



JANUARY - MARCH 2008
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Rats

THE CHINESE NEW YEAR

Plus The Chinese Issue:

*On Chinese Identity, Porcelain, Lanterns,
New Year Dishes and
the New Year Fire of 1830!*

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PUBLISHED BY

The Peranakan Association

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Singapore 911755

Tel: 6255 0704

DESIGNED BY

Michelle Yap

PRINTED BY

Lithographic Print

House Pte Ltd

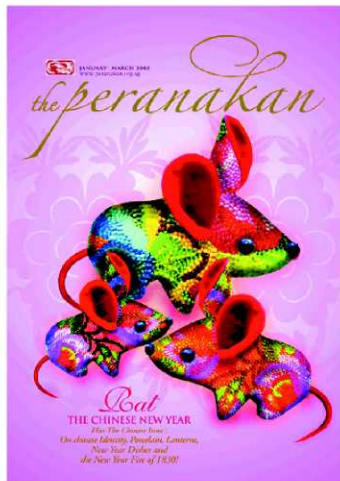
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MICA (P) 115/08/20067

Issue Date: 14/08/2007

Expiry Date: 13/08/2008



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

JANUARY – MARCH 2008
www.peranakan.org.sg

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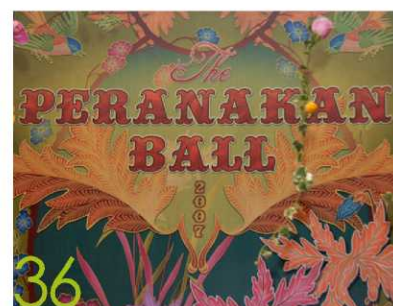
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A NEW YEAR

Cheers to the New Year. To the Chinese, a new 12-year zodiac cycle begins with the Year of the Rat, which commences on 7 February 2008.

Peranakans are perhaps too westernised to care much if this is Chinese New Year 4705, or the year of the Brown Earth Rat. But the Chinese-ness in us cannot but pay heed to some degree to what animal symbol we are born under, even if just for the novelty value. If you are a Rat, 2008 looks sure to be a banner year.

You may want to head for China, where it seems there are few poor Rats. Passionate and charming, Rats make good partners for a life filled with good fortune. Those born under this sign are thought to be intelligent, curious and sociable, born leaders who value ties with family and close friends. In this traditional time for feasting with family and friends, it is a good opportunity to discover the Rats in your circle as it is supposed to be a privilege to be associated with a Rat.

It might be revealing too, to know the animals in your circle, so to speak. In Chinese astrology, the animals take their turns round the 12-year cycle in the following sequence: the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. The animals that are compatible with each other can be divided into four groups: Rat-Dragon-Monkey, Tiger-Horse-Dog, Rabbit-Goat-Pig and Ox-Rooster-Snake. Note their distinguishing characteristics to see who has the best or the worst of the animal traits, who gets along well with whom within the family, among friends and especially in marriage. See if it works for you.

I am sure many a betrothed couple would have checked their zodiac signs for compatibility, to find out if they form a good match. It was certainly a must in the good old days. In my case, it never crossed my mind to do so until after my marriage. Happily, we have compatible zodiac signs as I am a Rooster and my husband Colin is an Ox. We have reached our 28th year together, and look forward to more wonderful years to come.



Thinking about the zodiac always puts me in a 'Chinese' frame of mind. And yet, how Chinese are we? This is a debatable question that Peter Lee puts forth in his very amusing and maybe not so romantic discourse on the origins of the Peranakans in South-east Asia.

Whether we are OCBC (*Orang China Bukan China*) or not, we can always enjoy learning and finding out more. This New Year issue presents lots of interesting topics and events. William Gwee pulls out from his rich library of knowledge, an epic poem called *Singapura Terbakar*, written by the renowned writer Munsyi Abdullah, which is about the great fire that consumed numerous Baba-owned shops near the Singapore River on 7 February 1830 — exactly 178 years before the coming Chinese New Year.

Noreen Chan highlights some quintessentially Chinese dishes in Peranakan cuisine, such as *chapchai* and *mee char Singapura* while Cedric Tan delves into Chinese customs surrounding the household lantern and chaiki, items essential to a traditional Peranakan home. Christopher Lim, on the other hand, uncovers the regional inspirations in the evolution of the *baju nyonya* Penang (*Penang nyonya*). We also have a special feature on specially commissioned Chinese porcelain for the Peranakan market, by Dr Lye Wai Choong. In the present day, Norman Cho shows how a young bachelor's pad can be decorated along Peranakan themes.

