



OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2007
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CONTENTS

2 Editorial

3 Letters

FLOWER FEATURE

5 Colour Our World with Flowers

COLLECTING

17 Fascinating Finds – Young Collectors

ONLINE

20 Second Life

23 Blogfeed

YOUNG PERANAKAN

25 Bringing Up Nyonyas

DALAM DAPOR

26 Flower Power

TRADITIONS

29 Tang Chek in Penang

BOOK REVIEW

33 Learning & Understanding

EVENTS

35 Christmas service
Postcard from Rosa
Remembrance of Scenes Past

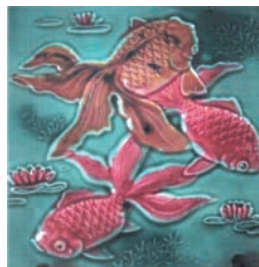
37 Dance Reflections

Credit Suisse

38 Noticeboard

40 Directory

4



21



33



37



17

WE HAVE ARRIVED

n more ways than one.

With 2008 just round the corner, we celebrate the year's end at our Peranakan Ball on 16 November, which marks the association's 107-year history. The theme for the evening is the flower garden and from our cover, you can see the mood is beautifully decorative.

Apt therefore, for several of our writers to come together in this issue to celebrate in floral style. We also cut across to the younger set, where we are gratified to note a growing interest in all things Peranakan - from claiming their roots in the school, collecting antiques, online through blogs and even creating *nyonya avatars* on a 3D virtual environment called Second Life!

Yes, We want to create even greater awareness. You may notice the magazine is twinning with our website, www.peranakan.org.sg, to share articles and viewpoints. It's one of the many initiatives we have taken in 2007 to widen our reach, and especially to our younger nyonys and babas, whether in Singapore, Penang, Australia, Britain or elsewhere around the world.

We've exceeded so many of our targets compared with 2006. All our pages are in full colour. Ads are rolling in. Our circulation has doubled to 5,000 copies. Readership has shot up with our expanded distribution to the Singapore Tourism Board, the Asian Civilisations Museum, University Cultural Centre and foreign clubs. So we are read by Peranakans, non Peranakans, locals and foreigners alike.

We have more writers, younger writers, and our

range of articles has improved and widened even as each issue becomes more focussed. We cast our nets wider in the community, thanks mostly to the power of email and the Internet. I proudly declare that we've arrived, from being a newsletter to a full-fledged magazine - glossy and beautifully designed. I even had someone writing in to ask for a job in our magazine. Amazing.

For the Peranakan magazine committee - all volunteers - it's been an exhilarating, stressful, hectic

ride as we squeeze out our spare time to produce each issue. But it's been so enjoyable and we've got such great team chemistry, that we don't really notice the pain!

I guess we don't mind it because we do it for the love of the culture. Thank you to our readers for your kind compliments. It is recognition that we really appreciate. It really spurs us on. Thank

you to all our dedicated writers - you've been great through the years.

There's always room for us to improve. We'd love to hear more feedback. Don't just tell it to a friend or two. Come forth and write to us at www.peranakan.org.sg or post to Raffles City, PO Box 1640, S'pore 911755. It's okay, we welcome criticism, so long as you want us to improve.

Merry Christmas and *Slamat Taon Baru!* ❀

Linda Chee



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Dear Editor

RICE STORIES

In my previous article about 421 Joo Chiat Road (Issue July-Sept 07), I wrote about a *wakwak* (old lady) who invoked curses with a plate of rice on her head.

Rice is integral to every Peranakan meal as a staple on the dinner table as well as the altar. No *semayang* (prayer offering) is complete without rice as it is a sacred commodity. Thus, *wakwaks* in the old days would very often *sumpah depan nasik* (swear before the rice).

When I was a little boy, grandma told me the story of how rice played a role in the origin of lightning. A long time ago in China, famines were frequent. Many people could ill-afford to have rice on the table. It was so precious. One day, a maiden in a remote village had no food left in her kitchen. She saw an unripe papaya on the tree in her yard. Driven by hunger, she picked the fruit. Just then it started to rainshe cut the papaya and disposed of the seeds. Suddenly, there was a loud bang! She had landed in the nether world.

But, there had been no flash of lightning. Only thunder. It was her punishment for wasting rice! She explained to the deities their mistake. She had not thrown away rice, but white seeds from the unripe papaya. The King of the Heavens henceforth decreed that before thunder strikes, there would be a flash of lightning to illuminate, so that one could distinguish between unripe papaya seeds and rice grains.

Here's a belief about rice: If you do not finish all the rice on your plate, you will marry a spouse with a pock-marked face. And talking about face, rice powder, or *bedak sejok*, is valued as a face powder to achieve that smooth porcelain complexion of a nonya. Incidentally, scientists have discovered that fermented rice contains *pitera* which is the core ingredient in modern cosmetics to induce beautiful skin.

Of gastronomical importance, rice reigns supreme as the prime ingredient in *nasik ulam*, *nasik kuning* and the all-time favourite *nasik lemak* which curiously, served another purpose as part of the feast on the 12th day of the traditional wedding, after the bride's virginity was verified. The whiteness of the rice, from being cooked in coconut milk, was most likely a representation of the purity of the bride. ❀

Norman Cho

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*



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THE COLLECTION OF KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

Decorative Candle-holders



Intricate manek potong hand-stitched on velvet bases

COLOUR OUR WORLD WITH FLOWERS



Flowers are not only for the soft-hearted or romantic. In ancient times, monks meditated by arranging flowers. Samurais practised the art for concentration when not crossing swords with enemies. Today, they are for every occasion, from birth to earth, from sickness to success.

LINDA CHEE presents a special feature where our writers cover the floral influence in the world of the Peranakans.

So it is. Flowers feature so pervasively in our lives. Next to food, flowers perhaps best define the Peranakan's love for colour and elaborate ornamentation – in our homes, décor, porcelain, silver, jewellery, *sarong kebayas* and so many other things.

The richness of the Peranakan heritage was probably a sign of the times. The heyday of the Peranakans, from the 19th century to early 20th century, coincided with the peak of Victoria's British Empire and Guangxu's reign in the Qing dynasty when ornateness was the order of the day. Peranakan families accumulated vast wealth in the colonies, building ostentatious homes that crossed two great civilisations in a riot of cultural extravagance. Plus local Malay influences. A truly cosmopolitan blend, or even *rojak* as some might say.

Admire the richly tiled façade of well-conserved Peranakan houses in Katong along Joo Chiat, Tembeling and Koon Seng



■ FLOWER FEATURE ■

Roads, or at Blair Road and Neil Road. Pretty façade tiles feature colourful peonies and chrysanthemums. Step inside and imagine door frames, cupboards, chairs, tables and bevelled mirrors with all sorts of fine carvings of buds, open flowers and leaves curving gracefully.

From the windows hang heavy velvet curtains in deep burgundy, veined with gold floral patterns. Fluted glass epergnes (vases) hold bouquets of bright flowers on marble-topped tables heavily inlaid with mother-of-pearl cherry blossoms and leaves. The *nyonya* of the household greets you in her finest attire, her red *kebaya* heavily embroidered with sunny chrysanthemums, her hand-painted *sarong* adorned with peacocks strutting in lush gardens. Her hair, bunned immaculately to perfection, is adorned with fresh jasmine flowers from her garden.

You are a guest at her *tok panjang* dinner where *nyonya* porcelain, richly enamelled with peonies, phoenixes and peaches on green and purple grounds, lend glorious colour to a mouthwatering feast of dishes. Shavings of scented *bunga kantan* (torch ginger flower) in her *nasi ulam* intoxicate your senses at the first bite.

Back to today. Such a form of idyllic life and appearance is rarely seen or experienced in its entirety now. But come April 2008 the former Asian Civilisations Museum at Armenian Street will reopen as a new entity to house a complete Peranakan museum. Where visitors will be able to see the Peranakan material culture and living traditions. The Baba House at Neil Road will also be ready about the middle of next year to showcase the traditional Peranakan house in its original glory.

Meanwhile, we find out more about flowers in the Peranakan garden and how they are used.

CEDRIC TAN LISTS THE FLOWERS USED FOR RITUALS AND CEREMONIES.

Flowers play a pivotal role in almost all Peranakan ceremonies and rituals, not only for their beauty and scent but sometimes for their symbolic meanings.

At the altar, a large floral arrangement adorns the right wing of the top altar while smaller posies fit into the elegant *nyonyaware* or English vases on the lower altar table. Loose flowers are heaped on footed glass platters or plates while individual blooms crown fruit offerings.



SHRUBS

Bunga siantan chiah/Ixora (Ixora chinensis)

Top on my list is the perennial four-petaled *bunga siantan* or *ixora*, a bush-like plant. It must be the *chiah* type which is orange in colour and has rounded edges unlike the more common pointed type.

