Thian Hock is also the author of A Nyonya Mosaic (1985) and Mas Sepuloh — Baba Conversational Gems (1993). He has produced, directed and written the scripts for several Peranakan plays as well as composed many songs, some of which are sung by our very own Peranakan Voices choir.*



*Sama sekali janganlah lupa  
Bahasa Baba bahasa kita  
Dictionary idopkan bahasa  
Marilah sambot Dictionary Baba*

*Bahasa iau kin kepada bangsa  
Bahasa jugak nyawa budaya  
Kalu kita buangkan bahasa  
Budaya tentu nanti binasa*

*by author William Gwee*



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# CHITTY MELAKA LIVE ON

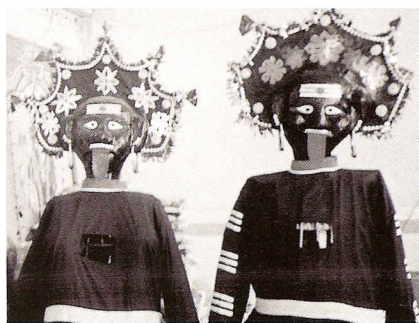
By Linda Chee

**A**s a child, my few memories of the Chitty were of the kindly Indian ladies who *pakai sarong* just like my mother and grandmother. Who spoke Malay just like me, a Peranakan Chinese. And who lived in Malacca as close friends of my many aunts and uncles, most of who have since passed on.

What has become of the Chitty of yesteryear? I often wondered but did not go beyond. It is heartening then, that Samuel Dhoraisingam has written a gem of a book, *Peranakan Indians of Singapore and Melaka*, on the small and fast-shrinking community that exists today mostly in Gajah Berang, Malacca.

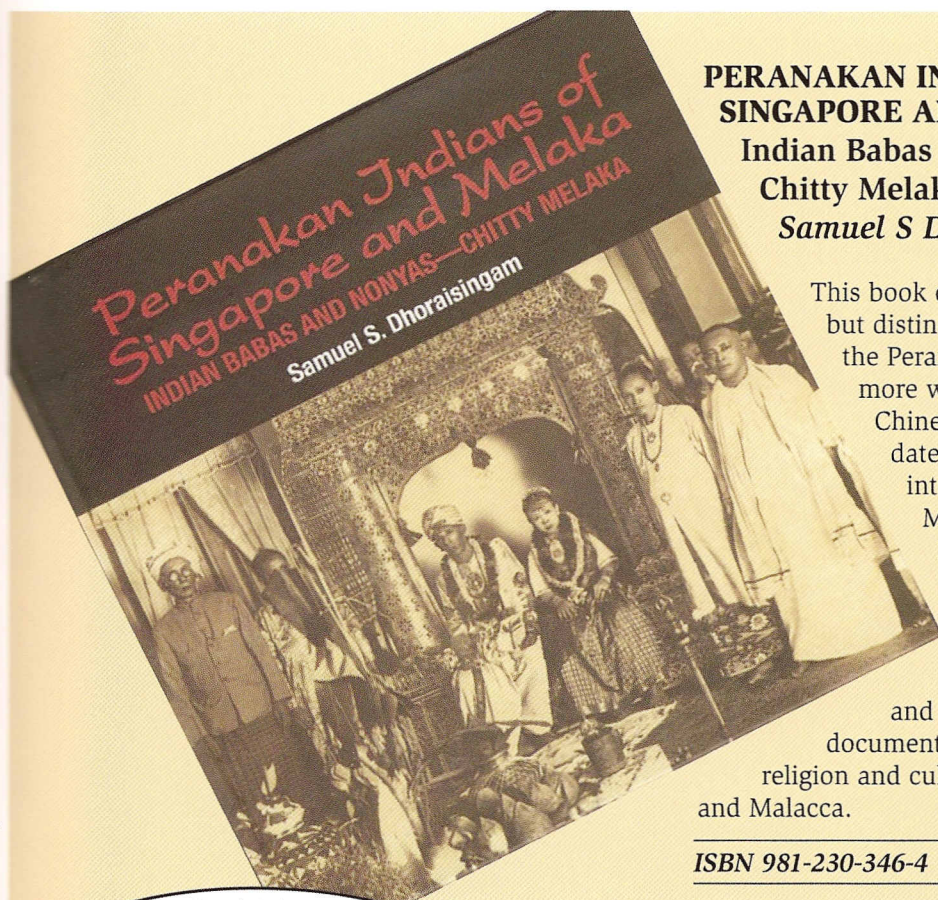
Descendants of South Indian merchants who settled in Malaya almost four centuries ago, the Peranakan Indian community became known as Chitty Melaka. They cherish their orthodox Hindu faith and life largely centres around the temple. Dhoraisingam records the origin,

history and culture of their unique heritage. While photographic quality could be better, the book has a remarkable spread of photographs documenting Peranakan Indian wedding ceremonies and attire, including an account of a marriage with a Peranakan Chinese bride.



