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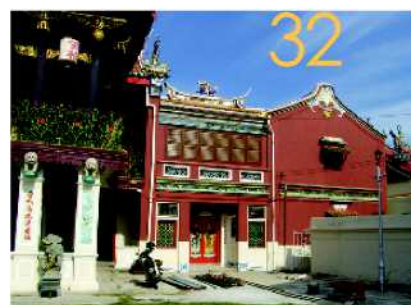
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CELEBRATION!

By Linda Chee

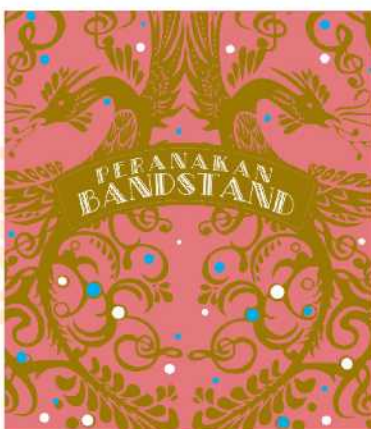
Dear Babas and Nyonyas

This is a grand bumper issue that breaks records for The Peranakan magazine. Never ever have we, in our history, hit 44 pages!

Kamsiah banyak banyak (a big thank you) to all our sponsors, advertisers, writers, members and supporters who have made it a point to contribute to the Peranakan heritage and culture. With your encouragement, the team behind the magazine is more inspired and charged up to give you even better quality for many more quarters ahead. We hope for the magazine to play a key role in the Peranakan renaissance, in which all things and themes unique to our origin are celebrated and sustained into future generations.

We realise that many think this is a tall order. But being Peranakan is about recognising the diversity of heritage and roots, and celebrating them all. It's a brand that we are proud to belong to. Yes, many younger Babas and Nyonyas are not well versed in our customs and *patois*. But the fact is that they, including my two children, are now claiming the Peranakan "ethnicity" as their own. In this spirit, it is heartening enough for us at the magazine to push on, to see meaning in our relevance to Singapore society.

Milestones like William Gwee's new Baba Malay Dictionary, the first ever in history, make the difference. Our 106th Dinner & Dance is in its own way another annual milestone and occasion to celebrate our uniqueness. To commemorate the D&D theme of *Peranakan Bandstand!*, Peter Lee brings to this issue a remarkable account of Baba musical groups since the turn of the 20th century to present day. From enjoying quaint ditties like My



Old Kentucky Home to *dondang sayang*, *keronchong* and more, music is indeed integral to our psyche.

So are all things richly elaborate and colourful, like Peranakan-style weddings. In recent years, women young and old have been trooping to Katong and Arab Street to buy kebayas and sarongs to dress up for special occasions. More couples getting married are opting for tradition, a trend we think is popular enough to devote a whole section to such weddings.

The rich Peranakan heritage is also at the heart of Colin Chee's report on revitalising Joo Chiat as the nerve centre of our culture. Many of you have memories of growing up in Joo Chiat. Click into the residents' new community website. In December, join in Singapore's first ever Peranakan Christmas Light-up at Katong and Joo Chiat!



We have other interesting topics in this year-end issue. Among them is the Tang Chek Festival to celebrate the ending of winter. Also, Penang as a Peranakan hub, tourist trail and *tempat semayang* (place of worship).

Before we close 2006, all of us at *The Peranakan* would like to wish our readers a Merry Christmas, Selamat Hari Raya, a Happy Deepavali and a Happy New Year.

Enjoy!

The Editor of The Peranakan 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.

DATOK BAKOL

The previous issue of *The Peranakan* mentioned Datok Bakol (Basket Deity) in a list of spirits believed to be evil, as derived from Malay beliefs. Except that Datok Bakol, which is of Chinese origin, is a good spirit. To the Peranakans, datok is generic for the spirits or gods they worship, regardless of male or female e.g. Tua Pek Kong, who looks after people's welfare, is male. Datok Bakol is female. Good Friday is Hari Datok Mati. The Catholic ritual of kissing the feet of Jesus on Good Friday is *chium kaki datok*. But Jesus Christ is Tuan Esah.

As a child, I was told of the legend of a girl who was orphaned as a toddler. Her elder brother took her in but she was badly treated by his wife. One day she was so hungry she looked for leftovers in the swill bin. Falling in headlong, she suffocated to death. Because her heart was pure she became a child deity. Women consulted her for lucky numbers in Chap Ji Ki (12-number betting game). In the old days Chap Ji Ki was illegal and the prize was 10 times the bet. The smallest bet was 10 cents.

No temple or image of Datok Bakol exists for worship. She is represented by a small bakol sia (bamboo basket) which is held by two women while a mantra is chanted. She is supposed to be shy of men so no man must be present for the mantra to work. The basket must be new, about nine inches wide and a foot tall. With the chanting, the basket will shake forward and backward, even violently. It takes an expert to hold the basket so that things do not get out of hand. Only after the basket starts moving, can men be allowed in.

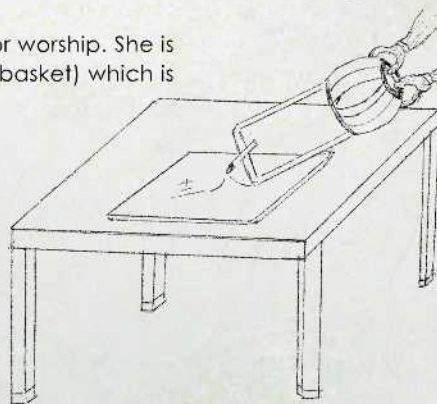
At the top of the basket is affixed a pencil or Chinese paintbrush for the spirit to write

numbers. She may be asked for the birthday of someone around and it would be revealed accurately. When the session ends, a mantra would be chanted to send the spirit off. The basket is then put aside for later use.

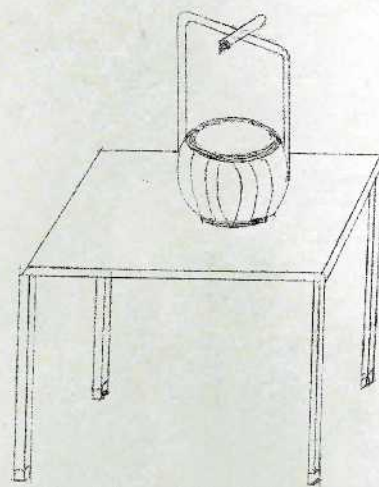
In the 1940s a nyonya in Katong had a Datok Bakol in her home. She consulted the spirit often for Chap Ji Ki. Eventually she stopped sending it off and kept the basket on an altar like a Chinese deity. She claimed to have dreamt of Datok Bakol teaching her how to interpret answers from the basket's movements to questions about problems like ill luck, exams and business prosperity. She charged devotees a nominal fee or *ang pow*. Her home became a "temple" for Datok Bakol until she passed away in the 1960s.

Perhaps someone who knows the mantra can come forward to teach others.

Tanah Kuning



The Bakol is tilted to write a lucky number.



Front view of the Bakol.

KAM SIAH FROM MAIN WAYANG

The Main Wayang Company would like to say a big KAMSIAH to Baba Peter Lee and Nyonya Linda Chee, the editors of *The Peranakan*, for so graciously featuring our 2006 Arts Festival event 'Baba Nyonya HISTory & HERitage' in your previous issue. It has made our hard work to preserve our Baba culture most worthwhile. Though we are an independent theatre and arts group, at the end of the day, we are all *sama sama jugak* a Peranakan community. Our shared heritage will only grow together as we all have common goals to promote our culture in so many different and creative ways.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our cultural adviser Baba William Gwee (author of the *Baba Malay dictionary*) for helping us to stage the *Baba Wedding*. William was instrumental in staging the 1985 Arts Festival *Pileh Menantu* wedding pageant. We treasure his invaluable advice on the *Lap Chai* and *Kahwen Belarak* ceremonies. It was a wonderful learning journey for us.

As The Main Wayang is still very young, we continue

to welcome caring contributions and worldly wise advice from our experienced elders. We thank every one (all members of The Peranakan Association and Gunong Sayang Association) for helping to make this milestone event a success.

Over the last two decades, my portfolios as an artistic director, besides having served on the main committees of the PA and GSA, have been most encouraging and meaningful. Now with my very own Main Wayang group, I have come full circle. What I learnt from both associations has spurred and inspired me. Together with our *kakis & kawans*, we will work harder to bring many more exciting events and shows.

Who knows, in the near future, possible collaborations among us Babas and Nyonyas abound!

Baba Richard Tan

Artistic Director

The Main Wayang Company



The multi-varied colours of residences and shophouses in the Joo Chiat area.

REVITALISING JOO CHIAT

By Colin Chee

2008 - this is the year that residents, businesses and their Member of Parliament (MP) have set to restore Joo Chiat's reputation as a much-desired residential and business address as well as a living Peranakan heritage.

To get there, residents have embarked on a plan to pull more families, the young and respectable businesses into the neighbourhood.

Spearheaded by the Save Joo Chiat (SJC) Work Group, revitalisation initiatives for Joo Chiat have received broad-based support. The SJC and the Joo Chiat Citizen's Consultative Committee (CCC) have formed a joint task force to roll out some key programmes.

The plan has the backing of organisations including the Peranakan Association, the Eurasian Association and several neighbourhood and Christian organisations especially Cornerstone Community Services Centre. It also has the support of Khalid Mosque, MUIS (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, i.e. the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore), and the Singapore Heritage Society. We hope to get on board soon the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Hindu temple

at Ceylon Road and the Kwan Yin temple at Tembeling Road. We will approach schools, land lords and more businesses within the next few months.