A sprig of spring onion and a bunch of *ixora* atop a heaped bowl of rice from the last pot cooked on the eve of Chinese New Year symbolises rejuvenation and bountiful good luck for the New Year. The *ixora*-spring onion garnish also symbolises cleansing during the *Cheo Thau* or Hair Combing Ceremony in a traditional

wedding. Individual *ixora* blooms are inserted into fresh jasmine then pinned on the bride's chignon on the eve of her wedding.

Bunga siantan chiah is also used in the last rites ceremony.

A person in mourning is deemed to have *bukak tuaha* or ended his mourning period by pinning a small bunch of *ixora* in her hair or as a corsage for him at the temple, at the graveyard or after the final ceremony at home. It is improper to use *ixoras* at any other time. A small bunch of *ixora* acts as the *kemunchak* or pinnacle of the *leng tok* food offering in the final memorial prayer, at the end of the *tuaha* period.



Bunga melor/Jasmine (Jasminum sambac)

This little white flower with a strong scent is also known as *bunga melati*. It is easily found in the Indian apothecary. Sweet-smelling jasmine is a favourite flower for altar offerings and as a hair accessory. It also adorns the bridal head dress. Strung together, the jasmine garland is a visually elegant trimming at the base of a young *nyonya*'s *sanggol telefon* beside each ear, or a newly-married *nyonya*'s *sanggol sipot*. In Penang, a three-layered jasmine garland interspersed with rose petals circles the base of the chignon, giving the impression of a floral tiara.



Bunga sukudangan/Bread flower (Vallis glabra)

This star-shaped cream-coloured flower emerges in bunches and exudes a slight freshly baked bread-like smell. It is a creeper and grows densely on lush archways or pergolas. It has a sticky sap and the scent is not as long lasting as the jasmine in our tropical hot weather. The bread flower is used in offerings or as part of *bunga champor* (mixed flowers) for the *mandi bunga* or ritual bath.



Bunga tongking/Chinese violet (Telosma cordata)

This yellow scented flower grows in bunches from the main stem of the plant. It is a slender twining creeper normally found along fences or patios. The flowers can be eaten raw or floated in a soup or folded into an omelette. It is offered in bunches at the altar or individually threaded into a garland for the chignon.



Bunga butang/Bachelor's button (Gomphrena globosa)

This amaranth-coloured button-like flower is usually planted along sandy patches and if properly dried, can be preserved well. It has fine, rice-shaped scaly petals and is widely used in the *bunga*

■ FLOWER FEATURE ■

rampay mixture. The flower can be placed as the reddish "heart" of the white frangipani which adorns the inner mid-portion of the *sireh darah* (betel nut arrangement to signify the status of the virgin bride) at a traditional wedding ceremony.



Bunga keembung/Balsam
(*Impatiens wallerana*)

Balsam has many varieties with a myriad of brightly coloured blossoms. The flowers shrivel after a few hours, rendering them unsuitable as hair adornment. They are popular as an offering in the *bunga champor*.



Bunga mawar/Rose (*Rosa chinensis*)

The local variety is small, compact but very fragrant. The flower is pinned on the chignon or even shredded to add colour to the garland of jasmine for the *sanggol nyonya*. Like the *bunga butang* and jasmine, the rose petals can be sliced

finely to give the *bunga rampay* some colour.



Bunga sundal malam/Tuberose
(*Polyanthus tuberosa*)

On the altar, the imposing long tuberose stalk seems to reach out to the sky above the rest of the flowers. It is an offering of fragrance that penetrates the higher realms. The scent from the bulbous flowers seems more pronounced in the evenings, beginning from the eve of various important religious

festivals such as *Semayang Ti Kong* (which takes place on the eve of the ninth day of the Chinese New Year), birthdays and the regular full and new moon days when this flower makes its appearance.



Bunga kacha piring/Cape jasmine (*Gardenia jasminoides*)

The *kacha piring* plant is the gardenia and is a medium sized shrub with glossy leaves.

The flowers last more than a day on the altar and are very fragrant.



Anggerik/Orchids
(*Orchidaceae*)

A popular pastime is tending orchids in the garden. Orchids adorn vases, epergnes and pots on altars, sideboards and tables.

Grown in charcoal-filled hanging pots, the preferred orchids are the golden showers and spider orchids as they are long-lasting with brightly coloured long sprays.



Bunga jinggeh ayam/ Red Cockscomb (*Celosia cristata*)

This plant has a furry-like flower clumped to resemble the velvety comb of a cock. Its reddish tone is preferred and can vary from bright red to maroon which represents good luck and success. It forms the central flower in the vase, for the altar. The local populace uses the leaves to treat joint inflammation and impotence.

TREES

The following are flowers from taller trees found in larger gardens. Most of the trees can be bud-grafted and grown in pots, with continuous pruning to limit the growth.



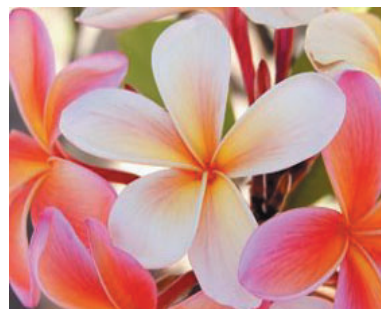
Bunga chempaka/Yellow or Cream Champaka
(*Michelia champaka*)

The Peranakans love the unique shape and scent of this flower. Besides using the *chempaka* flowers in offerings, the *nyonyas'* penchant for copying

and applying motifs is seen in carvings of its exact likeness from candied unripe papaya, that form the base of the *chanab* presentation (see page 11). The carved papaya is similarly called *bunga chempaka* and is the first piece to be skewered onto the vertical rod of the *chanab* box before adding on candied papaya carved in the eagle claw motif, and pickled red limes.

Bunga kenanga/Cananga (*Canarium odoratum*)

The petals of the flower are rather elongated; somewhat like a shriveled spider with a miniscule body. It is sweet smelling and is usually offered at the altar.



Bunga kemboja/Frangipani
(*Plumeria rubra*)

This shady tree with pink, orange and red flowers is often found in Muslim cemeteries. Not surprisingly, it is also known as *bunga kubor* (graveyard flower). The white

frangipani flower (*Plumeria obtusa*) has five rounded petals and a yellow core. It has limited ritual usage and is placed in the *sireh darah*. It is more popular as raw material for a traditional game. Children will gather the fallen flowers and tie them into a bunch with a rubber band to form the *chap tay*, somewhat resembling a badminton shuttlecock. They kick the *chap tay* to keep it aloft until the flowers are destroyed.

It is believed that the *pontianak* is attracted to the scent of this flower and will supposedly linger near the tree in the evening where this spirit awaits her victims. Therefore, it is not a popular plant in a typical Peranakan garden. However, in today's modern setting, frangipani seems to be a favourite choice in lush Balinese-inspired gardens.



The epergne.



The chanab.

MAURICE WEE COVERS MORE GROUND ON THE FLORAL INFLUENCE

Epergne

The epergne is quintessentially and distinctively a part of Peranakan décor. Made of blown glass, this elaborate multi-level vase from Europe was highly popular in the early and mid-20th century as a symbol of opulent living. In fact, wealthy families owned several of these epergnes, which were far from cheap. An epergne was displayed as the centrepiece on the *meja bulat* (round table) in the main hall, although some homes had them in the bridal chamber during the wedding celebration.

Bunga chanab/chienhup (flowers for the sweet meat box)

Baba Thomas Tan from Malacca is currently one of the rare few who are skilled in the art of carving *bunga chanab*, a uniquely Peranakan art. The *chanab*, is a lacquered and gilded sweet meat box used for offerings to *Ti Kong*, the Emperor of Heaven. At the very top of the *chanab* is a metal holder supporting five bamboo sticks. Pieces of red candied lime (*lemono kheh ia*), candied papaya, sliced and carved into the shape of *chempaka* flowers and eagle claws are arranged vertically on the skewers. The five skewers symbolise the



Hairpins with bunga chot in the background.

five elements of Chinese mythology, ie fire, water, metal, wood and earth.

Bunga chot (floral hair piece)

The *bunga chot* is a hair accessory that is elegantly and attractively displayed on the chignon (*sanggol*) of *bibiks*, or older nyonyas, and the coiffured hairstyles of younger nyonyas such as the *sanggol talipon*. They were fashion items and it was an acquired skill to create *bunga chots*. Only scented flowers were used, including jasmine (*melor*), roses and *sukudangan*.

TAN KUNING RECALLS SOME CONCOCTIONS USING FLOWERS.

Minyak rambot (home-made hair oil)

In previous times hair oil was home made. The liquid from freshly grated coconut was cooked in a kwali over a slow fire. This yielded three or four tablespoons of oil which when cold would be put in a *chupu* (small porcelain container) for daily use. A few fresh petals of *bunga chempaka* or *bunga kenaga* would be immersed in the oil for several days to scent it.

Bunga tongking

This flower can be stir-fried with minced pork and served as a side dish. It is believed to be good for the eyes, so have a try! It comes in small bunches of green buds, which turn pale yellow in full bloom. The *bunga tongking* was once widely available in the wet markets, but the price is now prohibitive.