His documentation is most interesting for its meticulous detailing of quaint similarities and contrasts with the Peranakan Chinese. He points out instances where Malay traditions and folklore have evolved into customs that Peranakan Indians call their own. Examples like the *Sembayang Dato Chachar* and *hantu tetek* (centre), use of *bunga rampai*, main *cherki*, enjoying

the *ronggeng*, reciting *pantuns* and *dondang sayang* at traditional weddings. Clothes, jewellery and footwear were also similar, especially among the women. Get the book to find out too, about what's common and yet unique about Peranakan Indian cuisine. ☼



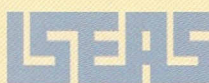
## PERANAKAN INDIANS OF SINGAPORE AND MELAKA Indian Babas and Nonyas - Chitty Melaka Samuel S Dhoraisingam

New from  
**ISEAS**

This book offers a glimpse into an almost unknown but distinct community in Singapore and Malaysia: the Peranakan Indians. Overshadowed by the larger, more widespread and more influential Peranakan Chinese, this tightly knit community likewise dates back to early colonial merchants who intermingled with and married local Malays in Malacca. Most Peranakan Indians are Saivite Hindus, speak a version of Malay amongst themselves, and have a cuisine influenced by all three major cultures of Malaysia and Singapore (Malay, Indian, Chinese). Bringing together original interviews and archival material, this accessible book documents the all-but-forgotten history, customs, religion and culture of the Peranakan Indians of Singapore and Malacca.

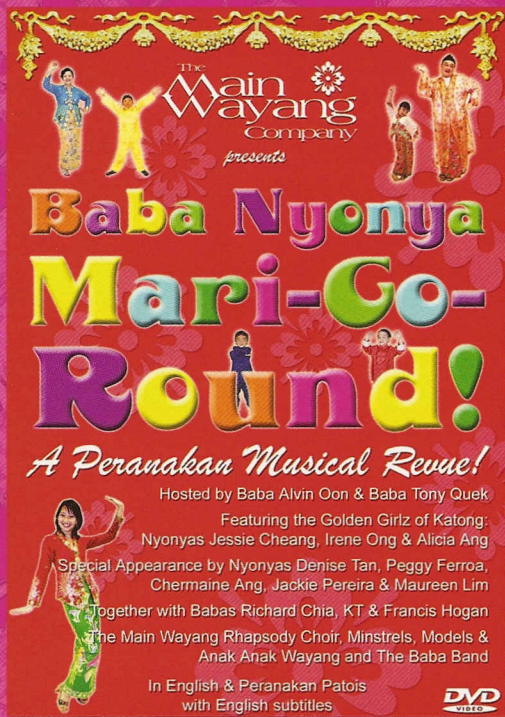
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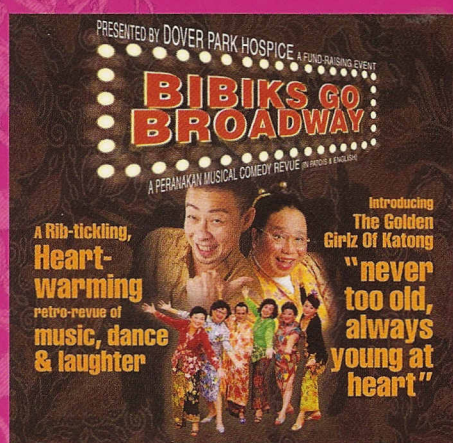
## *Baba Nyonya Mari-Go-Round! DVD*

Our latest Peranakan Musical Comedy Revue on DVD! A high energy show filled with skits, festive songs and non-stop Joget music! Starring our Bibiks & Golden Girlz of Katong, The Main Wayang Rhapsody, The Young Minstrels, our in-house Nyonya Super-Models and a special tribute to our dearest Nyonya Sally Gan! (with English subtitles)



## *Mari Jolly Jolly! CD*

Having a house party and no Peranakan songs to sing & dance to? This is your 'must-have' music CD for every Baba home! Old & new songs you can play all year round & still tak jelak! Plus 2 specially recorded songs by our dearest Nyonya Sally Gan; 'Nyonya Pakay Bunga' & 'Tri La Li La!' and new songs like 'Happy New Year!', 'Mari Merengue!', 'Ho Mia Lah Lu', 'Baba Nyonya Cha Cha Cha' & more!