Key law enforcement agencies have also been understanding. Most importantly, Joo Chia's revitalisation efforts have received constructive coverage in the media.

A key strategic consideration of the plan is to refocus public perception back to what Joo Chiat has been known for - its living heritage status, its unique Peranakan and Eurasian yet diverse personality, its unbeatable eateries, its extensive pre-war architecture, its creative energy, its traditional businesses.

To showcase Joo Chiat's little gems and potential to the world, SJC has launched a community website called www.myjoochiat.com (right). The website

has a Peranakan and Eurasian as well as kampung click-and-feel, colourful and refreshing. Already it has excited many stakeholders and we have the good fortune of support from many unexpected quarters.

The website design was created by three Temasek Polytechnic Information Technology School lecturers, one of whom is our very own PA (Peranakan Association) member, nyonya Josephine Tan-Eber. The site may double up as a community project as well as teaching tool for TP students. It has the support of the Joo Chiat CCC, the Peranakan and Eurasian associations, as well as the generosity of the Singapore Land Authority and Mighty Minds for use of their maps. We hope eventually to tie in with other stakeholders as well.

Another important activity to re-energise Joo Chiat is the new Christmas Light-Up at Katong and Joo

Chiat, which will have a distinct Peranakan theme in its debut year. Cornerstone Community Church, housed in the old Odeon Katong on East Coast Road, is leading the 22 - 24 December event organising it with the involvement of SJC and Joo Chiat CCC.

The Light-Up promises to be an exciting community event that will also involve the participation of the Peranakan and Eurasian Associations. We have tied in with the Orchard Road light up organisers, who will send seven floats into Joo Chiat on 22 December. Other programmes will include stage shows and music, concerts, food and snack stalls as well as fashion, art and craft stalls. As this is the debut year, we are keeping it small and manageable. ✱

Baba Colin Chee is the spokesman for the Save Joo Chiat (SJC) Work Group.



The new www.myjoochiat.com website takes pride in the Joo Chiat neighbourhood's rich Peranakan heritage.

The myjoochiat logo with its emblem of a butterfly breaking free, fragile in its beauty and strong in its determination to live. It is abundant in its wealth of heritage cultures, religions and ethnic groups - Peranakan, Eurasian, Chinese, Malay, Indian and, increasingly, Caucasian. Joo Chiat is all of these: a heady aromatic rempah of spices, smells and colours unique to Singapore and to the world.

All photographs by Colin Chee.





PERANAKAN MUSICAL GROUPS THROUGH THE AGES

By Peter Lee



Chia Keng Tye's orchestra in the garden (top) and the reception hall (above) of Rosedale, his mansion in Kiliney Road, c. 1922.

My grandmother Tan Guat Poh was an accomplished accordionist. She did not have a huge repertoire, but it included songs such as "I Kiss Your Hand, Madame", "Isle of Capri" and "Silver Threads Among The Gold". One of her favourite tunes, although she could not play it, was "Goodbye Dolly Gray", a pop song of 1900 composed during the time when soldiers from the West were sent off to South Africa to fight in the Boer War! Another favoured song was "Oh Donna Clara" from 1929, which was a tango written by a Polish composer!

Up to her old age, she would play the accordion every evening before dinner, accompanied by her daily stengah of whisky soda. Several aunts including one referred to as "Tachi Choo" could also play the accordion. My aunt Agnes Tan recalled, "Your grandmother, together with Mrs Lee Choon Guan and other cousins of hers would often get together and sing songs over glasses of whisky." One popular group song was "Swah Sway Kemorning", known to every Eurasian and Peranakan worth his or her salt, but which is actually a traditional Irish children's song, "So Early In The Morning".

My grandfather Lee Chim Huk, although he had never in his life seen a cotton field in the 'Deep South', loved Stephen Foster songs such as "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Black Joe". A great grandaunt, Lee Geok Kin (sister of early 20th century tycoon and philanthropist Lee Choon Guan) used to accompany him on the piano or violin.

Seroni and Dondang Sayang

These memories always led me to believe that many Peranakan homes in the 19th century must have been filled with music. Traditionally, music was heard during important rites of passage such as weddings and funerals. Making the loudest din of all was the *seroni* (a trumpet

of Turkish origin) band, consisting of five musicians playing the large *seroni*, the large drum, small drum, cymbal and gong. There was also another *seroni* ensemble, the *seroni kechik* band, with musicians playing the small *seroni*, the small drum, the *swilin* flute and cymbals. The sound of the *seroni* can only be described as a painful wail or a never-ending ambulance siren, but when sensitively played may have a poignant, plaintive quality. There may have been several Babas in the past who knew how to play the *seroni*. The last one was the late Mr Yeo Kim Swee of Tranquerah, Malacca, who passed away quite a few years ago.

Another ensemble appearing at such occasions was the *dondang sayang* band, comprising a group of musicians playing one or two drums (*rebana*), a viola (*biola*) and a gong, and sometimes accompanied by a drum, tambourine and flute. The mixture of Eastern and Western instruments points to an archaic cosmopolitan musical form with vestiges of Portuguese influence. In *dondang sayang* two singers improvise rendering verses, one after the other, on a wide range of topics. A session may be seductive, witty, humorous, or even sad, depending on the mood of the moment. Quite often such sessions would be interspersed with interludes of *joget* and *ronggeng* music mainly for dancing. Towards the end of the 19th century, the colonial government began encouraging the



The United Chinese Musical Association performed variety entertainment in aid of the Rangoon Road Fire Relief Fund in 1924.

development of moral, intellectual, athletic and artistic pursuits. One of the first organisations to be set up was the Straits Chinese Recreation Club (1885), which promoted lawn tennis, cricket and other athletic sports. In 1891, several Babas established the Straits Chinese National Football Association.

The movement was also not restricted to academia, sports and the arts. In the 1890s several eminent Babas set up the Straits Chinese Reform Party, which sought to discard the queue or pigtail worn by all Chinese under the Manchu imperial government. In 1900, the Straits Chinese British Association (former name of The Peranakan Association) was incorporated to, among other aims, promote an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire, and to promote the social, intellectual and moral welfare of Chinese British subjects.

Musical Heydays

However in 1909, the Rev. W Murray still bemoaned, "What is conspicuously wanting among the Straits Chinese is any genuine interest in clubs which aim at moral and intellectual improvement." Almost as if in response to his call, several associations were established, among them the Straits Chinese Football Association (1911) and the Straits Chinese Literary Association (1911)

On musical developments, one of the first bands to be

mentioned as a result of this 'campaign' was a certain Drum and Fife Band (!), comprising the grandchildren of tycoon Tay Geok Teat, which played at the Straits Chinese Recreation Club's Chinese New Year Sports Day at Telok Ayer from 1893 to 1895. It must have been truly a surreal sight!

In 1904 several Baba residents of Cornwall Street formed the Cornwall Minstrels, which performed at several soirées. Song Ong Siang described their first anniversary at the old Town Hall, *"The room had been tastefully decorated for the occasion and looked very inviting. The young Straits Chinese who composed the Minstrels were in smart fancy costumes, and rendered English comic songs in a very creditable manner, while the orchestra played some pretty selections extremely well. The Hall was filled with an audience largely composed of Straits Chinese, including their womenfolk. Mr Chua Sim Ghi had to respond to a demand for an encore for his rendering of 'A Little Bit Off The Top', as also had Mr Chong Poh Kiat, who sang 'My First Wife'... During 1905 and 1906 the troupe was very much in evidence, appearing as entertainers on numerous occasions at wedding dinners and private residences of members and their friends, and at charitable shows".*

The group performed in Malacca and Kuala Lumpur and won several silver trophies as well.

The United Chinese Musical Association at Moonlight Hall, New World, in August 1930, for a performance in aid of the International Buddhist Union.



In 1906 the Straits Chinese Amateur Musical Society established itself in a clubhouse in Wallich Street, but it was unfortunately short-lived. This period saw a proliferation of musical groups. The Gunong Sayang Association was formed in 1910 for lovers and practitioners of *dondang sayang* by several Babas including Koh Hoon Teck, whose company Koh and Company published popular anthologies of *panton dondang sayang*. It remains perhaps one of the oldest surviving musical associations in Singapore.



The Straits Chinese Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society at The Aw Mansion in Nassim Road during the Lunar New Year, 17 February 1931.

Among the groups were the United Chinese Musical Association (founded 1919), Amateur Friendly Orchestra (whose members included our former Association President Dr Lim Han Hoe), the Straits Chinese Amateur Dramatic and Musical Society (1927) Lunar Athletic and Musical Party (founded 1930), Oleh Oleh Party (1932), the Merrilads Musical Association (1930s) Silver Star Minstrels (1930s), Springdale (1930s), Gaylads Minstrels (1930s) and the Wales Minstrel Party (1930s). These musical groups were generally large, ranging from eight up to forty musicians.

Jimmy Gan Remembers

"When I was young I remember that my father Gan Hock Chye held rehearsals every Saturday in our home in Joo Chiat Lane," says retired Baba musician Jimmy Gan. "There were eight to ten musicians in his group, the Gaylads Minstrels, playing mandolin, guitar, double bass, tambourine, maracas. My father played the mandolin. But after he died in 1937 there was no one to take over, so things fizzled off. I learnt to play the guitar from a young age and joined Dr Chia Keng Hoe's group, the Merrilads. We rehearsed every Sunday at his house in Sea Avenue. This was before the war and I was only about 15 years old. We played for free to raise funds. I remember songs like 'Rasa Sayang', 'Waktu Fajar', 'Serampang Laot'. We could

play pop songs, *keronchong*, *dondang sayang*, *joget*, *ronggeng* music.