Ayer bunga

Ayer bunga, a bowl of water with flowers floating on it, was also a must for *semayang bulan*. In the bowl would be a bunch of pomegranate leaves and five types of fragrant flowers like jasmine, rose and carnation. After the offering, the water was scooped out and used for bathing (*mandi ayer bunga*) to attract good luck and repel misfortune.



Bunga tanjung



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Bunga sanggol (flowers for the chignon)

Peranakan women did not have loads of flowers on their hair. Most had one row of *bunga melor* (jasmine) attached to one or both sides of their chignons. Jasmine was preferred for its mild fragrance and light colour. A row of jasmine flowers would be strung together and sometimes, colored petals were folded and inserted in between them. The petals could be from red roses or orchids like the Vanda Miss Joaquim. The *sanggol* could be the *sanggol nyonya* to go together with the *baju panjang* (three quarter length long dress) or the *sanggol bun* and *sanggol sipot*, the smaller chignons that went together with the *baju kebaya*.

Another type of flower that could be used was *bunga tanjung* (*Mimusops elengi*), which had a strong fragrance (picture above). Strung together and bound around the chignon, the row could be about 2 or 3 inches long. But when worn intertwined within the hair, it could be longer. It was worn mostly at home for its aroma to refresh the hair after a wash. The *bunga tanjong* withered and turned brown fast, so it was rarely used when the women were outdoors.

BILLY TEO EXAMINES DECORATIVE WALL TILES THAT HAVE BECOME COLLECTORS' ITEMS.

Ceramic wall tiles were a popular feature in houses in Singapore and Malaya during the 1900s. Their almost overwhelming presence in Peranakan houses built at that time led to the common but perhaps inaccurate description of such tiles as 'Peranakan tiles'.

These ornate wall tiles nevertheless do reflect the rich diversity of Peranakan culture and the inspiring incorporation of Chinese, Malay and European influences. They were used on the façade, reception hall, patio, kitchen, stairway, floor and even on tables and chairs. Dimensions vary from square tiles of 6" x 6", border tiles measuring 3" x 6" and even corner tiles of 3" x 3".

During the 1900s, tiles were imported from Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Japan. Popular manufacturers include H & R Johnson (founded in Cobridge, UK, in 1901), Minton Hollins (founded in Stoke-upon-Trent, UK, in 1793), DK (Danto, founded in Kitamamura, Japan, in 1930) whose marks are usually found on the back of a well preserved tile. More often than not, the mark on the



back is obscured by stubborn old grouting stuck fast over the decades.

Houses decorated with such tiles have become a rarity in Singapore. So the supply is especially limited. But for new and enthusiastic collectors, it is never too late to start.

Tile designs

Flower, fruit and animal motifs expressing wishes for prosperity and good fortune were especially popular on tiles for Peranakan houses. The designs included typical European motifs spanning from Victorian to Art

Deco, and Chinese-inspired themes with auspicious or religious meanings.

Other popular symbols were:

- peach (longevity)
- Buddha-hand citron (good fortune)
- pineapple (prosperity)
- fish (abundance)
- bat (fortune)
- birds and insects (various meanings)
- animals and mythical creatures such as the phoenix, *qilin* and lion (various meanings). ❀



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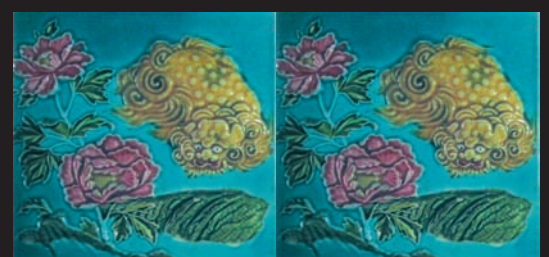
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1: Mark of the manufacturer "H & R Johnson" found on the back of tile. 2: Victorian border tile. 3: Goldfish motif symbolising abundance and prosperity. 4: A rare set of 4 tiles with chrysanthemums and Chinese characters. 5: Tiles signifying prosperity and longevity. 6: special set of tiles with flying birds. The complete set comprises 6 tiles. 7: A Victorian border tile. 8: A pair of qilin commonly found in homes to ward off evil spirits.



Bunga rampay (also spelt rampeh or rampai)

Here is a compilation of notes from various writers on the Peranakan version of the potpourri, as used for the many occasions in their life.

It was, and still is, customary and popular for Peranakan families to use the *bunga rampay*, their version of the potpourri, for all sorts of milestones: On the wedding bridal bed (*ranjang loksan*), to celebrate Chinese New Year, for birthday celebrations, on the *sam kai* altar, on feast days and also for the reposed.

Finely sliced screw pine leaves (*daon pandan*) comprise 90% of the concoction, mixed loosely with flowers like white and yellow *chempaka*, roses (red, pink, yellow or white), *bunga melor* (jasmine), *bunga kenaga* and *bunga tongking*.

The Malay cultural influence comes from the scent of Arabic bark oils or perfumes like *Ayer Mata Duyung*, while the sprinkling of sandal wood dust is derived from Chinese tradition. Some people even use 4711 cologne instead of perfume.

At weddings, some prefer the *bunga rampay* to be strewn across the *ranjang loksan*. Others have a big plate on the bed or in a corner of the bridal chamber. A plateful could be offered during the *semayang bulan* (prayers to the moon) after which each female member of the family would place a handful under the pillow for good luck. Some also use *bunga rampay* to scent their containers of face powder made of rice, shaped in a semi-circle and imported from Malacca or Penang. ❀

FASCINATING FINDS

Four young collectors speak to **LINDA CHEE** about their passion for Peranakan antiques.



Kevin Aeria, 35, waited a long time to fall in love – with Peranakan gold and silver. It all started after the death of his grand aunt Eliza Thomazios in 1983 at age 86. She was a true blue Portuguese nyonya from Jasin, Malacca who loved to wear daily, and during festive occasions, her *Baju Panjang* and arranged her hair in a *sanggol*.

After she passed on, Kevin's brother gave him a box of her belongings which he kept in his wardrobe and promptly forgot. He thought it contained old coins and notes. But when the family decided to move from Marine Parade to their present home, Kevin took a peek at the box's contents and there was no turning back.

"That box was sealed tight for 15 years. I finally took the courage to slowly remove the tape tightly wrapped around the box." To his astonishment, Kevin found beautiful gold and silver jewellery. This gave him a headstart in his Peranakan collection. Today, Kevin has expanded his collection with more jewellery, beadwork, furniture and porcelain. "Peranakan culture has crossed over to the 21st century. I am very sure this vibrant culture will survive for many years to come through our younger generations," said Kevin.

Adrian Quah, 27, started collecting silver about two years ago. His

favourites are pillow and bolster ends because they are easy to keep and display, and are more easily available. The young Baba, whose hometown is Malacca, looks for silverware as used by the Peranakans, which tend to have decorations of floral, animal and human figures on them with traditional Chinese, Malay and even European motifs. "These are unlike silver for the Malays which tend to have floral and geometrical motifs, or others like English and Chinese export silver."

Says Adrian: "I enjoy discovering what the motifs mean, because most motifs on old Peranakan silver carry some connotations in mostly Chinese and Malay contexts. It is like deciphering coded messages. "Carp may denote abundance (*yu*) in Chinese symbolism, deer for wishing long life and paired butterflies may denote wedded bliss. Sometimes the messages are more cryptic and I find them difficult to interpret."

Adrian observes that flower motifs in silver items include the locally available *bunga tratay* (lotus), *bunga mawar* (rose) and blooms originally from China such as prunus blossoms, the peony and the Buddha Hand citron (a fruit resembling elongated fingers). These carry different messages of happiness and desired beautiful and positive human traits.



One of Kevin Aeria's prize pieces is a rare beaded comb holder in excellent condition. "I love this piece, as it is almost 100% perfect. I love flower motifs, as their colors are so rich and vibrant."



From Adrian Quah's collection: A bekas sireh or container to hold sireh leaves (front features phoenix and floral decorations) together with a silvergilt bolster end featuring phoenixes, peony, bamboo, prunus, pomegranate, peaches, Buddha's Hand Citron and other flowers.

Tuson Chong, 22, collects jewellery, particularly hairpins and kerosangs in silver and gilt. Mention antique shops and his eyes light up. The young Sarawakian landscape architect, whose grandmother is Peranakan, enjoys searching for good finds, having started six years ago with one hairpin acquisition from a Tanjong Pagar Shop. "The old settings look so much better. It is craftsmanship that people cannot produce now."

He adds: "I wouldn't say that the flowers are the main thing I go for in a piece of jewellery. But floral patterns really do make a difference. It's a lot more interesting and curious because of the re-enactment of what the jeweller was thinking when making the piece. "To me, Peranakan jewellery has an equal and curious mix of Chinese, Malay and European flowers and animals. Like the peony, plum blossom, cherry blossom (Chinese), bunga tanjong, clove flower (Malay), sunflower, tulips and lilies (European)."