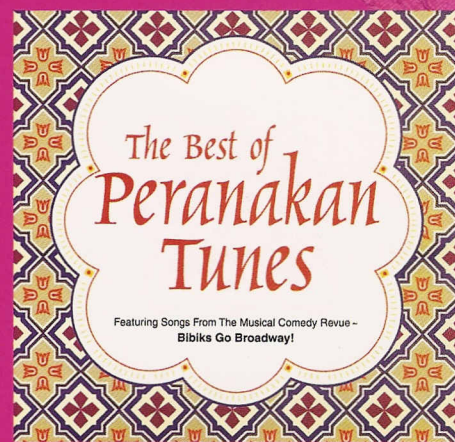
## *Bibiks Go Broadway! VCD*

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# BABA CULTURE ON A NATIONAL STAGE

*A Peranakan weekend at the Singapore Arts Festival 2006.*



**O**n a fun, festive Peranakan weekend of 10 to 11 June, the Main Wayang Company presented their Baba Nyonya HIsTory and HERitage at the Arts House as part of the Singapore Arts Festival 2006.

The brief from the Arts Council was, in Main Wayang director Richard Tan's words, "to present a refreshing and interactive way of presenting our Baba culture and heritage, that had to be innovative,

modern, entertaining and filled with lots of warmth and heart! We gathered a wonderful team of dedicated performers, presenters and volunteers. In a snap, over a hundred 'kakis' and 'kawans' from 5 to 75 years old came together to give their best."

Over that weekend 22 events took place at the Arts House and at the Asian Civilisations Museum at Empress Place, including kebaya fashion shows, a bazaar, choir performances by the Young Nyonyas of Marymount Convent, batik, embroidery and beadwork demonstrations, interactive games such as *chongkak*, five-stones and learning how to wrap a *kueh chang*.

The highlights were the *joget* party, a *lap chye* parade on the riverside (nyonyas bearing the lap chye or traditional gifts exchanged by the bride's and groom's families) and an elaborate Baba wedding procession complete with *seronee* player (A real *seronee* player has not been seen at a Baba wedding demonstration for many years). Main Wayang ordered a new set of bridal robes, embroidered in China, for the event.

*Recently there has been confusion among members and the public whether Main Wayang Company is affiliated to The Peranakan Association. Both are totally separate entities. Main Wayang is an independent Peranakan theatre and arts group. ☞*





# PERANAKAN COUTURE

NAFA fashion incubator launch



The urban Singapore nonya: Multi-talented, well-bred and intelligent. Cultured, cosmopolitan and a career professional in Bohemian chic. Bestowed with Southeast Asian beauty, she loves beautiful clothes and jewellery, effortlessly mixing and matching designer creations with Peranakan heirlooms and the latest accessories.

Conceptually defined, Peranakan couture was elevated to another dimension at the launch of a new fashion gallery by the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) School of Fashion Studies on 10 March 2006. Some 50 kebayas with matching sarongs went on the runway. Embroidered and beaded, the sensual silhouette of the modern sarong kebaya showed off rich hues of emperor yellows, citrus greens, plum-blossom pinks and dusty lavenders mixed with white, red and gold metallic accents.

Mr Choo Thiam Siew, President of NAFA, said: "The Kajima Fashion Boutique Gallery signifies a new chapter not just for NAFA, but also the grooming of the next generation of fashion talents in Singapore." The gallery aims to be a fashion incubator to forge a spirit of entrepreneurship in NAFA students and alumni.