"I also joined Baby Low and his Hawaiian band. Baby Low played the Hawaiian guitar, I played guitar and bass. The singer was Tan Eng Chia, one of the early Talentime winners. We had a good violinist, Pak Malim, who lived in Bedok. We played a wide range of songs, all with Hawaiian arrangements. In those days it cost only \$120 to \$150 for a small band, and \$500 for a 10-piece band. Each person would be paid about \$25. The lead pianist, maybe \$30".

Dr Chia Keng Hoe's brother, Chia Keng Tye, formed a junior symphony orchestra in the early 1920s, perhaps 1922. Both Chias were sons of Baba tycoon Chia Hood Theam, and rehearsals were held in Rosedale, the family mansion on Killiney Road, every Thursday night. Another former president of The Peranakan Association, Tay Lian Teck, was the conductor and violinist, while the famous Singaporean violinist Goh Soon Tioe was first violinist. The late Ee Peng Liang was a flautist in the orchestra. Chia's great granddaughter Noreen Chan remembers, "My grandma says they nicknamed Tay Lian Teck Enchik Bengot because he used to tap his foot on the ground to keep time until his shoe was flattened on one side."

■ CHRONICLES: BABA BANDS ■

The 1970s and 1980s were definitely the poorest decades for Peranakan musical groups. Only the Gunong Sayang Association carried on their traditions. But by then there were only a few *dondang sayang* specialists, such as Gwee Peng Kwee, his son GT Lye, William Tan and the late Lee Yoke Poh. Today, the Association also has a ladies choir that has been active since about 1999. New Peranakan songs have been written by GT Lye and his brother William Gwee Thian Hock.

In the new millennium

Of late, the focus on music in the Peranakan community has been choral and vocal rather than instrumental. For a few years from the late 1990s The Peranakan Association even had its own a cappella group called Babacappella, which performed only once a year at the annual dinner. The association formed its own choir, the Peranakan Voices, in 1999, and a band, since last year. With a repertoire of original songs written by a few of our own members, and familiar favourites, the group has since then performed at many national, corporate and charity events to raise awareness of Peranakan culture through music. They are the most

visible representatives of the Association and fly our flag wherever they go. More recently, a new independent arts group, The Main Wayang Company, was formed in 2005, with a choir called Peranakan Rhapsody, which performed at a fringe event in this year's Singapore Arts Festival.

Although most of the Peranakan bands before the war focused on Western classical and Western and Asian popular music, the concerns of the current generation are to articulate a sense of identity through song. However all current attempts seem to focus on nostalgia — reviving popular songs from the time of our forefathers — big band tunes, Latin and Hawaiian arrangements, *keronchong*, *lagu asli* and *joget*.

*The time seems right to archive and promote the choral and instrumental traditions of our musical heritage, especially *dondang sayang*. I hope that our musical community will make efforts to preserve this heritage before it is lost forever.**

Photographs courtesy of GT Lye and Dr Noreen Chan.



Members of the Amateur Friendly Orchestra performed "Hawaiian Mirth and Melody" at a Singapore Chinese Girls' School Concert at Victoria Theatre in aid of the school's building fund, 20 April 1925.

ONCE SIAMESE TWINS

By Khoo Salma Nasution

Once strong trading partners in the days of empire, it is no surprise to learn that the Peranakans in Phuket mostly originated from Penang.

Early Penang and the Straits Settlements

Penang and Phuket were already closely connected through trade half a century before the British formed the Straits Settlements -- Penang, Malacca and Singapore -- in 1826.

In 1786, the British opened a trading post in Penang, drawing traders including the Chinese and Christian converts from Kedah, Malacca and Siam. When Thalang (now Phuket) was destroyed by the Burmese around 1810, the Siamese Christians fled to Penang.

In 1825, the British pressured the Siamese to sign the Burney Treaty and allow in British trade. Chinese migration from Penang to Phuket accelerated after the 1855 Bowring Treaty which gave extra-territorial and trading rights to British subjects. The

Straits-born Babas, as British subjects, were above Siamese law and sometimes abused this privilege. They developed mining and agriculture and managed tax collection for certain products. They also controlled the labour force through a form of social organisation called *ang yi*.

In the Straits Settlements, the *ang yi* were called secret societies, mutual protection societies that had very little government or police protection. They fought for control of men, trade, territory, opium and gambling.

Phuket leaders and their Penang affiliations

The *ang yi* in Phuket and southern Siam were headquartered in Penang. In 1867, *ang yi* riots broke out in Penang and Phuket. To keep the peace, the King of Siam recognised several community leaders in Phuket, including Tan Gaik Tham from

Penang. 'Tan Tham' successfully modeled Tongkha after Penang. Decades later, Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) made Khaw Sim Bee, the Phraya Rassada or Royal Commissioner. He modelled Phuket after Penang and adopted the colonial style of administration.

The Khaw family company Koe Guan Kongsu remained in Penang, sourcing capital and technology from there for their business ventures in Phuket and southern Siam. They had fabulous houses in Penang, most of them by the North Beach, a European preserve. Examples were Khaw Soo Cheang's Rajah's Lodge and Khaw Sim Kong's Essex Lodge on Light Street. Khaw Soo Cheang even donated Ranong Ground to the Penang public to play football!

By the late 19th century, a large Peranakan community had formed



A Baba mansion in Phuket.

"There was a grand piano in the entrance hall and practices were held there. I had to arrange the seating and music stands. My father had a cupboardful of orchestra music sheets, which I donated to the museum when he passed away," recalls Chia Chin Siang, the son of Chia Keng Tye.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s these musical associations performed mainly at social gatherings and at fund raising events. They performed popular Western tunes as well as keronchong and stambul. Honkytonk and Hawaiian were popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The Amateur Friendly Orchestra even had a 'Hawaiian group' performing at the Victoria Theatre in 1925 to raise funds for the Singapore Chinese Girls' School. Plays, musicals and Malay bangsawan (operettas) were also popular during this period. Venues included the Victoria Theatre, the Victoria Memorial Hall and the Star Opera run by Cheong Koon Seng. (please see 'Role Reversals' by Peter Lee in *The Peranakan*, July-September 2002, pages 3-9.)

In the Mood

The Second World War brought an end to most of these performances. "The Broadway Party was probably the

last remaining musical association. I remember they used to perform on radio up to the 1950s," recalls G T Lye. The Gunong Sayang Association, which had been dormant during the war years, was revived in the 1950s by Gwee Peng Kwee. "Although my father was exposed from a young age to *dondang sayang*, he only became very active around the age of 40, when he joined the Association. Koh Hoon Teck was a relative. He learnt from masters from Malacca such as Baba Tan Kim Teck, Ibrahim Shawal, Enchek Bah Chye and Yeo Kim Swee." Up to this era, the Baba style of *dondang sayang* was very much admired by the Baba and Malay communities, and radio and public performances were common.

However in the 1950s and 1960s several ad hoc groups were set up to perform popular tunes at the intervals or 'extra turns' of *Wayang Peranakan*, but they never had the vibrancy of the pre-War years. One such group was the Jumping Jeans (1965), perhaps the first Nyonya Band, whose members included Dolly and Rosanna Ong, the daughters of renowned actor and comic Ong Thye Watt (please see 'Stage Sisters' by Peter Lee, *The Peranakan*, July-September 2003, pages. 2-6).

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Phuket's China Inn, a Baba house converted into a restaurant.



Penang-style Baba food in Phuket.

in Penang. They spoke a mixture of Chinese dialect, Malay and English. The elite of Phuket and Penang entered into strategic marriages. The Khaw family intermarried with important Siamese and Penang families. In 1928, Tan Joo Ee or Khun Chyn Sathan Phithak, who was the father of Khun Pracha Tandavanitj, tied the knot with Lucy Goh of Penang. Philanthropist Lim Boon Keng of the Limpanond family married Teoh Cheng Khim of Penang in 1937. Many Phuket families had relatives who were business associates in Penang.

Hokkien society in Penang

In the 19th century, Penang the port was a 'mother settlement' for the Chinese while Phuket the mining frontier was a satellite settlement. The Hokkiens formed the majority in Penang and organised themselves into clan associations. Some, like the Khoos, Cheahs and Yeohs, hailed from villages in China. The associations united them through common worship of patron saints. They formed the core of Baba society, expanding through chain migration from villages in China.

The most powerful Chinese in Penang were the Five Great Clans – Cheah, Khoo, Yeoh, Lim and Tan. They controlled a large part of the regional coastal trade. The Khoos dominated the pepper trade with Sumatra, the Yeohs controlled the rice trade with Rangoon and the Tans controlled the tin trade with Phuket. In Penang, they controlled several temples including the Cheng Chooi Chor Soo (Snake Temple).



Two elderly Phuket women.

As late as the 1960s, Phuket was still following trends in Penang. The Mayor of Phuket, Khun Maitree Bonsoong, was inspired by the Penang esplanade called Gurney Drive and began the project to reclaim Saphan Hin. The last strong connection between Phuket and Penang is perhaps the Nganthawee family, who set up Gan Chai Leng Co Ltd, one of Penang's biggest development companies.

Close ties dwindle

The Penang-Phuket relationship withered after Penang lost its free port status around 1970. It became cheaper for Phuket to import from Bangkok. Politics and economics made the difference. Their Baba communities grew apart, developing different orientations to Malaysia and Thailand respectively.