Tuson's friend, **Sheree Hong**, 24, started collecting old kebayas recently and loves green kebayas with floral prints. Her interest was sparked by her mum, who sews beaded slippers. "She's sewing a pair for my father now. Next one

will be mine."

Sheree has always been interested in textiles. However, only recently did she discover the beauty of Southeast Asian textiles especially batik. "Generally I like motifs of flowers and animals, birds and insects. I prefer the lighter pastel coloured ones. But I have begun to like batik in strong colours as well. When I was in Kuching recently, I attended a kebaya exhibition. It opened my perspective on the wide range of batiks." Sheree enjoys batiks because of their "long history related to the Javanese, Indian, Malay, Chinese and European way of life."

She is also fond of kebayas. "I collect them mainly to wear on special occasions. I prefer the antique pieces because of the material used, and the delicate patterns of the embroidery (flowers animals, birds and insects.). The heavily embroidered ones are my favourites but it still depends on the colours used. I understand the darker shades of browns and reds are for older nonyas and the pastel light coloured ones for young nonyas?" said Sheree with a smile. ☼



Sheree Hong and Tuson Chong enjoy searching for good finds in antique shops.

Tuson's kerosangs in gilt (right) and Sheree's antique kebaya.



GET A SECOND LIFE

By Claire Seet

"Every human being is interested in two kinds of worlds: the Primary, everyday world which he knows through his senses, and a Secondary world or worlds which he not only can create in his imagination, but which he cannot stop himself creating."

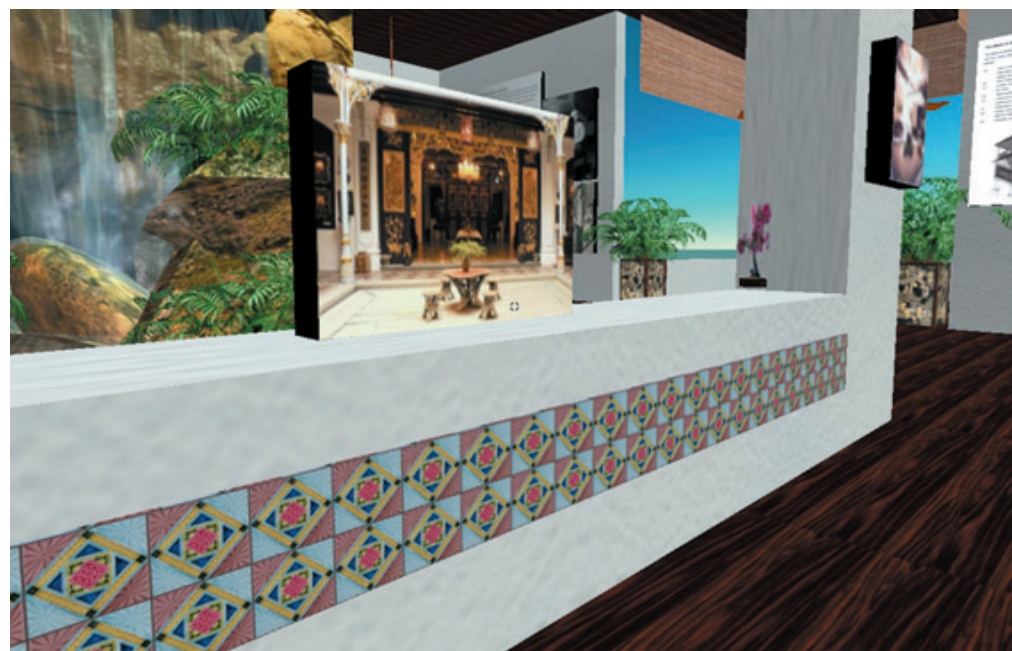
- W.H. Auden

I am a young Peranakan. It has become a personal project to look out for things that are relevant to the culture and increase awareness of what is Peranakan. After several media reports about Second Life (SL), I recently decided to take the plunge, download the client program that will enable me to create my 'avatar' (online character or identity), and interact with other residents and explore the virtual realm of SL.

'Username. Password. Connect. Your screen may be frozen. Initialising Second Life. Contacting Region.'

A black screen eases my transfer from real life into Second Life. After clothing my 'avatar', and raring to explore, I type in 'Peranakan' and am pleasantly surprised when there is a link to follow. All it takes is a few moments and I am 'teleported' to the Peranakan Corner - Featuring Straits Chinese, in Hyperborea [222, 206, 23]. There is a house showcasing simple Peranakan History, photographs, beadwork and clothing.

Nicky Ree, who owns the house, worked on it on friends' requests as they felt it would be a good project. She sourced



most of the information and pictures from the Net, as she now calls the Netherlands home and did not have access to family photographs and other resource material. She now works in Second Life, making the career move in January this year, mainly designing clothes, including kebayas, sarongs, in addition to many other haute couture offerings. Her new retail outlet is located on an island, Tropical Orchid [230, 128, 30] that will open on 12 October.

When asked what influences her designs, she says simply, "I basically designed what I would like my AV to wear". I am itching to explore more, try my hand at creating new things. Just like real life, Nicky mentions, good design in second life requires the flair, hard work, and the time for the details. On that note, it looks like it's back to real life for me.

'Are you sure you want to quit? Yes, Cancel.'

My mouse hovers for a moment, and I think about the piles of work still to do in the morning.

'Yes.' ☼



WHAT IS SECOND LIFE?

Second Life is a 3D virtual environment. Within the computer-rendered world, users can create their own identity (known as an 'avatar'- you can choose your online name, and how you look and what you wear) and interact with others in a lifelike social space. Residents can explore, meet other Residents, socialise, participate in individual and group activities, create and trade items (virtual property) and services from one another.

Some interesting facts:

- The Australian Broadcasting Corporation have an island, CSIRO.
- Scientists conduct seminars in Second Life (SL).
- Universities provide virtual classrooms to host lectures and projects online.

- Second Life has its own economy and currency called Linden Dollars (L\$).
- Residents can create new goods, provide services, buy and sell in the virtual world, just as they would in Real Life - for money.

There are also currency exchanges where Residents can exchange US\$ or other real world currencies for L\$ and vice versa. The exchange rate is approximately L\$ 270 to one US dollar. ☼

Log onto www.secondlife.com for more details.



BLOGFEED

We extract some interesting postings from www.peranakan.org.sg

Peranakan Genealogy >> **Thread-Long Lost Realatives**

Site Admin on October 18th 2006

Anyone got any interesting stories to tell about their Peranakan family tree?

gwenlim « Reply #1 on: December 29, 2006, 12:00:29 AM »

I can tell you a story. It started when the British fell and fled, when there was chaos in the island. My family lived in Katong, a small enclave of expatriates and businessmen, and was amongst the first to know that Singapore was lost. My grandfather, at the time, had been a British consort, and it was he who decided that my family, the Sus, would stay put. The women of my household were terrified. We were known for our resilience, but more for our beauty [this is very true, I have seen Su family albums in the National Museum]. Our status in the community and alliance with the British made us prime candidates for blacklisting.

My grandfather knew we had one skill that could either save or kill us. Our intelligence. Hence, he donned his suit, shined his shoes and went to the club, which the Japanese had naturally taken over once the papers were signed. There, he strode into the horde of comfort girls, generals, majors and corporals, and taught the Japanese how to dance. During the years when men were murdered for wearing glasses, much less than for wearing a colonial suit in the middle of a military dancehall past curfew, he became known as Sakura Tango. From then, the story gets blurry.

His move saved my family. All I do know now, is that we escaped the harrowing three years intact, to be again, the translators and middlemen; there before the British, and after the Japanese.

hocky « Reply #2 on: September 11, 2007, 05:19:08 AM »

Hi Gwen,

I also happen to be another Katongite from Kuo Chuan Avenue (if I am not wrong) near the Catholic Church and Marine Parade. I was born and bred there and went to school at Telok Kurau. We had a pleasant life in a simple single story terraced house packed with our big family. Dad went to Europe on a work stint and came back with what he said was the same bright red metal pedal car that Prince Charles also had (we are the same age). Then he bought one of the first brand new Morris Minors in Katong. He was very into British things. Later on we moved to

Frankel Estate where we built our own house on a nice block.

New Member Introductions>> Thread Descendant of Lee Lai Moh

Hello fellow babas and nyonyas,

bus_wrecker « on: March 16, 2007, 02:24:49 AM »

Good to see a website like this dedicated to Peranakans! and I'm bloody proud to be one! a Malaysian based in Singapore. Came to Sg a few years back to do my degree only to realise how different I was from the majority of Chinese in Singapore. You see, I couldn't speak Mandarin (and other dialects too) so it's no wonder the majority of...hmm... how should I put it... 'cheenageks' found it rather difficult to accept my um.. inability to converse in Mandarin.

I've been doing some research on my family for quite some time now, filling up the missing links in my family genealogy tree. I believe most of the Peranakans in Singapore were originally from Malacca, so I'm quite sure you're familiar with (or heard of this place) with this place called Bukit Rambai.