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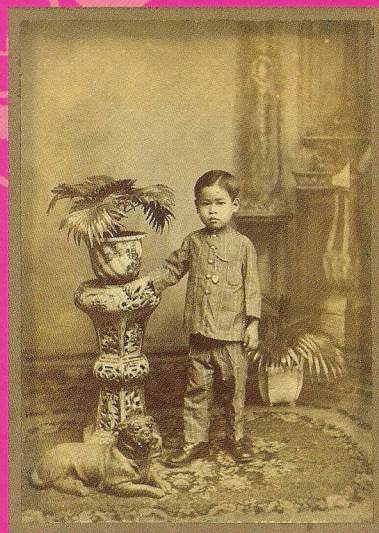


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## A TREASURE TROVE OF VINTAGE COLLECTIBLES

Peranakan beaded items, silver, early photographs, out-of-print books, advertising signs, clocks, cameras, tin toys and many more exciting finds



### THE HERITAGE SHOP

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

# FOR THE NYONYA

By Linda Chee

# FOR THE HOME

1. Suasa 9k gold carved hairpins in a complete set of seven pins, \$2,500
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3. Goldplated silver belt, buckle with chi ling motif, \$280
4. Silver belt, buckle with pierced and chased chi ling motif, \$450
5. Silver belt, buckle with chi ling motif, \$200
6. Silver belt, buckle with chi ling and phoenix motifs, \$650

Hand-blown Venetian glass vases in brilliant colours. Heights: from 6 – 12 inches. Believed to be produced between the 19th and 20th centuries. Prices from \$80 - \$250. From The Heritage Shop.

Photos by Colin Chee





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\*U. Scherdin, S. Presto, F. Rippke, J. Nielsen, M. Strassner, A. Imadojemu, E. Gärtner, A. Herperts, H.C. Korting, S. Bielefeld: In vivo assessment of the efficacy of an innovative face care system in subjects with mild acne vulgaris. IntCosmSci 2004, 221-229.



The Peranakan Association proudly presents its 106th Anniversary Dinner & Dance, an evening of live big band music for babas and nyonyas to swing, jive and rock & ronggeng the night away!



**PERANAKAN  
BANDSTAND**

**Date:** Friday, 6 October 2006  
**Venue:** The Orchard Hotel, Main Ballroom  
**Time:** 6.00 p.m. till late  
**Price:** Standard Table for 10 \$880.00 nett  
 Donation Table for 10 \$1500.00 and above  
 Per Person \$88.00 nett

**Contact:** Mrs Lim Geok Huay at 6255 0704.

### Bunga Sayang at the Esplanade

Coming together in the true spirit of Peranakans, 26 of our members have volunteered their time to stage a wedding procession at the Esplanade Theatre on 7 & 8 July, as the Association chips in to celebrate National Racial Harmony Month. Titled Bunga Sayang, the performance will be part of a musical concert called Soundwaves, staged by the People's Association.

Veteran playwright and artiste GT Lye is choreographing the procession where the complex hybrid world of the Peranakans will be unveiled. From our Peranakan youths, Joycelin Huang and Emeric Lau will play the roles of demure bride and groom.

### New Peranakan Matriarch in Homesick

Come and meet modern matriarch Patricia Koh (Neo Swee Lin) and her family at Wild Rice's Singapore Theatre Festival, from 2 – 6 August at the Drama Centre @ National Library. Alfian Sa'at's new dark comedy, Homesick, deals with SARS, secrets, sibling rivalry, staying and quitting. Just regular family stuff – except it threatens to erupt into World War III! Homesick's all-star cast includes Lim Kay Siu, Remesh Panicker and Chermaine Ang. [www.singaporetheatrefestival.com](http://www.singaporetheatrefestival.com)

### Ode to nonya aristocracy

Over at the Tanglin Club, the Association is presenting a parade of Peranakan fashion and song at a ladies' luncheon on 21 September. Besides a sarong tying demonstration and performance by The Peranakan Voices, club members and their guests will get to sing and joget along with the rhythm.

### OUR MEMBERS

A big welcome to our new members:

1. Mrs Josephine Eber
2. Mr Ito Kimio
3. Ms Jenny Kho Aye Gek
4. Mdm Molly Khoo Saw See
5. Capt. Francis Koh
6. Ms Low Whee Hoon
7. Mr Maurice Neo
8. Mrs Yvonne Pereira

Our deepest condolences to the families of these members who have passed on:

1. Mr Kwek Chip Leng, Charles
2. Mr Quek Liang Chua

### We want your e-mail address!

The Peranakan Association is building up our online membership database so that we can have faster and more efficient correspondence with as many members as possible. Please send your email addresses to Mrs Lim Geok Huay at [enquiries@peranakan.org.sg](mailto:enquiries@peranakan.org.sg). Thanks very much!