In Penang, the mainly English edu-

cated Babas became Anglophile, with a love of things British. However, British census classified them as ethnic Chinese. They identified themselves with the larger Chinese society but had a different outlook and values from the Mandarin-educated Chinese.

While the Penang Baba enjoyed British patronage, they were condescending to the *sinkeh*. But after Malaya left the British Empire, they became a bygone community 'stranded by the tide'. In Penang today, the Mandarin-educated Chinese with their strong business networks have overtaken the Babas economically.

The Phuket and Penang Babas used to speak the same language, Hokkien. However, the Phuket Babas now speak Thai, having assimilated seamlessly into Thai society under the classification of 'Thai-Buddhists'. Some do not even know their Chinese surname. They have embraced Theravada Buddhism while maintaining Chinese religious practices. In Phuket, all those of Phuket Chinese descent can consider them-selves Baba.

Whatever the differences, the Peranakan or Babas of Phuket and Penang still have many similarities and should appreciate their shared heritage as well as renew ties. *

Khoo Salma Nasution @ Khoo Su Nin spent three months in 2006 researching the Baba community in Phuket, on the Asian Public Intellectual Fellowship (API) funded by the Nippon Foundation. Her photographs of the Phuket Baba can be viewed on www.lestariheriatge.net.

All photographs by Khoo Salma Nasution

NUPTIAL SPLENDOUR

By Maurice Wee

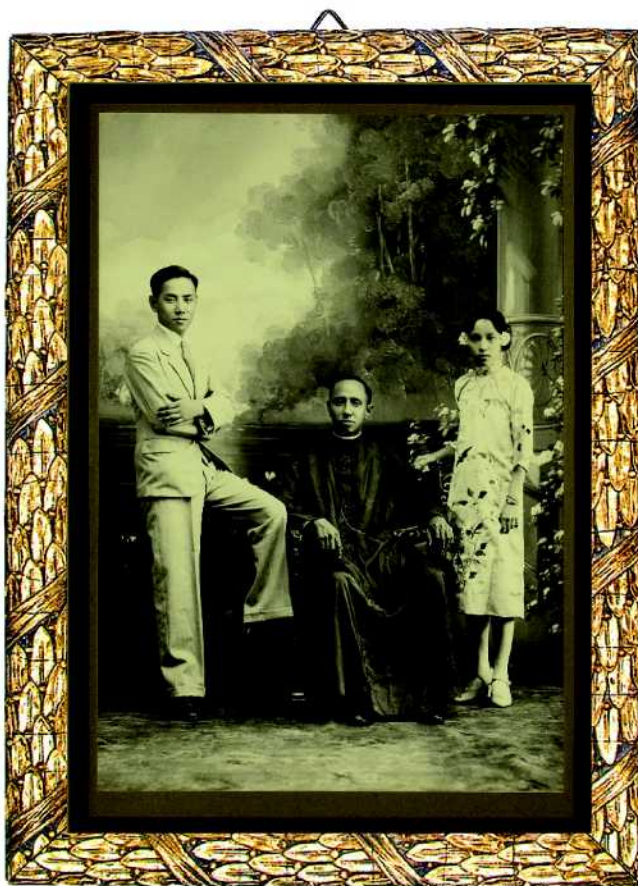
11 November, 1935: The sprawling bungalow at 67 Waterloo Street was transformed for the glorious and opulent three-day wedding celebration of Singapore nyonya Josephine Tan Pin Neo to Indonesian baba Wee Guan Hong.

Doorway draped in red chai kee for luck, the family home was fronted by a large pair of ricepaper lanterns with the family surname, symbolic of wealth, happiness and longevity. New western-style velvet curtains dressed up windows and doors in the main and second halls. The family altar was brightly lit and fragranced with the sweet scents of *stanggi* and *bunga rampay*. All blackwood mother-of-pearl furniture was adorned with contrasting red silk cushions.

The 21-year old Josephine, or Fin to relatives and close friends, was born with a (golden) silver spoon in her mouth. She was the only daughter of Tan Cheng Kee, the eldest son of philanthropist Tan Keong Saik. The wedding preparation for his favourite child involved the entire Peranakan community. Ah Bee, the *Sangkek Um* (bridal expert) was booked months ahead to oversee the grand event.

On her big day, Fin dressed in layers of brocade silk heavily embroidered with phoenixes, spring flowers and Buddhist emblems. Her hair was embellished with hundreds of hairpins studded with rose-cut diamonds and intan.

During the day, the bride and groom paid their respects to elders at the customary tea ceremony, a private affair with close relatives and their families. The wedding luncheon was a sumptuous and elaborate tiffin, *tok panjang* (long table) style. Prepared by the renowned



Josephine Pin Neo, 16, and her beau Guan Hong, 20, with Reverend Father Lionel Cordero before their engagement in 1931.



Fin (with head dress) at the wedding party which included Mrs Lee Choon Guan. MBE, (seated, first from left) renowned for her collection of diamonds.

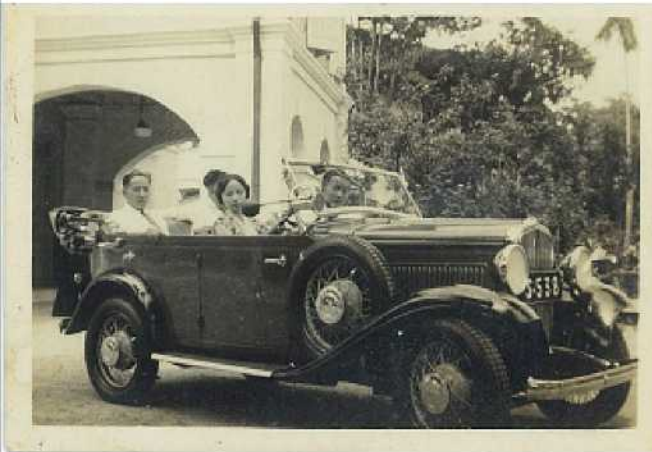
chongpo (Hainanese cook). Ah Seow, it was a splendid spread of Peranakan dishes including *heepeow*, *ayam buah keluak*, *bakwan kepiting*, *udang goreng asam* and *hati babi bungkus*. The *laok piring* (side dishes) comprised *babi panggang*, *sambal jantung pisang*, *sambal udang*, *sambal timun*, *achar* and *sambal belachan*.

Dessert was an equally huge offering of *kueh kueh chuchi mulot* (dessert) including *tai bak*, *biji delima*, *chendol*, *talam chok wah*, *agar agar*, *pengat pisang* and *onde onde*. Not forgetting *sireh* (betel leaves), cigarettes, cigars and brandy. Finger bowls were placed near the ladies who ate with their fingers. In those days, it was customary for Peranakans to use their fingers instead of western cutlery.

The grand event was in the evening, when 25 tables were laid for guests including prominent business people from Malacca and Singapore, diplomats, relatives and friends. The guests were entertained by two bands playing the *de riguer* *dondang sayang*, *lagu joget* and western songs. Minstrels went around creating a hearty and lively ambience. The celebration went on till the wee morning hours, much to the chagrin of neighbours who called in the police to

complain about the noise!

As the wedding stretched over days, gambling was a popular activity. Three tables were laid out for *cherki* to be played in groups of 5, 8 and 10 persons.



Left: The new bride at her Waterloo Street residence



Right: The most treasured item in Fin's trousseau is a pair of 70-year old rhinestone high-heeled wedding shoes, specially commissioned in Singapore.

Fin also owned numerous pairs of *kasot manek* (beaded slippers) embroidered with *sulam mas* (gold thread) and *manek po tong* (faceted glass beads) in elaborate motifs of crickets, roses, butterflies and even one with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. She inherited heirloom pieces such as exquisite French lace *kebaya*s with matching batik *sarongs* from Cirebon, Pekalongan and Lasem.

Her four-poster brass bridal bed is intact to this day, at son Peter's home in Dunbar Walk. More than 100 years old, the canopy bed is dressed splendidly with silk and satin pillows, and bolsters with embroidered ends.

In Fin's bridal chamber was a dresser (*meja sisir rambot*) with a 3-panelled mirror, made of teak and cherry wood. Fin's wedding wardrobe had three compartments for her elaborate trousseau. These included gold and silver *tali pinggang* (belts), *kerosang serong* (brooches) made by commissioned Ceylonese jewellers, *olek olek* (dangling earrings), *gelang papan* (hard bangles), *gelang jingle* and many more.

satin pillows, and bolsters with embroidered ends.

Fin, now a delicate yet sprightly 94, can still recall her big day with fond memories of her dear husband. Though matched by her father, theirs was a match made in heaven, with wonderful blessings of two children, three grand children and three great grandchildren. ✱



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KAHWEN DULU KALA

Cedric Tan elaborates on the complex wedding ceremonies that epitomise the pinnacle of Peranakan culture and shows how you can get away with a condensed, far less costly, modern version.

The traditional Peranakan wedding is flooded with everything the culture has to offer: The sumptuous *tok panjang* spread, the lavish display of heirlooms, the generous sprinkling of *pantons* and *si-ku* at ceremonies, the haunting *seroni* music, resounding clanging of cymbals and the upbeat marching band music, with a procession of guests dressed to the nines.

It is perhaps the only surviving adaptation of traditional Fujian rites in this region and outside China. Prenuptial events can last for more than a month prior to the 12 glorious days of wedding celebration then drag on for another two more weeks for the post-nuptial get-to-know-you feasts before everything comes to a close. Many Singapore Peranakans have roots in Malacca so the Malaccan style is more widely practised here, although with some localised variations.