My paternal great grandfather's (Lee Lai Moh) grew up there. That's where the story starts. From his first wife(yeah those days you could have plenty of wives), came a few children including a daughter named Lee Aik Neo. Lee Aik Neo married Lim Chong and had Lim Swee Yin, who coincidentally is my maternal grandmother.

Hang on, you must be wondering, how did maternal grandmother get into the picture? More on that later.

So Lee Lai Moh married again and had a few more children. From that marriage came Lee Teck Chong. Lee Teck Chong married Chang Him Neo and had 14 kids. (My dad says during that time, no TV. So must have more children). One of those 14 kids is my dad.

Lim Swee Yin, on the other hand had 3 children and you guessed it, one of them is my mom.

So there you go, I've got a double dose of Peranakan genes. One from my dad and one from my mom. Some of my



friends think that's why my brains are all messed up.

I'm ever ready to share my Peranakan heritage with everyone. And if you like, we can go back to Malacca, go to my aunt's nyonya *restoran* and have a big feast. Just call her in advance because the place is super packed on weekends. Some of you already know it. Yeah, Restoran Auntie Lee at Ujong Pasir. Find the red post box and you'll find the place.

To the moderators, i'd be more than happy to be a member of the Peranakan Association in Singapore. do let me know of the procedures.

New Member Introductions>> Thread: Apa khabar? Peranakan from the land of the Rising Sun

Sanath on February 15, 2007, 11:00:56 AM »

Hi all,

Just a new member to this forum.

4th generation Peranakan on both maternal and paternal sides, now studying Buddhism in the Land of the Rising Sun (Japan). 28 years old.

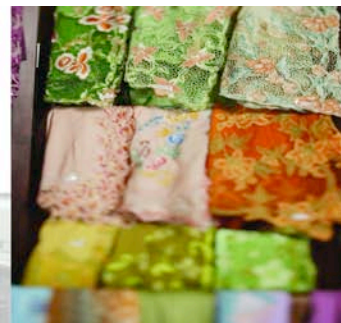
About to join the PA and will try to go for the new play by the Youth Association. Have always been trying to pick up Baba Melayu but with no one to speak to I can't, my dad speaks fluent Baba Melayu though. Would love to know other young Peranakans like myself. ☺



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BRINGING UP NYONYAS

By Linda Chee

More than a century after it was opened by Baba Song Ong Siang for young nyonyas to be educated, the Singapore Chinese Girls' School continues to keep traditions alive by cleverly weaving them into the curriculum.

From the garden...

The Singapore Chinese Girls' School has preserved an important aspect of the Peranakan household – the garden – with its own green courtyard featuring plants the Peranakans consider both beautiful and functional.

"I chose them based on the pre-1935 Malay garden. The list of plants came from the Botanic Gardens Bulletin in 1933 by Professor R E Holttum," said Mr Tan Jiew Hoe, President of the Singapore Gardening Society and a Board Director of the school. He personally supervised the design and planting for the Peranakan Courtyard.

SCGS' Courtyard has plants commonly found in Peranakan gardens and are used for a variety of purposes. Some for aesthetic value, but mostly for other reasons such as their usefulness in cooking, for medicine, as food or cosmetic dyes, as natural air fresheners for the house or at family altars.

"This tradition is used to convey values and as a vibrant learning venue where students research on the use of various plants that also relates to aspects of science at the same time," said Mrs Julie Lee, SCGS Registrar.

...to the kitchen

Home Economics as taught in SCGS reflects the cooking tradition so valued by the community for one of the most revered aspects of the culture – its unique cuisine. Peranakan condiments are used, some proudly from the school's own garden, to cook up a storm of mouth-watering dishes and desserts. ☼



Mrs Dora Fernandez and her domestic science students.



SCGS' own Peranakan courtyard.

Bunga telang.

FLOWER POWER

By Noreen Chan

Flowers have been used in cooking since antiquity, both as decorations and ingredients. Dandelion flowers, for example, are one of the "bitter herbs" mentioned in the Bible. Rosewater features extensively in Middle Eastern and West Asian cooking - think of Turkish delight. Flowers (usually dried) are also steeped in water to make teas e.g. chrysanthemum, chamomile, or macerated in alcohol to make a variety of liqueurs, a practice developed by monastic orders in Europe which lasts to this day, albeit in commercial form, for example, Benedictine Dom.

Peranakan cuisine makes more use of herbs and roots than flowers, but there are floral features in our cooking that are worth highlighting.

Bunga Kantan

Also known as Torch Ginger (*Etlingera elatior*), this is a member of the ginger family. The shoots, which can reach over a metre tall, grow from rhizomes (like the common ginger) and spread prolifically once established. The flowers start off as small shoots with a pinkish tip which develops into the flower bud. At this stage it can be cut and used for cooking. If left alone, it will develop into an exotic flower with pink fleshy petals.

The buds are used whole in cooking, or



Bunga kantan

sliced finely across for garnish. The fragrance is subtle, spicy and instantly recognisable to its fans. What would *rajak* be without it?

PENANG LAKSA

There are two main kinds of *laksa*, the *laksa lemak* that contains coconut milk and the tangy version known as *laksa asam* or Penang *laksa*. The sourness comes from tamarind (*tamarindus indica* or *asam jawa*) which is distinguished from *asam gelugor* (*garcinia atroviridis* or *asam keping*) which is the dried slice of an acid fruit of the mangosteen family. The *laksa* uses fish and plenty of vegetable, herbs (mint) and pineapple slices.

The following recipe is from my *Tua Kim Poh*, who hails from Penang. It can be found online at my Uncle CC's website

<http://pachome1.pacific.net.sg/~ccchi a/recipe01.html>

1.5kg fish (*ikan parang* or *ikan kembong*)
10 cups water
12 dried chillis, steeped in water + 3 fresh chillis
Thumb -sized piece of *kunyit* or turmeric
3 stalks serai or lemongrass
300g shallots
200g *belachan*
2 stalks *bunga kantan*
8 stalks *daun kesom* (polygonum)
1 tbsp sugar,
2 tsp salt (or to taste)
2 cups assam water
Thick rice noodles
Haeko (black prawn paste), diluted with water to thin consistency

Grind to make rempah

To make the gravy: Bring water to the boil and cook the fish. Remove, debone and return the bones to the stock and boil for another 20-30 minutes, then strain. Add the *rempah* to the stock, along with a stalk of *bunga kantan* (the other will be sliced for garnish) and all the *daun kesom*. Boil for another 20 minutes, add the *asam* water and fish meat, and season to taste.

For the garnish: Mint leaves, wiped and picked clean. 3 red chillies, 1 cucumber,



Penang Laksa.



Apong Berkwa.

pineapple, 1 large onion – sliced or cut into small pieces. Finely slice the remaining *bunga kantan*. Some people also like to use the preserved leek known as *loh kio*.

To serve: Blanch rice noodles and place in bowl. Garnish liberally with herbs, vegetables and pineapple and ladle the gravy over. Add sliced chillis, *bunga kantan* and a spoonful of *haeko*.

Bunga Telang

Blue pea or Butterfly pea (*Clitoria ternatea*, also known as *Aparajita* in India) is a blue flower, with a yellow centre, that grows from a creeper. The flower itself has no flavour, but the dye extracted from the dried flowers is used to colour a variety of sweet and savoury dishes, such as Kelantanese *nasi kerabu*, and our Peranakan *kueh-kueh* and *kueh chang babi*. In fact the blue colouring has become an essential characteristic of our cuisine.

My grandmother used to tell me that *bunga telang* grew along the fence of the tennis court in her home, and she would pick the flowers to dry and use for

cooking. Any extra would go to the “Ah Sum Kueh” who used to sell her homemade *kueh* in the neighbourhood. It is a fairly tedious business as many flowers are needed, but the colouring cannot be duplicated artificially. You could of course get away with not using any colouring at all, but it is extra touches like these that make a dish special.

APONG BERKWA

This recipe comes from my *Koh Chik Hazel*. This small rice flour *kueh* is eaten with a sweet banana sauce similar to *pengat pisang*. It is becoming a rare dessert, so we had to request it from her on special occasions like my father’s birthday recently. The *apong* are made in moulds which can be bought from *Kampung Pantai* neighbourhood in Melaka; I have heard there are electric *apong* makers but have yet to see one. *Pisang rajah* – slice and steam
Coconut milk – 1st and 2nd milk
3 pieces *gula Melaka*
Pandan leaves, pinch of salt

To make the “gravy”: Boil the 2nd coconut milk with the *gula Melaka* and pandan leaves until dissolved, then add the 1st milk, steamed bananas and salt. Thicken with corn flour.

To make the Batter: 3 cups rice flour and 1 cup glutinous rice flour, 1 cup coconut milk (the coconut seller can get you some on request), pinch of salt, 2 tsp fresh yeast. Mix together and let stand for about 3-4 hours until risen. If you cannot get fresh yeast, dry or instant yeast can be used, but needs to be mixed with 1 cup of lukewarm water and teaspoon of sugar (so as to start the fermentation).