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# THE PERANAKAN GUIDE

## SINGAPORE

### MUSEUMS

#### ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

Visit the Mary and Philbert Chin Gallery at the ACM Empress Place to view some outstanding pieces of Peranakan gold jewellery. The ACM at Armenian Street, which housed most of the Museum's Peranakan artefacts, is closed for renovations. It will soon be transformed into a dedicated Peranakan museum. *Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555, Tel: 63327798, Opening Hours: 1pm to 7pm (Mondays), 9am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Sundays), 9am to 9pm (Fridays), Admission \$8 (adults) \$4 (students and senior citizens), \$4 (adults on Fridays 7pm-9pm), \$2 (students and senior citizens on Fridays 7pm to 9pm)*  
<http://www.nhb.gov.sg/ACM>.

#### MUSEUM, CENTRE FOR THE ARTS, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

To celebrate the university's centennial, the Museum currently has an exhibition, *The NUS Story: 100 Years of Heritage*, which explains how Peranakans were instrumental with their donations in establishing what has since become the university. *Museums, NUS Centre for the Arts, University Cultural Centre Annex, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent, National University of Singapore, Singapore 119279, Tel: 65164 617, Opening Hours: 10am to 5pm (Mondays to Saturdays), Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays, Admission is FREE*  
[http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/exhibitions\\_sseac.htm](http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/exhibitions_sseac.htm)

#### THE TAN CHENG LOCK BABA HOUSE

— coming soon! This new heritage house museum in Neil Road will open in 2007. Meanwhile you can 'visit' the house on-line at  
<http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/baba/index.html> and watch the video clip.

### LANDMARKS

#### AMOY STREET AND TELOK AYER STREET

Perhaps the oldest Peranakan enclave. Many Peranakans from Malacca moved to this area as soon as the East India Company began to lease out land for sale.

#### BLAIR PLAIN

A typical Peranakan residential area around Blair Road, Spottiswoode Park, Neil Road and New Bridge Road that is worth a stroll. Visit *Guan Antiques* nearby at Kampong Bahru Road, a treasure trove of Peranakan heirlooms.

[http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/design\\_studio/dds2b/blair/study/Blair.html](http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/design_studio/dds2b/blair/study/Blair.html)

#### EMERALD HILL ROAD

Another interesting residential district showcasing the best of eclectic Peranakan domestic architecture, just off Orchard Road.

#### KATONG AND JOO CHIAT

Perhaps the nerve centre of Peranakan life in Singapore. In its heyday it was the site of grand seaside villas and elaborate Peranakan terraced houses. The latter can still be seen in a walk around Koon Seng Road. Also visit Peranakan shops such as *Katong Antique House* (208 East Coast Road) and *Rumah Bebe* (113 East Coast Road) as well as the great variety of Peranakan restaurants along the same street.

[http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what\\_to\\_see/suburban\\_living/katong.html](http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html)

#### TAN KIM SENG FOUNTAIN

This Victorian fountain was erected in Fullerton Square in 1882 by the colonial Municipal Council to commemorate the vision, philanthropy and civic leadership of Tan Kim Seng, who in 1857 donated \$13,000 towards a project to supply water from Bukit Timah to the town. In 1925 the fountain was moved to its present location on the original Esplanade. At the opening ceremony, the President of the Municipal Commission, Thomas Scott, said, "Without Tan Kim Seng's generous

gift, probably our water supply would have been a thing of the future instead of an accomplished fact." *Tan Kim Seng Fountain, Queen Elizabeth Walk.*

#### TAN SI CHONG SU

The Tan Si Chong Su is the ancestral temple for those with the surname Tan. Built between 1876 and 1878, the temple was built with funds donated mainly by two Baba philanthropists, Tan Kim Ching (1824-1892), scion of Tan Tock Seng who founded the Pauper's Hospital that later became Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and Tan Beng Swee (1828-1884), the son of tycoon Tan Kim Seng. The first president of the temple was another prominent Baba, shipowner Tan Kim Tian (no relation to the other Tans). It is built in an ornate southern Chinese architectural style, with its characteristic curving eaves and elaborate stone and wood carvings in the interior. The temple mainly houses the spirit tablets of members of the Tan clan. But as it is a traditional Chinese belief that anyone with the same surname is ultimately related, the clan comprises quite a wide range of people with the Tan surname. *Tan Si Chong Su, 15 Magazine Road.*