Pre-Nuptials

The investigative *Merisek* stage is where the parents of the prospective groom scout around for a suitable bride. Chancing upon a prospect, they send an emissary to

check on her physical well-being and character. Once to their satisfaction, birth dates of the potential couple are referred to the horoscope book for divine compatibility. The *Tukair Chinchin* (betrothal) ceremony follows, after which both sides start addressing each other via '*Balek Mulot*' as though they are already matrimonially linked.

The wedding preparations begin. The bridal chamber is dressed up. The bed receives special attention. *Ann Chng* dictates the cleansing of the bed and placing under it, objects symbolising fertility (lemon grass stalks, red yam plant and a comb of 12 *pisang raja* bananas planted in a pot). A young boy rolls on the bed thrice with the hope of the first born being a boy.

On another day, the white cotton *Cheo Thau* costumes are incised and sewn during the *Mengoyak* ceremony. Meantime, formal invitations in the form of wedding cards, *Hantair Sireh* (folded betel condiments distributed to the ladies) or *Sang Ee* (giving *kueh ee* to close relatives) are delivered personally, lest deemed not sincere.



Authentic costumes and accessories, all provided by Ah Bee, an actual Sangkek Um, for the Peranakan charity performance *Kehidopan Si Buta* on 29 and 30 May, 1958, at the Happy World Stadium. The play was scripted by Francis Hogan.

Front, from left: Sangkek Um Ah Bee, Pengapet (page girl) Irene Poh who is a Peranakan Voice member, Francis Hogan the Penganten (bride), Walter Koh the Kia Sai (bridegroom), the Koo Yah (page boy, unidentified) and Poh Kim Wah, the Pak Chindek. Back, from left: Ronnie Seow, Lim Kim Geok and David Lee.

■ TRADITIONS: WEDDINGS ■



Left: The Pengapet (page girl) and Koo Yah (page boy) in the procession at the wedding of Daniel Ang and his bride, Karen, in Malacca. Right: Traditional wedding costumes as staged by Gunong Sayang Association. Right: In the centre is GSA President Baba Albert Chan.

A week before the wedding is the *Lap Chai*, or exchange of wedding gifts. Relatives and friends also throng the household to help out in the preparations.

A cacophony of ladies chatter up the decibels as they prepare basketfuls of onions, spices and other ingredients for grinding during the *Hari Kupas Bawang*. They sweat profusely over hot stoves cooking sambals during *Hari Manyambal*. On *Hari Tumbok Tepong*, they manually grind grain and knead flour to make colourful and mouth watering kueh.

On the eve of the wedding or *Khui Thia* day, the wedding luncheon and dinner (*Chia Lang Khek*) are hosted. The ladies turn up in full attire and jewellery for a *Nasi Kemuli tok panjang* luncheon in the kitchen, while well-dressed gentlemen group in eights around square tables to savour a course-by-course dinner. The dinner guests are later invited to join a procession to the bride's house to deliver *kueh ee*. A reciprocal procession from the bride's side follows, to seal the wedding. This signals the raising of the *Sam Kai*; a double-tiered table representing heaven, man and earth, in honour of the Jade Emperor. Meanwhile upstairs, the bride busies herself practising various movements for the wedding under the hawkish eyes and pinching fingers of the *Sangkek Um* (mistress of ceremony).

Wedding Day

In the wee hours of the morning, led by the soulful serenades of the *seroni*, a rite of passage called the

Cheo Thau (Hair Combing) ceremony gets underway when the groom and bride individually undergo a ritualistic toilet ceremony. The groom faces the family altar while the bride undertakes her vows in front of the *Sam Kai* altar. As they sit on the *gantang* (rice measure) placed in the middle of a five-foot diameter *nyiru* (round rice sieve), toiletries and daily implements symbolically circle the face and head, each representing a profound virtue required of their conduct.

This ceremony marks the transition of the couple's status from child to adult.

The respective fathers duly offer them wine during the *Pai Chiu* (Wine Libation) ceremony. The bride is then veiled and escorted to the bridal chamber to await the arrival of the groom. Meantime, the groom has a meal with his entourage as part of the *Khi Be* (Mounting the Horse) ceremony before leaving for the bride's home in a grand procession led by clanging cymbals. Arriving at the bride's home, he unveils her and they proceed for a meal together in the bridal chamber to conclude the *Chim Pang* (Unveiling the Bride) ceremony.

Sohja Tiga Hari

Two days later, the wedded couple pay respect to the deities, ancestors and elders during the protracted and energy-sapping *Sohja Tiga Hari* (Third Day) ceremony. They shuttle between their homes, ancestral homes and temples seated majestically in sedan chairs led by a procession of lanterns, buntings, umbrellas,

seroni and musical bands. Later, in their respective family homes during the *Tuang Teh* (tea) ceremony, the couple are coached to address each elder correctly (for the rest of their lives) before serving tea. At the end of the day, they are richly rewarded with jewels, angpows and even title deeds for their effort.

The length of this marathon ceremony will depend on the number of relatives from their extended families (as they *sohja* elders couple by couple) and the number of places visited during the procession.

Chia Sia

The *Chia Sia* on the 5th night is a gathering of the groom's male relatives and friends to be formally introduced to the bride. Dressed resplendently in the baju *hock chiu*, the bride must show unflinching emotion and poise as she faces the barrage of jokes and tricks set by the boisterous crowd after serving them a cup of wine. Her failure to remain steadfast condemns the groom to treat his guests to another round of dinner. Throughout the 12 days, the groom returns to his home in the morning and is later invited to retire in the bride's residence every evening.

Bikin Dua Belas Hari

The final day of the wedding is the day of decision as the virginity of the bride is scrutinized in a room in the groom's home. If her mother-in-law is satisfied, *Nasi Lemak* is delivered to the bride's home while guests are treated to a sumptuous *tok panjang* meal. The couple is later presented with a pair of sugarcane and a cockerel and hen. These birds are released under the bridal bed; the sex of the first child is the subject of interest as people surround the bed to coax and see which bird emerges first. There is plenty of laughter and hullabaloo here to end the *Bikin Dua Belas Hari* ceremony.

Post-Nuptial

The post-celebration days are reserved for clearing up the house. The groom's family invites the bride's for a meal in their home and receives a reciprocal invitation. This *Chia Chin Ke Chek Um* (Invitation to Father and Mother-in-Law) ritual reinforces the matrimonial bonds between the two extended families. ✽

MODERN TRADITION WITHOUT TEARS

Younger couples facing the constraints of time and budget may scale down or dispense with the prenuptial ceremonies. A condensed wedding can easily be fitted in over a weekend.

The prenuptial can reenact parts of the *An Chng* ceremony such as setting up the bridal bed, the young boy rolling over and the all-important *Lap Chai*. Keeping with the correct flow of ceremonies, the *Kui Tiah* gathering on the wedding eve can be followed by the *Cheo Thau* ceremony according to the predetermined hour set by the horoscope book.

The *Pai Chiu* ceremony will kick off the events on the wedding day morning followed by the *Chim Pang*. By late morning, the *Sohja Tiga Hari* should move into high gear and end with lunch. The obligatory *Bikin Dua Belas Hari* ceremony may commence immediately after lunch. By mid-afternoon, the couple can take a breather before getting ready for the evening reception. They can start the reception in full traditional wedding regalia then make a quick change to modern attire to enjoy the rest of the evening.

The *Sangkek Um* and *Pak Chindek* (groom's assistant) are indispensable in providing training, ensuring the correct execution of the ceremonies and sourcing the regalia and artifacts. Nowadays, they may double up as wedding planners and rope in supporting suppliers i.e. caterers, beauticians, decorators, etc to ensure a stress-free and smooth ceremony. They will continue to remain the torch bearers of the spirit of the Peranakan culture.

The traditional Baba wedding has seen an encouraging revival recently. With artifacts and expertise now available within their financial means, young Peranakan couples are looking back with interest to marry in the *kahwen dulu kala* style and dress in the heavy costumes. Some have literally walked down the church aisle in traditional costume with the bride veiled in black! From my observation of many traditional families, a black veil has been the general colour; black for sadness as the bride bids farewell to her family. Pink has been used to a lesser extent.

While couples of yesteryear undergo the ceremonies in good faith and without question, it is important to impart the underlying meaning of various acts and symbols to modern weddings in order to grasp the beauty of these practices and relate to them. By doing so, it is hoped that what little is left behind can be meaningfully retained and transmitted to the next generation to behold.

KAHWEN SEKARANG

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BABA NYONYA CULTURE PROMOTIONS

Baba Nyonya Culture Promotions has been instrumental in the resurgence of interest in the Peranakan traditional wedding, events and craft in Malaysia and Singapore for more than 20 years. The leading Peranakan traditional wedding planner and culture consultant provides the full range of Malacca style wedding costumes (formal *kun*, informal *hock chiu*, man's *tng sah be koa*) and attires (*baju panjang*, *kebaya*s etc) complete with correct accessories and period grooming for weddings, receptions or photography sessions on location in Singapore or Malaysia.

Their expertise also encompasses setting up various wedding artifacts, training for movements, providing the professional services of *Sangkek Um*, *Pak Chindek* and *Sinseh*, preparing handicrafts associated with the wedding (eg. *chanab*, offerings) and sourcing paraphernalia for the wedding procession. They actively research and share their findings so that couples can appreciate the underlying symbolic meanings of various acts and objects during the wedding. **Contact Baba Cedric Tan at (6017)-8834374 or email : baba@babamelaka.com**



Clarissa and Daniel.

KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

Nowadays we hardly get to witness a wedding where the couple and parents on both sides are of Peranakan descent. On 26 August, one such union took place with the marriage of pediatrician Suzanne Goh and businessman Paul Chan. Earlier, on 2 July, the true blue Peranakan couple along with their retinue trooped to the East Coast for a photo session in their dream attire, at Katong Antique House. **Contact Baba Peter Wee at (65) 6345 8544 or fax (65) 6345 1220** if you would like advice and consultancy to have your own memorable Peranakan wedding.



Suzanne and Paul with the groom's parents, Mr and Mrs Chan Teck Kee.

RUMAH BEBE

It's never too late, as shown by this couple (below). Visitors from the United



American Nyonya & Baba.

States, they loved the novelty of dressing in the *baju hock chiu* complete with headgear and accessories, to show the folks back home. Bebe Seet of Rumah Bebe has Malacca-style costumes available in the tradition of the 1st day wedding (\$500) and 12th day *baju hock chiu* (\$350) at 4-hourly rates. A \$50 surcharge applies for extended usage. Rumah Bebe premises can be used at no cost for a photoshoot. **Contact Rumah Bebe at (65) 62478781.**

THE MAIN WAYANG COMPANY

The company moves ahead with modern times to provide innovative and relevant ways of celebrating the Baba Wedding. Outfits can be tailor-made to accommodate special occasions (eg. at Sentosa's Images of Singapore Museum, 'Kodak Moments'). Wedding costumes for the *Kia Sai* and *Penganteng*, *Koo Yah* and *Pengapet* with head dress accessories in full embroidery (China-made), Malay brocade or Chinese brocade.

All costumes are for sale or rental. Prices vary from studio sessions to full day weddings; plus wedding consultancy and services including the *Lap Chai*. The *Kahwen Belarak* service comes with *seroni* musicians, lanterns, umbrella bearers and the whole entourage. **Click www.mainwayang.com, write to peranakan@mainwayang.com or contact Baba Richard Tan at (65) 9636 8968.**



Kahwen Belarak comprising the whole wedding entourage.

DALAM DAPOR

KUEH EE HARMONY

By Noreen Chan

“Tang Chek has been marked all over the world since ancient times. The Egyptians celebrated the “rebirth” of the sun with a 12-day festival, a tradition that was adopted by the Babylonians, Romans and other ancient cultures. In fact, many Christmas traditions have their roots in pagan customs surrounding the winter solstice.”

Known as *dong zhi* (Extreme of Winter) to the Chinese, the Winter Solstice is celebrated on 22 December (although in some years it may fall on 21 December). *Cheng Beng* or *Qing Ming* falls 105 days after, which explains why these two important festivals are quite fixed in the Gregorian calendar, as opposed to most other Chinese festivals which follow the lunar calendar.

For centuries, especially in southern China, *dong zhi* or *tang chek* (in the Hokkien dialect) has been celebrated with a family reunion – some consider it even more important than the reunion dinner on the eve of the Lunar New Year – and the preparation and eating of glutinous rice balls known as *tang yuan* or, as the Peranakans call them, *kueh ee*.

Tang yuan are considered auspicious because the name sounds like *tuan yuan* which means

togetherness and harmony. They may be plain or filled with peanut, red bean or sesame paste. In Singapore, they may go by the name *Ah Balling*. Apart from appearing during *tang chek*, *kueh ee* makes its appearance at the traditional Peranakan wedding, where it is the first food shared by the couple. It is said that the sweet and sticky dessert will encourage a sweet and abundant life, where husband and wife will “stick” together!

The custom is to make white and red *kueh ee* (more of the former), in two sizes; the large ones should be the size of a marble, about half an inch across. Ready prepared white and pink dough can be bought in wet markets, but many families would roll their own. I remember *nyiru* (woven bamboo trays) spread with cloth, covered with the little dough balls which we would prepare the night before. Early the next morning, the balls would be cooked in boiling water – once they

float they are done – and served in a sweet soup flavoured with *pandan* (*gula Malacca* and ginger were favourite variations).



From left: My grandmother Elsie Chia, my mother Eleanor Tan and my nephew Matthew, gelek (roll) kueh ee.

■ FESTIVALS:TANG CHEK ■

Before the family could partake of the *kueh ee*, tiny cups or bowls had to be offered to the deities and ancestors – three bowls for the former and four for the latter. Everyone had to eat some for good luck.

Our *amah cheh*, Ah Kan, used to make something she called *tumpalak*, in which *kueh ee* were saturated in sticky syrup and sprinkled with coarsely ground peanuts. A great favourite with us children!

In Malacca, another practice is followed, called *pintu makan kueh ee*, as described by Cedric Tan. It involves sticking one red and one white *kueh ee* on each side of the door frame, respectively. It signifies the household's happiness in wading through another year and looking forward to the bright and cheery spring. Plain white glutinous rice balls are normally about a five cent coin size in circumference but the red ones are about one third the size of the former. For the purpose of sticking these balls to the door post, the white and red are made of equal size; in my family's case about the size of a 20 cent coin.

We soak these balls for the doorposts in syrup and offer

them in dainty *nyonyaware* to the household deities. At noon, these giant balls are pasted onto the door. We use the part that is not covered by syrup to stick the ball to the top end of the wooden door post. Red on one side and white on the opposite side. On both the main and back doors of the house. The sugared surface will not stick; it will slide down the doorpost after a while to leave a trail of syrup.

The balls will be left untouched till the next *tang chek* on the coming 22 December, despite having to clean all doorposts shortly after, for Chinese New Year. Preserved by the syrup, these balls will turn rock hard. They are symbolic of a traditional Peranakan household in Malacca besides the five types of leaves hanging next to the door during the *Chang Festival* (or Dragon Boat Festival).

Here in equatorial Singapore, it is easy to forget the seasonal origins of our festivals. *Tang chek* was, and is, a time of optimism, that spring would return and the cycle of growth would begin anew. A good opportunity to celebrate family ties and the sweetness of life! ✱



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GEYLANG RD

SEMAYANG CHIAH ABU IN PENANG

Baba Christopher Lim recently invited Baba Ee Sin Soo and friends to Penang's Boon San Tong Khoo Kongsi, where the family is viewed as a close-knit group of living and dead relatives, for Semahyang Chiah Abu, or ancestral worship, to honour and have communion with ancestral spirits who "return" to the clan temple.



Baba Christopher's maternal great-grandfather's grandfather, Mr Khoo Thean Teik, was an eminent 19th century Penang philanthropist and a descendant of Hai Teonh (lineage of the first son) belonging to the Boon San Tong Branch. He was also a founding director of the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi at Cannon Square and Boon San Tong Khoo Kongsi at Victoria Street.

The Kongsi remains the pillar of continuity of familial lines, an indivisible institution with common goals and benefits for members, and a place to appeal for the blessings, aid and cooperation of ancestors. Devotional acts by the clan house are considered a good way to honour the dead.

These acts establish, reinforce and contribute to the roles, identities and psychological well-being of the clan members.

The clan temple hall maintains red and gold tablets bearing the names of ancestors. On this special occasion, food offerings were made before them to reflect respect and concern for the deceased elders. The family "reunion" was marked with five offerings ("Gnoh Seng" in Hokkien) of chicken, duck, roast pig, fish and crabs, 24 Penang nyonya dishes including the deceased's favourite foods; multi-coloured kueh ee in syrup; mee ku (pink Penang longevity buns); fruits and nyonya kueh. The essential accoutrements for the offering comprised 15 bowls of rice, chopsticks, spoons, glasses of wine and cups of tea and little ceremonial chairs covered with embroidered cloth at the altar.



A rear hall dedicated to *Tua Pek Kong* was set up with similar offerings.

The ceremony started in mid-morning when Mr Khoo Kay Hock, as main trustee (*Lor Choo*), lit a pair of red candles and joss sticks for the deities and ancestral spirits, honouring and inviting them. He then incensed the *pak poe* (two red kidney-shaped divination articles) with the joss sticks before throwing them on the floor to reveal whether the ancestral spirits had arrived and started on their feast.

While the spirits "dined" and watched the conduct of all in the Kongsi, clan members were busy praying to *Ti Kong*, Door Guardians, *Tua Pek Kong* and the ancestors at the tablets, seeking protection, spiritual and practical benefits. An odd number of joss sticks (following the *yang* principle) were accorded to the deities and an even number (following the *yin* principle) to the ancestors.

After about an hour, Mr Khoo sought permission to end the ceremony by throwing the *pak poe* on the floor, enquiring if the ancestors had finished their meal. Gold incense paper was burnt for *Tua Pek Kong* and silver incense paper for the ancestral spirits. A pinch of the food offerings was added to the bowl of hot water with spring onions at the altar. A stalk of spring onions sprinkled this water in a circular fashion on the burning incense paper to denote ownership and prevent other wandering spirits from claiming the incense paper. Now, clan members waited eagerly for the roast pigs to be carved and served with white porridge for lunch.



We were impressed by the social and familial solidarity through inter-generational continuity. Ancestral worship by the generations showed kinship and *kongsi* had not been weakened despite modernity and globalisation.