To make the *apong*: place the mould on the burner, brush lightly with oil. Drop spoonfuls of the batter into each depression, add a drop of blue colouring from the *bunga telang*. The batter will rise, bubble and develop small holes. Once firm, remove the *apong* to a dish and repeat the process until the batter is used up. ❀

TANG CHEK IN PENANG

Find out how the Khoo Kongsi consecrates new ancestral tablets to remember their ancestors.

By Ee Sin Soo

On the 1st day of the 11th lunar month, i.e. December 10, the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi celebrates Ancestors' Remembrance Day by consecrating new ancestral tablets to be enshrined in the ancestral hall. The elaborate communal ancestral hall, where over 20 generations of ancestral tablets are neatly arranged, is an expression of the Sin Kang Khoos' cultural heritage, a symbol of their ethnicity, commemorating the lineage's continuity. These tablets contribute to favourable geomancy, harnessing and directing the natural ethereal forces towards this focal point to bring benefits to the living and dead.

The carved tablet is a strip of wood set in a wooden pedestal, with the name, dates of birth and death of the deceased in raised and gilded characters.

The Khoos' patrilineal family structure allows the head of the family, his wives and sons, whether of natural issue, by adoption or purchase, to claim a share in ancestral worship and have their tablets installed. Single and unmarried sons and daughters also have a place in the ancestral hall.

A married daughter has the duty of paying homage and making offerings to the tablets of her deceased parent(s), sharing in the cult albeit temporarily. However, she does not

have a reciprocal right or privilege to a seat in the kongsi. Her marriage ensures her a rightful place in her husband's ancestral hall.

Tablets could be shared by husband and wife with their names carved in one tablet. The tablets of the deceased have undergone the rite of "dotting the eye" while those of the living, whose souls have not entered the tablets, are covered by a piece of red cloth or red paper, signifying long life, for future use.

These individuals have a place on the altar as an ancestor when the time comes.

Any tablet in the kongsi must be consecrated by an appointed elder to derive spiritual potency, be regarded as a spiritual/living manifestation of the deceased and thus function as an appropriate object of veneration

The rite of "dotting the eyes" is performed by using a clean

calligraphic brush dipped into a solution of red ink, usually cinnabar, to daub a tablet in a ritual manner. The tablet thereby becomes "spiritualised" once its "eyes" are "opened". The practice of "tablet-dotting" is accompanied by much ceremony.

It begins with the Taoist priest blowing the *seroni kechik*





and an elder clansman striking the gong, leading the procession of male members or elders representing the particular family that wishes to install the tablets.

When the male member carrying the tablet reaches the threshold of the ancestral hall, he kneels down and positions the tablet on his back. At the appropriate ritual moment, the appointed elder who is the ritual master, picks up a writing brush to dot in the imaginary eyes three times and gives a blessing. His actions are charged with dramatic intensity.

To the uninitiated, the entire consecration ritual seems simple and shows no spiritual gap separating the commonsense world inhabited by lay people from the spiritual realm. The consecration ritual by an appointed elder occurs in front of a lay audience consisting of trustees, Khoo clansmen and invited guests. It is a community event and the kongsi clansmen represent,

respond to and direct the kongsi's religious aspirations, indivisibly bonding all the generations represented there together.

The consecration ritual concludes with the clansmen approaching the tablets in deep prayer, the incense smoke wafting over their faces and clothes, while the ancestral spirits gaze down from their tablets, concluding the spiritual drama staged by the elder and Taoist priest. The spiritual joy evoked by the revealed tablets is emotionally uplifting to clansmen.

The entire event illustrates the Khoos' versatility and adaptability, embracing the practical aspects of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. For them, death is not the finality of life. They gain salvation via the ancestral altar by being a *shen* through deification by the living, bypassing the impossibility of Nirvana and reincarnation. ☸

Concept of three souls

To make sense of the rites for the passage of the soul, how the soul is linked to the cult of ancestor worship and how it relates to philosophies of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, the key is to understand the concept of three essences (*sanhun*).

Man is considered to have a three-fold constitution as body, soul and spirit, i.e. three separate essences (*sanhun*), fused into one to form the soul. This reflects the universe as the harmony of Heaven, Earth and Man. Man's vitality is derived from this harmony and, in the right proportions, life exists.

Upon death, the three different forms divide and go their separate ways, returning to the soil (Earth element), to heaven (the Heaven element) and to the ancestor altar (the Man element). The soul passes through the various stages of *gui*, ancestor *shen* and god. Ancestor *shen* ranks lower than *tudi* (earth god or local deity) or any other gods or deities – *shen* is the lowest rank in the

hierarchy of gods. The two terms ancestor "*shen*" and god are used here to make the above distinction. An ancestor *shen* is *shen* only to descendants but not to outsiders. Not all ancestors are *shen*, some are liberated from *diyu* (purgatory) as free souls but have not attained the status of *shen* yet and some are probably still in purgatory serving their time as *gui*.

At the moment of death, the deceased's soul acquires the status of *gui* and faces judgement in purgatory. Release from purgatory depends on merit accumulated when alive. As such, the soul may be sentenced to be reborn as an animal to repay its debt of wrong. Ultimately, the purified soul is freed from purgatory. Being freed, it loses its status of *gui*, separating into three different forms.

At the funeral during burial or cremation, the soul degenerates and goes back to the soil - the Earth element.

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

COLIN CHEE spots Peranakan gems in two local titles.

SPEAK BABA MALAY

Publisher: *Baba Nyonya Sayang*
by Philip Chan

Sometimes you chance by a book that innocuously leads you to new discoveries.

I came across just such a book after Peter Lee had it sent to me to be reviewed. The book's cover didn't jump at me. It looked like any other slim soft-cover 81-pager that said simply *SPEAK BABA MALAY - The Easy Way* by Philip Chan Soo Siang.

"Hmmm. Another one, again," I thought, without so much as even a cursory look at its contents. Other more interesting stuff to read, I was sure. Until I finally took it up one evening, as a filler.

In his introduction to the book, author Philip Chan quotes a Malay idiom: "*Bahasa jiwa bangsa*." Translated: "Language is the life or soul of a people." It brings to mind an old Chinese saying that says the same thing: that if you wish to know a people's culture, you must speak and read their language.

Philip writes further: "In recent years, there has been a revival of the culture of the Peranakans or Babas and Nonyas, with renewed interest in aspects such as food, dress, music, traditions, arts and crafts. However, such a renewal would be incomplete without the revival of the language and literature of the Babas and Nonyas."

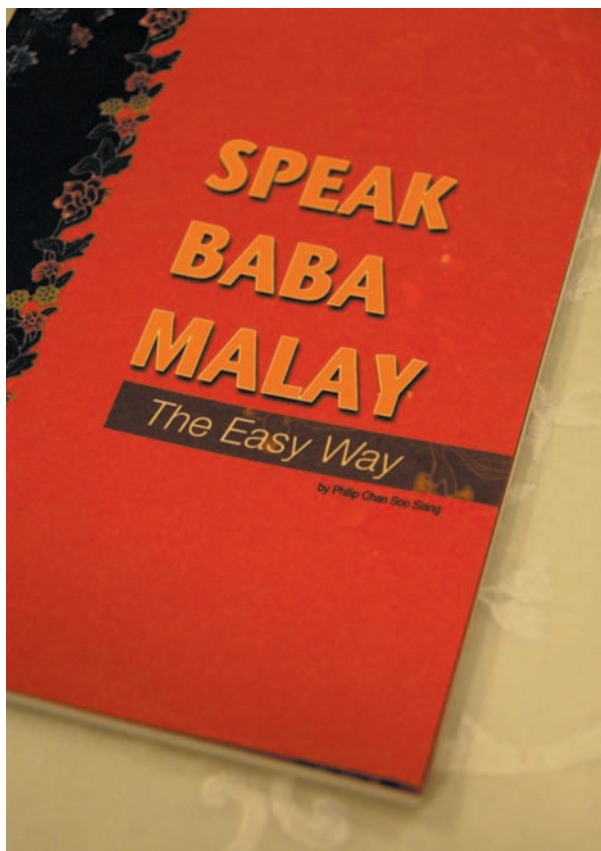
How true! It strikes a chord straight away. I can empathise with that. Being half-Peranakan I lack a command of the language and its sing-song nuances.

Taking the book apart, it struck me as something familiar - like the old English grammar text book I used to study as a child in primary school long long ago under British-trained teachers.

The book has separate chapters for spelling and pronunciation, greetings and common expressions, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, nouns, interrogatives, numbers, time and

periods, conjunctions and prepositions, unique terms and their use.

I didn't know Baba Malay had grammar, being a derivative of both the Malay and Hokkien mother tongues. I just had to call Philip to explain.



"What I am trying to do is provide a simple source book to promote the understanding and use of everyday Baba Malay," says Philip.