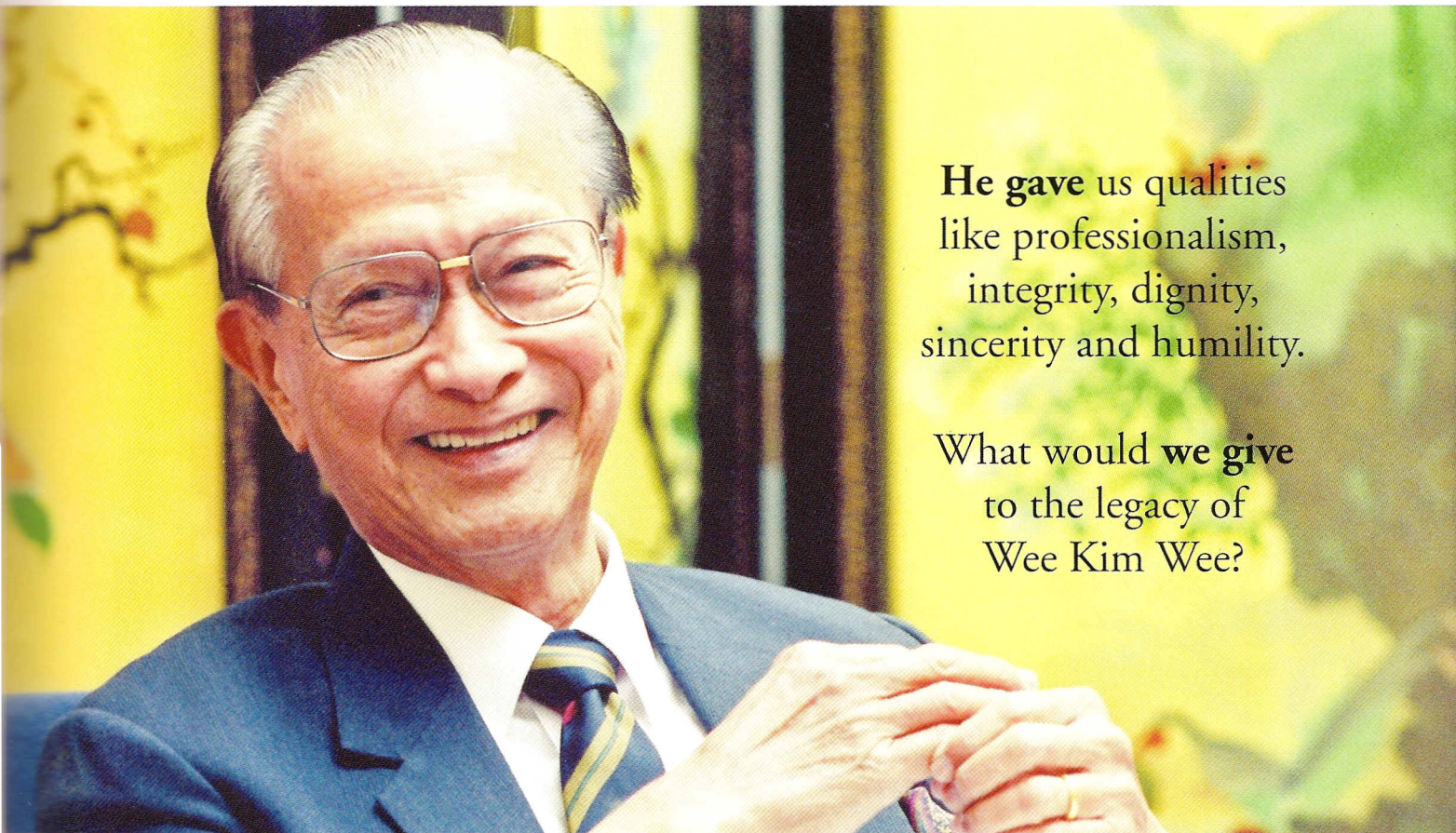
#### THIAN HOCK KENG

The oldest Hokkien temple in Singapore was founded in 1821 although the present structure, built without nails, was completed only in 1841. The temple is dedicated to Mazu, the Daoist goddess of the sea and protector of all seamen. Many of the temple's patrons were Peranakan pioneers, such as Tan Tock Seng, who donated \$30,000 for renovations. He also founded the hospital named after him. The Hokkien Huay Kuan, a community organisation for Hokkien people in Singapore was housed at the temple and also helmed by Peranakan pioneers. *Thian Hock Keng, 158 Telok Ayer Street, Tel: 64234616*

*If you come across other Peranakan locations of interest in Singapore and countries beyond, please share with us, [enquiries@peranakan.org.sg](mailto:enquiries@peranakan.org.sg).*



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