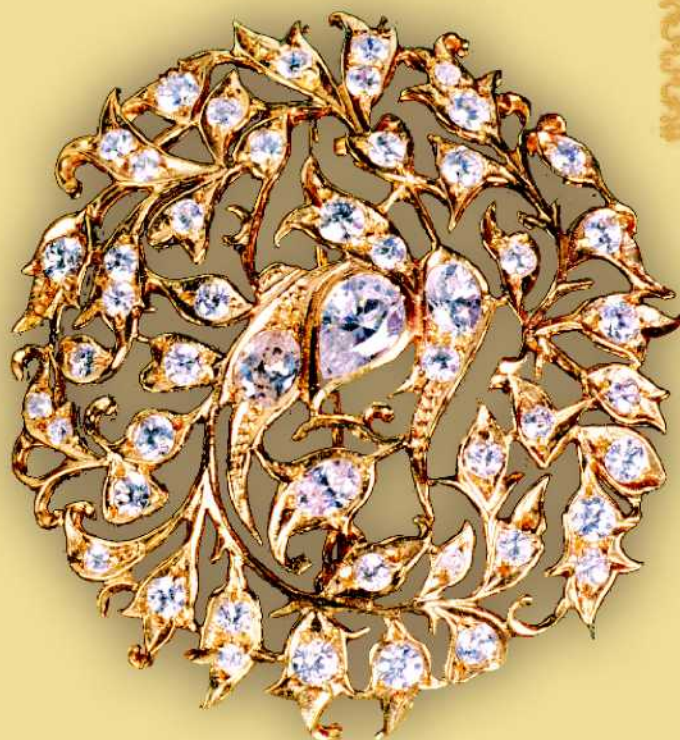
By performing their duty to the dearly departed ancestors, showing respect and care for their families, both living and dead, the intervention of the ancestral spirits promised full and rich lives ahead, giving rewards and protecting clan members from misfortune and malign influences of other evil spirits for another year. *

Ancestral worship

Ancestor worship is a religious system of beliefs, practices and attitudes of the living concerning the spirits of dead relatives. The dead are believed to exist in the afterlife and can influence the affairs of the living.

The living give ritual attention to the ancestors to demonstrate love, respect, trust, reverence and, possibly, even fear. Prayers and offerings are acts of devotion, seeking continued supernatural favour and aid.

Ancestral spirits are considered to be psychologically and socially significant in ways like gods and other supernatural beings, participating actively in the lives of clan members and their families. They have traits, emotions and capabilities of the living with supernatural potency. They protect and uphold morality, approve or disapprove the behaviour of their descendants. Ancestral wrath acts as a sanctioning force, causing living members to monitor each others' behaviour.



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ON THE PERANAKAN TRAIL

by Christopher Lim and Ee Sin Soo

Penang means many things to different people. The usual tourist attractions show up its multicultural history. Baba **Christopher Lim** of Penang took Baba **Ee Sin Soo** and friends off the beaten track onto a couple of trails of selected associations, places of worship and residences.

These highlight Peranakan contributions to the valuable built heritage of Penang connected to the religious, social and cultural life of Babas and Nyonyas on the island

These selected locations are distinctively Peranakan with manifestations of Peranakan material culture. They reflect the Baba Nyonya's socio-economic class, gentrified lifestyle and eclectic taste for the finest things. They are also associated with Peranakan culture and frequented by Peranakans.

TRAIL 1 (CITY, HISTORICAL ENCLAVE, NORTHERN)

1. Kuan Yin Teng, Kong Hock Keong, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling (Pitt Street)



The temple, one of the oldest Chinese temples in Penang, is built on land given by the East India Company in 1801 and originally named Kong Hock Keong or the Cantonese-Hokkien Temple, as it was jointly established by both clans. It is dedicated to two goddesses, Kuan Yin and Ma Chor Poh, and attracts both Peranakans and Chinese from any clan all year round. There is a lovely cobbled square bustling with activity and an octagonal well in one corner.

2. Poe Choo Seah, Straits Chinese Association, Lebuh King (King Street)

This unassuming 19th century association with 18 members has a friendly nonagenarian caretaker, Mr Khoo, who will let you in and his kind



grandson, Mr Khoo Teng Hee, will take you on a guided tour of the ancestral tablets housed in ornamented display stands and cabinets embellished with pretty dragon phoenix wooden carvings.

3. Khoo Kongsi (Leong San Tong), Khoo Clan Temple, Medan Cannon (Cannon Square)



The famous Khoo Kongsi is the grandest clan temple in the city built in 1902 and completed in 1906. The breathtaking complex, boasting intricate carvings and richly ornamented beams of the finest wood, has a clan temple dedica-

ted to the clan's patron deities, housing a collection of ancestral tablets, an association building, a traditional theatre, a museum and late 19th century townhouses for clan members, all clustered around a granite-paved square. Simply awesome.

4. Khoo Kongsi (Boon San Thong), Khoo Clan Temple, Lebuh Victoria (Victoria Street)



This lesser known Khoo Kongsi, albeit a scaled-down version of its Cannon Square brethren, was built by the descendants of the fifth generation, Hai Kee Khak, whose patriarch was Khoo Chian Eng. Another monument of kinship in Chinese baroque style with friendly clan members.

5. Cheah Kongsi, Cheah Kay Hock Haw Kong, Cheah Clan Association, Lebuh Armenian (Armenian Street)

It has a beautifully decorated clan temple reflecting a blend of eastern and colonial influences; and a Straits



Eclectic bungalow which combines Malay, Chinese and European elements with a charming front lawn. There are informative displays of worship practices and artefacts of Baba Nyonya households.

6. Tan Kongs, Eng Chuan Tong, Halaman Seh Tan (Seh Tan Court, Local Area Name: Seah Boey)

The entrance from Beach Street leads up to an impressive frontage with a courtyard and clan house. You will find a large plaque honouring Tan Siew Sin, the former Minister of Finance, Federation of Malaya, and beautiful furniture including a pair of unusual elephant altar candleholders.



millionaires.

9. Wat Chaya Mangkalam Thai Temple, Lorong Burmah

This Thai temple has a reclining Buddha. Take a walk around the

Buddha and see the many niches housing the ashes and photos of Penang Babas and Nyonyas resting in peace behind, beneath and on the side of the Buddha.

TRAIL 2 (SOUTH-EAST, CENTRAL RANGE, CITY)

1. Kuan Yin See & Kew Ong Yah, Jalan Burmah (Burmah Road, Local Area Name: Chia Chwee Lor)



This temple with its resident monks has links to Kek Lok See as it was formerly a bungalow donated by a Kek Lok See abbot. It is also the focus of a vegetarian food festival during the Nine Emperor Gods Festival for the Peranakan community.

2. Peranakan Buddhist Temple (beside Nissan car showroom, formerly Lai Lai Supermarket), Jalan Burmah (Burmah Road, Local Area Name: Chia Chwee Lor)

This private temple did not allow us in but we found that it had Peranakan brown and gold doors, furniture and altar ware when we peered in through the gate.



7. Cheong Fatt Sze Mansion, Lebuh Leith (Leith Street)

Beautifully restored and transformed, this legendary Chinese courtyard mansion, although not Peranakan, is inspiring with its 38 huge rooms, 5 courtyards, 7 staircases and 220 windows. There are Venetian shutters, sturdy Victorian ironwork and decorative ceilings, richly coloured opalescent stained glass creating an atmosphere of light and colour, Chinese ceramic shard decoration, gilded timber lattice work and carved capitals.

8. Millionaire's Row, Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah (Northam Road, Local Area Name: Ang Mor Lor)

Drive or walk along this tree-lined boulevard to enjoy a view of the elegant eclectic European styled mansions in a residential suburb which once housed many local Baba

10. Pinang Peranakan Mansion, Lebuh Gereja (Church Street)

The Straits

Eclectic mansion was originally the home of Kapitan Chung Keng Kwee built at the end of the 19th century. Though not a Baba himself, he chose this style of architecture because of its association with wealth and status. The building has been saved from the mercy of the elements and a disgraceful death. Now lovingly restored, it is very much like a phoenix risen from the ashes. A feast for the eyes.





3. Loh Leong San's Townhouses, Jalan Burmah (Burmah Road, Local Area Name: Chia Chwee Lor)

This row of four pretty early 20th century Straits Eclectic townhouses has its facade in shades of green and white with matching bamboo blinds. The elaborately carved brown and gold doors partially hidden by the blinds are striking and give the residences character.

4. Pek Sah Tong, Jalan Jelutong (Jelutong Road, Local Area Name: Tok Lok Au)



This was formerly the Sheikh Al-Hadi's Malay-Palladian residence which has been converted for use as a temple by Taoist vegetarian nuns. If you go for the free vegetarian food served on the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month, you can catch a glimpse of the Peranakan furniture in the temple.

5. Tai Guan Tong (Ta Yuen Foh Tang), Jalan Macalister (Macalister Road, Local Area Name: Tiong Lor)

This Taoist nunnery, with its Peranakan furniture and altar ware, is not listed in any guidebook and has only one nun left. It reminded us of the Sian Teck Tng Vegetarian Convent at



Cuppage Road in Singapore. It is a rare gem slowly deteriorating and crumbling, in dire need of funds for urgent restoration.

6. Mahindarama Buddhist Temple, Jalan Kampar (Kampar Road)



Check out the dining hall of this Ceylonese temple with a photo lineup of prominent Peranakan founders and donors who had contributed to the establishment of the temple, demonstrating the strong link Penang Babas and Nyonyas have forged with Sri Lankan Theravadic traditions. Food served in the dining hall for the monks and devotees includes Penang Peranakan dishes and kueh kueh.

7. The Penang Buddhist Association, Jalan Anson (Anson Road)

The Association was founded in 1925 by a group of Straits Chinese Buddhists. The Straits Eclectic temple was built in 1931. There are cast iron staircases, mother-of-pearl inlaid blackwood altars, chandeliers and other large Peranakan furniture.