And the book is enchantingly simple and conceived, in a way that beautifully complements William Gwee's *A Baba Malay Dictionary* which was released in 2006 amidst much fanfare.

"It will hopefully provide some structure and standardisation to Baba Malay as we know it, taken along with Uncle William's dictionary," says Philip, who also consulted William Gwee when he first decided to write just such a book back in 2005.

William Gwee writes in the book's Foreword: "This publication is therefore a boon to Babas and Nonyas who aspire to polish and improve on the authentic language of their community,

and also to the "born-again" who seek to re-establish their identity and heritage."

Philip was also challenged to write the book because often he would be teased as an OCBC - *Orang China Bukan China*. "But I tell people I am actually an OSBC - *Orang Singapura Bukan China*," chuckles Philip.

"I do want to get our Peranakans to speak more Baba Malay. It is our heritage, and I don't mind teaching classes if there is demand for this service. There has to be passion for it."

Philip was inspired by a similarly formatted book on Tagalog which he used to learn the language when he was a travelling missionary based in Metro Manila over a four year period from 1996 to 2000.

"It was so simple to use, I thought I could adapt it for my purpose," he says.

Another chapter in the book is a Peranakan tale told in both Baba Malay and English, and a song written in both Baba patois and English.

Now back in Singapore, Pastor Philip Chan ministers full-time at the Emmanuel Assembly of God Church in Upper East Coast. But he doesn't preach in Baba Malay. The congregation in his church is largely Indonesian. "So we preach in Bahasa Indonesia."

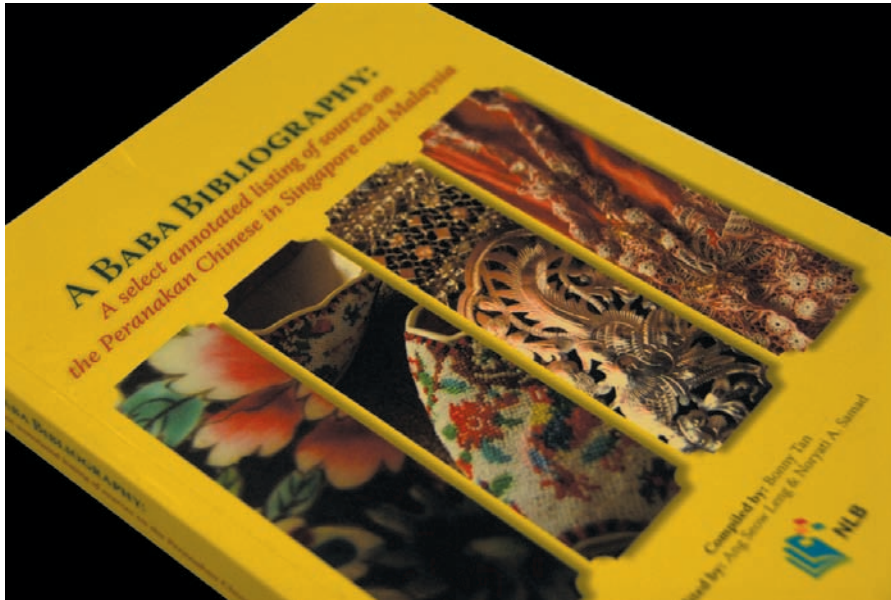
A BABA BIBLIOGRAPHY:

A selected annotated listing of sources on the Peranakan Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia

Publisher: *National Library Board*
by Bonny Tan

I've never before reviewed a bibliography, or read one for that matter. So, when I was given this book to look at, it was done more out of curiosity than genuine literary interest.

A bibliography is a listing of sources of information on a given subject. In this case, it is about us Babas and Nonyas and our diverse interests in



literature, language, song and dance, customs, religion, festivals, food, jewellery, attire, education, community leadership, et cetera.

How exciting can that get?

For the uninitiated, you can get hooked. If you can't handle history in big chunks, bibliographies will give you

a fairly good and learned understanding of any subject in snippets and smaller digestible bites.

Take for instance the history and origins of *dondang sayang*.

Depending on sources that range from newspaper clippings based on interviews, research for PhD theses,

learned journals, newsletters, seminar papers and publications, *dondang sayang*'s origins range from:

"..this form of poetic singing originated with the Malays."

to

"..dondang sayang began at the (Malacca) Sultan's courts and was influenced by Portuguese music. It soon spread southward to Johor and Singapore."

to

"*Dondang sayang* was believed to have been introduced into Singapore by a violinist Cik Laut. The pantuns were originally sung sitting down without *joget* being performed."

If such gems have not whetted your appetite for more, there is little else that will excite you. It is a remarkable effort by the National Library Board to put this bibliography together and one which we Peranakans should be thankful for. I never knew there was so much resource about us available in the public domain. This alone is an eye-opener. ☼

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A SPECIAL PERANAKAN CHRISTMAS SERVICE

25 December 2007

Come enjoy the quaint old-world charm of an authentic Peranakan Christmas service at the conserved Bethesda Katong Church at 19 Pennefather Road on Christmas day.

The congregation led by Elder Charlie Chan welcomes all members of the Peranakan Association, their friends and other Peranakans to the special one-hour service from 11.00 am to 12.00 pm, followed by lunch on Tuesday, 25 December.

Sing hymns (*nyanyi puji-pujian*) in Baba patois with gentle babas and bibiks dressed in white or black head scarves.

Kepada Tuhan kasi hormat dan slamat berjumpa!

If you would like to attend the service, please contact Helen Tan at 9-618-7168 or email: catchaseaugust@hotmail.com



Silent Night, Holy Night (in Baba Malay)

Malam yang tersnnyap,
Bintang pun gmerlap,
Atas ibu dan anak-nya;
Anak kudus yang mulia
Tidor dngan sdap,
Tidor dgan sdap.

Malam yang mulia,
Hairan-lah gombala
Lihat chahya deri shorga,
Serta dngar Halleluyah.
Juru-slamat jadi!
Juru-slamat jadi!

Malam yang terkudus,
Jadi-lah Pnbus;
Chahya muka-nya trang
chrah,
Sbab terbit-lah anugrah.
Isa Tuhan jadi!
Isa Tuhan jadi!

Courtesy of Bethesda
Katong Church

POSTCARDS FROM ROSA

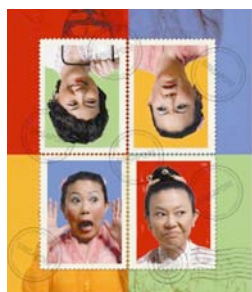
15 - 25 November 2007

Don't miss Action Theatre's premier production of Postcards from Rosa by award-winning playwright Baba Desmond Sim. This hilarious and heartfelt play has Neo Swee Lin playing the role of a grandma from Singapore's Katong who decides to go Down Under to visit her grandson.

Grandma Rosa has "seen" the world through grandson Benny's eyes and his postcards. Now that he's suddenly stopped writing, she has to find out why. Lovingly written with an abundance of humour and pathos, the play is inspired by the memory of Baba Desmond's own grandma.

From Katong to Sydney, watch Grandma Rosa as she goes Down Under in her running shoes!

Postcards from Rosa is playing from 15 - 25 November, 2007, at 8 pm daily plus 3 pm on Saturdays and Sundays, at The Room Upstairs, 42 Waterloo Street. The Room Upstairs is Action Theatre's 100-seat theatre on the second floor of a beautifully restored pre-war bungalow. Tickets are from \$35 - \$45 from SISTIC. More details on www.action.org.sg. Tel: 68370842. Email: info@action.org.sg



REMEMBRANCE OF SCENES PAST

May Oon paints her impressions of Peranakan women
11 - 15 October 2007

May Oon joins the ranks of Martin Loh and Desmond Sim as artists of Peranakan descent intent on documenting their cultural heritage. Unlike her predecessors Loh and Sim,

who have a penchant for vibrant hues, Oon works with a subdued palette of sepia tones, and with broad, sweeping brush strokes. She explains, "This exhibition is inspired by old photographs depicting the costumes and life-styles of the Peranakan women, or nyonya.... I hope that through my art, I can bring the presence of the past within the present, thus keeping this rich and unique culture alive." ❀



Bibik at the Market
100cm x 100cm

Gallery, The Arts House, 1 Old Parliament Lane, Singapore 179429,
10am to 7pm, 11 - 15 October 2007.

DANCE REFLECTIONS 2007

By Ong Poh Neo

This year's annual dance festival by the National University of Singapore (NUS) Centre for the Arts (CFA) opened on 15 September with original new shows from talented dance groups. CFA, with 20 dance groups, faced the daunting task of presenting performances of a Peranakan "flavour", unlike its South-east Asian neighbours with their inimitable classical national dances founded in tradition, custom and mythology evolved over generations.

The Peranakans in Southeast Asia have not got a dance to call their own.