8. State Chinese Penang Association, also known as Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang, Jalan Perak (Perak Road)

Visit our counterpart in Penang for information on events and traditions of our Baba Nyonya brethren.



9. Thnee Kong Thnua, Jade Emperor's Pavilion, Penang Hill, Air Itam

The split-level temple with a one-of-a-kind multi-bracketed dome is located on the hill slope. The Jade Emperor with a flat-topped crown wears a long black beard, seated regally on his throne with a kindly, grandfatherly look, clasping a short,



flat tablet in both hands before his chest. He has two attendants holding fans above his head and his red and gold tien teng hovers above the altar, befitting his status.

10. Kek Lok See Temple, Air Itam



This well-known temple embraces both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism and needs no introduction. Many additional concrete structures have been added to the sprawling temple complex but the old sections are still a nice hideaway for Peranakan-style altars and furniture under the watchful eyes of the enlightened buddhas.

11. Sam Poh Footprint Temple, Batu Maung

See the famous 15th century Chinese eunuch admiral-explorer cast in stone and his stone footprint, one here and another in Medan. Although dedicated to the seafaring legend, there is no urn before his statue as he was not canonised. *

All photographs by Ee Sin Soo

PERFORMANCE

THE SOUND OF GRANDEUR

By Emeric Lau

As far as weddings go, everybody knows it is extremely difficult to outdo the grand visual spectacle that is part and parcel of traditional Peranakan weddings. It was no surprise then that the Peranakan Association was asked to stage a traditional wedding procession as part of Soundwaves, an annual production by the People's Association to commemorate Racial Harmony Month.

Staged at the Esplanade theatre on 7 and 8 July, this year's Soundwaves felt particularly close to home for our participants. Our very own Baba Dick Lee had been roped in by People's Association as creative consultant. The line up of songs for Soundwaves included several of Dick's compositions and most notably for us, *Bunga Sayang*, which played



The Association's wedding entourage at the Esplanade with Baba Dick Lee (in white), the creative consultant for the Soundwaves production.

at the point when the wedding procession came onstage. Indeed, Dick's masterful adaptations of perennial local melodies infused Soundwaves with a strong Singaporean flavour.

Joycelin Huang and I had the rare opportunity to play the respective roles of demure bride and groom. Coached by veteran G T Lye, we learnt the correct way of moving in the procession and how to *sohja*, or pay one's respects. Bebe Seet had our costumes

specially tailored for the event. They were so elaborate, we took a long time to don them properly before each performance. But, it was well worth the effort. Everyone, including performers from the other segments of the show, wanted to have a photo taken with us! *

BOOK LAUNCH

HARI HUA HEE BUKU IAU KIN

By Chan Eng Thai

On the balmy evening of 22 August 2006, the Peranakan community gathered at the National Library's function foyer for the official launch of William Gwee's *Baba Malay Dictionary*.

The Guest of Honour was the President of Singapore Mr S R Nathan and Mrs Nathan. The occasion was hosted by Periplus Publishing, with the Peranakan Association as co-host. Periplus' Managing Director and CEO, Mr Eric Oey and Mrs Christina Oey had their staff, who were the personal hosts for the evening, all dressed in sarong kebayas with a modern touch, which enlivened and added colour to the occasion.

Our Peranakan Association President Mr Lee Kip Lee gave the opening speech, saying that the *Baba Dictionary* was long awaited by the Peranakan Community. Its publication, he added, marked a milestone in the annals of the Association's history as the oral language of the Babas had been compiled into a book for posterity. His speech was then

read out in Baba Malay and the guests were given an opportunity to hear an alleged "dying language" spring to life with sayings like *tunggu sampay bejanggot*, *sanggol tiga tiang* and *serap sama chukar esi dalam botol* being used!

The author Mr Gwee spoke about how he grew up, when practically all members of his household and even neighbours spoke in Baba Malay. Alas, with globalisation, that kind of environment cannot be replicated. However, with the *Baba Dictionary* and the continuing activities of the Peranakan Association, the *Baba* language can be practised and be made relevant in these present times.

Mr Gwee's *Baba Malay panton* was read out by six-year old nyonya molek Seraphina Yap, which was very much appreciated by President Nathan. The guests were treated to *makan kechik* and *kueh chuchi mulot* from PeraMakan restaurant, which were consumed with much relish, as well as songs from the Peranakan Voices. *



President Nathan launches the *Baba Malay Dictionary*. Also in the picture: Peranakan Association President Lee Kip Lee, nyonya molek Seraphina Yap and Mrs Nathan.

MAKAN EXTRAVAGANZA

By Ong Poh Neo

On a lazy Sunday brunch at the ballroom of the Furama City Centre, the Peranakan Voices (PV) gave a performance that succeeded in achieving a vigorous, sustained Peranakan Buzz.

The brain child of PV member Irene Ooi, Makan Extra-vaganza on 23 April was the product of over 20 energetic and dedicated PV volunteers. The show interspersed song and dance, backed by the Peranakan Association's (PA) own young band, with various items. Tony Quek, Francis Hogan and KT Chan played out a well-timed skit which had the audience in stitches. Peter Soh was 'dug out' and persuaded to do a solo. The only professional, Brandon Chong, did a skit, a spin-off of TV's PCK.

The mercurial Shirley Tay, PV member and chef of the hotel's Tiffany Coffee House, single-handedly cooked and presented a tasty Peranakan buffet topped by an equally dazzling array of dessert for 44 tables of PA members and guests. A later count revealed some 700 plus bowls of laksa had been consumed.

Most of the audience, if not all, retired with voluble requests for more shows. Any takers? *

All photographs by Shia Ai Lee



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WELCOME

A big welcome to our new members:

1. Mr Colin Chee
2. Mrs Gauron Pat Yeow Soo Gim
4. Mr Leow Boon Wee
5. Ms Lim Chin Choo
6. Ms Eileen Quek
7. Mr Roney K L Tan
8. Mrs Teo Helena Chan Siak Hong
9. Mr Ignatius Teo Kian Hong

OBITUARY

Our deepest condolences to the families of Mr Sng Boh Khim and Mr Tan Kim Hock who have passed on.

Baba Convention 2006: "Peonies Bloom In Phuket"

This year's Baba Convention will be held on the balmy island of Phuket from 1 – 3 December 2006. At press time, the cost for each participant is S\$700 inclusive of air ticket, all transfers, two room nights (twin share with abf) in a hotel in Phuket Town, registration fee, Grand Welcome Dinner & Show (day 1), seminar & lunch, dinner & show at Phuket Fantasy (day 2), tour of Phuket Old Town, lunch & closing ceremony at Central Festival Mall (day 3). Please note, the convention organisers say this costing is subject to adjustment in the event of further changes. **Contact Mrs Lim Geok Huay at tel: (65) 62564863 for bookings and registration.**

Peranakan Christmas 2006 at Katong/Joo Chiat

Singapore's first-ever Peranakan Christmas will be held at Katong and Joo Chiat on 22 – 24 December 2006! The event promises to be a draw for residents, the community and tourists attracted to the neighbourhood's rich multi-cultural heritage. Co-organised by the residents, Cornerstone Community Services Centre and Joo Chiat Citizens Consultative Committee

(CCC), bazaar tentage stalls are up for hire for the three day and night event at an affordable \$300 or \$400 for Katong Odeon and Katong Mall locations respectively.

Contact: Ms Lew Mi Yih at community@cscs.com.sg.

Join the Peranakan Association

Mari mari, Peranakans, be in touch with your heritage. Non-Peranakans, you are also most welcome to join. Be a life member of this invigorating, colourful culture for only \$103. Our activities include talks, social gatherings, some social sports, an annual dinner, annual convention, Peranakan fairs, fund-raising and heritage projects. **Click on www.peranakan.org.sg or call Mrs Lim Geok Huay at tel: (65)-6255-0704.**

Preserving the Peranakan Culture

The Peranakan Association of Singapore is a heritage and cultural organisation. Our choir is the Peranakan Voices and our activities are for the preservation as well as promotion of the Peranakan culture. We are not associated with any commercial entity which provides "Peranakan " theme events.

106th Dinner & Dance: A Big Thank You

The Peranakan Association and the 106th Dinner & Dance Organising Committee extend our heartiest thanks to the following sponsors who contributed so generously to make this grand annual occasion a big success. A big thank you too, to others not on this list who gave their time and effort towards ensuring the smooth organisation of the event.

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106th Dinner & Dance Organising Committee

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John Lee - *Co-Chairman/ Design & Decoration*
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Alvin Yapp - *Committee Member*
Mark Koh - *Committee Member*
Mabel Long - *Committee Member*
Ian Yap, Flipmedia - *Logo design & decorations*

THE PERANAKAN GUIDE: SINGAPORE

By Peter Lee

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 to be transformed into a dedicated Peranakan museum. Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555, Tel: (65) 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: (65) 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

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

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.nus.edu.sg/museums/babaindex.html>

EMERALD HILL ROAD

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

JOO CHIAT AND KATONG



Perhaps the nerve centre of Peranakan life in Singapore. In its heyday the area had 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, Joo Chiat Road and Joo Chiat Place.

http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stb_portal/en/homr/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html

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.

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, a huge sum in those days. 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: (65) 64234616

If you come across other Peranakan locations of interest in Singapore and countries beyond, please email us at: enquiries@peranakan.org.sg Thank you!

All photographs by Colin Chee



THE
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ASSOCIATION
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