Among the highlights, choreographer Fan Dong Kai managed to incorporate Baba Dick Lee's well-known *Bunga Sayang* into his dance, its abstract content tending to give the audience a rather opaque view of the life of a nonya from youth to matriarch. Perhaps the elements of "funk" were beyond this veteran's prejudiced view of Peranakan life!

Osman Abdul Hamid came closest to a by semblance of hybridization and Peranakan. Some aspects of our culture are identifiable more with Malay than Indian types, and his choreography for dance group Ilsa Tari was a beautiful balance between the two. His emphasis on arm and hand movements would have won the approval of even the late Goh Choo San.

The finale, not all Peranakan but the most spectacular in costuming, performance and choreography, was Zaini Mohd Tahir's *Samsara* performed by the NUS Dance Ensemble. It was an enthralling Balinese contemporary dance and



Passage by Fan Dong Kai.

surpassed cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Dance Reflections was an immensely satisfying evening where NUS, besides being in the world's top 20 for academic excellence, has achieved performing arts excellence in dance, a combination rarely seen. With the calibre of the dancers and outstanding choreographical talent, CFA dance groups can stage such dance performances anywhere in the world. ✽

Photo by Eric Goh

HERITAGE CREDIT SUISSE

By Chan Eng Thai

Financial institution Credit Suisse invited The Peranakan Association to present our culture and history, as part of their programme to share the Singapore heritage with their expatriate staff.

Over three lunch talks in August and September, the staff were introduced to the Peranakan family structure and cycle of life. Interesting nuggets, like the matriarch of the household wielding immense influence in the family, and the hallmark of a good upbringing in daughters – being a good cook, able to *sulam kebaya* and *jait kasot manek*, and serving her mother-in-law until the old lady called it a day! Thereafter, the old lady's jewellery would be bequeathed to her, a reward sometimes worth suffering and waiting for.

We also presented our antiques, *kasot manek*, books on Peranakan porcelain, furniture and bead work. To add a touch of reality, freshly baked homemade pineapple tarts (*kuh tat*) were displayed in a jar and distributed to the audience to sample.

Many members of the audience never knew who the Peranakans were!

A "real" matriarch was introduced, i.e. the irrepressible "Wakwak of Marine Parade", G T Lye in "her" *baju panjang* and *sanggol*



tiga tiang. "She" brought the house down with her tales, including how she had to serve her mother-in-law for 30 years, and how she fled the bridal bedroom screaming when her husband touched her, as she had never been touched by a man before the wedding night.


The Peranakan Voices sang a medley of Baba Malay and Mandarin songs, showcasing the coming together of the Malay and Chinese cultures in the Peranakans.

As the cultural events coordinator who presented the sessions, I wrote and recited a *panton* for the occasion.

Pantun Credit Suisse

Berneh Buah buah dari sana-sini,
Tanam kan di Singapura,
Kompolan Peranakan chukop huahee,
Nyayi menari untuk saudara.

Seeds of fruits from afar,
Planted here in Singapore,
We Peranakans are truly happy,
To sing and make you all merry! ✽




*The Peranakan Association presents **Peranakan Culture, Reel and Real** to any group, organisation or company who wants to know more about our History and Heritage. Our presentation of Chakap, Wakwak and Lagu will be historically accurate, culturally vibrant, informative and tantalising to the eyes and ears for all.*

For enquiries and bookings, please contact our Peranakan Voices Coordinator, Francis Chia at Tel. 96805912 or Chan Eng Thai at Tel. 65388280.

*Bunga chantek bauh wangi,
Laok chobak sedap tak tawah,
Dengair chakap nyayi menyayi,
Wakwak, Lagu gelak ketawa!*

*See the flower and smell its fragrance,
Taste the food, its delicious not bland!
Hear our Talk, with voices singing
Wakwak and songs laughter aplenty.*




PERANAKAN CLASSIFIEDS

Birthday, Engagement,
Wedding, Anniversary, New
Baby, New Year...
or just feeling good?

Send your well wishes to loved ones and friends through The Peranakan. At a special fee of only \$50 for members and \$80 for non-members. You can post messages of up to 50 words or a photo in a space 7 cm x 6 cm.

Baba Malay postings also accepted.

Call Whee Hoon at 96229237
or email for bookings.



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BA BAZAAR POSTPONED

"Ba bazaar, A Peranakan Food & Craft Fair", previously scheduled for 16-25 November 2007, has been postponed until further notice. Any inconvenience is regretted.

For any enquiries please contact the Hon. Secretary Mrs Lim Geok Huay at 62550704.

THE PERANAKAN BALL 16 NOVEMBER 2007

The Organising Committee would like to thank the following organisations for their generous support:

Ang Eng Baju Kebaya
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20th BABA CONVENTION 2007 IN PENANG

Promoting the Peranakan Alliance Across Borders
Friday, 30 November – Sunday, 2 December

This year, the 20th Baba Convention is organised by the Persatuan Peranakan Cina in Penang.

Package cost: S\$580 (twin-sharing) and S\$650 (single) includes SQ return flights plus surcharges and taxes, two-way transfers, accommodation at Cititel inclusive of breakfast and main meals. Also included are a half day tour of Penang where you will visit the T'ng Kong Tua and the Peranakan Museum.

For enquiries and registration, please call Mrs Lim Geok Huay at Tel: 6255-0704.



nvpc
National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre

SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

An Active Lifestyle

As volunteers at Dover Park Hospice, we agreed to share our line-dancing skills when approached by the staff. Not only does volunteering allow us to enjoy our time together, it also helps us keep fit.

Mr Patrick and Mrs Ruby Ng, both 70
Retirees
Volunteers, line dancing instructors
Dover Park Hospice

SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

Peranakan husband-and-wife volunteers Ruby and Patrick Ng were the poster couple for the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre's (NVPC) senior active-ageing press advertisements recently.

NVPC promotes and supports volunteerism and philanthropy, functioning as a first-stop centre to foster the giving spirit in Singapore. Whether it's time, talent or resources, if you'd like to raise your hand and volunteer for a cause of your choice, **eMatch** now at www.nvpc.org.sg. For more enquiries on how you can make a difference in the community that you live in, please call NVPC at 1800 325 0965 or email feedback@nvpc.org.sg.

Photo: Courtesy of NVPC

WELCOME

We welcome our new life members:
Mr Norman Cho Beng Huat
Ms Cecilia Fong
Ms Lim Jacinta
Ms Susan Lim
Mr David Neo
Ms Priscilla Shaw
Ms Bonny Tan
Ms Celine Tan Hwee Min
Ms Betty Tan Poh Choo
Ms Nancy Chua Geok Neo
Ms Teresa Kennedy
Ms Claire Agnes Lee

OBITUARY

Our deepest condolences to the families of members who have passed on:
Mr Novarro C K Choo
Mr Lee Liang Hye
Mrs Leong-Cheang Ia Lian
Mdm Quek Seow Year
Mr Tan Kiong Khoo

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. Look out for some exquisite Peranakan treasures in *Beauty in Asia* (3 May – 23 September). 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, 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>.

National Museum of Singapore. The museum's Singapore History Gallery pays tribute to the contributions of the pioneering Peranakans. On view are some outstanding artefacts, including the oil portrait of Lim Boon Keng, old photographs, jewellery and sireh sets, as well as the magnificent carved wood hearse of Tan Jiak Kim, which is considered one of the '11 Treasures of the National Museum'. National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road, Tel: 63323659, Opening Hours: 10am to 6pm Daily (Singapore History Gallery), 10am to 9pm Daily (Singapore Living Galleries), Admission \$10 (adults) \$5 (senior citizens above 60), \$5 (students, Nsmen), Free admission to the Singapore Living Galleries from 6pm to 9pm. <http://nationalmuseum.sg>

NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts, is a comprehensive establishment for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections, exhibition practices and partnerships. The Museum has over 7,000 artefacts and artworks from four collections. NUS Museum, NUS Centre For the Arts, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Tel: 6516 4617 / 6, Opening Hours: 10am to 7.30pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 10am to 6pm on Sundays. Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays. Admission is FREE. http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/exhibitions_sseac.htm For programmes related to the exhibition, see <http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/cottoni.html>

The Baba House — COMING SOON! This new heritage house museum at 157 Neil Road will open in late 2007. Meanwhile you can 'visit' the house on-line.

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/baba/index.html>.

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.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.myjoochiat.com>

Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street. Perhaps one of the first Peranakan enclaves. 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. 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

Tan Si Chong Su. Built in 1878, Tan Si Chong Su is the ancestral temple of the Tan clan, and was founded by prominent Baba philanthropists Tan Kim Ching, son of Tan Tock Seng, and Tan Beng Swee, the son of Tan Kim Seng. The first president of the temple, Tan Kim Tian, was a well-known Baba shipping tycoon. The temple consists of shrines for the ancestral tablets of Tan clansmen, as well as altars to the clan deities. The elaborate stone and wood carvings as well as the swooping ceramic roof finials makes this one of the most elaborate Chinese temples in Singapore, quaintly located amid the gleaming towers of the financial district. Tan Si Chong Su, 15 Magazine Road.