Let's look forward to two exciting milestones in Singapore's Peranakan history in the coming months. In April, the Asian Civilisations Museum at Armenian Street will finally re-open its doors after two years of preparation to become a full-fledged Peranakan Museum. And the much-awaited mid-year opening of the restored Baba House at 157, Neil Road, which will be a sight to behold, with its own matriarch bibik-in-residence.

Selamat Taon Baru! 🐭

Linda Chee

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CORRIGENDUM: In the previous issue, a photo of bunga cempaka on page 9 was inadvertently named bunga tanjung. On the left is what the bunga tanjung looks like. It is threaded together as a hair accessory to adorn the sanggol nyonya. We thank the readers who noticed!

WE ARE CHINESE IF YOU PLEASE... (WHATEVER THAT MEANS)

By Peter Lee

Perhaps nothing is more misunderstood about the Peranakans than their ethnic origins. I have heard descriptions of Peranakans being half Chinese and half Malay; or that our ancestors were Malay. Then there are those who maintain the Peranakans are barely Chinese, views represented by the well-known derogatory terms — OCBC (Orang China Bukan China, a Malay phrase meaning 'Chinese who are not Chinese') and Chap It Tiam (Hokkien for 'Eleven O Clock', a reference to being 'incomplete', or 'almost, but not quite', 'Twelve O Clock' being a metaphor for completeness).

To add to the confusion, there is the myth of the royal origins of the Peranakans. In the *Sejarah Melayu*, there is an account of the Chinese Princess Hang Liu, the supposed 'Eve' of all Peranakans, who arrived in Malacca, with an entourage of 500 'youths of noble birth', to marry Sultan Mansur Shah in the mid 15th century. However seductive this may sound, and there may be a great possibility that many rulers in the Malay and Indonesian archipelagos had wives and concubines who were of Chinese origin, it is unlikely that the ancestry of the Peranakan community can be attributed to this tale. The children of such issue would certainly be Muslim and have adopted Malay identity.

There are some historical accounts that suggest that there was intermarriage between the Chinese and local elite, and that Chinese Muslims from the Yuan and Ming periods may have become influential in the region. This is all still a rather murky and politically sensitive area of history — the Chinese contribution to Malay and Indonesian culture and society. The more sensational and unproven assertions I have heard include claims that many influential leaders of the Malay and Indonesian

worlds were Chinese Muslims, including the famous walis of Islam, the sultans of Demak, and even the heroic Hang Tuah of the Malacca Sultanate.

The Real Origins

Sadly the real origins of the Peranakans are probably far from romantic. Munsyi Abdullah provides the window of possibilities in this description of the arrival of a boat into Singapore when Raffles was still residing in Singapore:

"On a certain day during the Bugis season I noticed fifty or sixty male and female slaves taken about the town of Singapore, some of whom were youths; others had infants in their arms, some also were sick; so I went forward to them and asked of what race they were, when I was told (by their keeper), this one is from Bouton, this from Mengri, that from



A Chinese merchant in Batavia, illustrated in the manuscript diary of the German traveller Caspar Schmalkalden, who visited the city in c.1647 (from *Die Wundersamen Reisen des Caspar Schmalkalden nach West-Und Ostindien 1642-1652*, F.A. Brockhaus Verlag, Leipzig, 1983, p.128).

Mandor; but if you take a boat and go to the prow that entered last night, you will find that it has two to three hundred slaves on board. I then, for the sake of curiosity only, asked their prices, on which one was offered at forty dollars, another at thirty; I then went away. Then on the morrow I took a boat and went to the prow, which I found "chock" full of slaves, to the number as above stated, male and female, amongst whom were young handsome girls...This filled me with compassion towards them. I now observed, as I stood looking over the scene as it presented itself to me, hundreds of Chinese coming with the intention of purchasing...

Now at that time most of the female slaves brought were from Bali and Celebes; these were all bought by the Chinese to make wives of, and whose progeny has been numerous down to this date. Malay prows brought slaves also from Siak. These also were numerous, principally being brought from the interior, i.e. from Mentangkaban and Pakan Baru. All these poured in from distant parts to Singapore, and were sold like lambs, driven the whole length of the road, and whipped forward by the rattan. Such was the state of the case at that time — slaves were sold like beasts, whether it were in Singapore or Malacca."

The possession of a huge number of slaves was a sign of wealth, and it was not uncommon for rich merchants and officials of the Dutch colonial towns to own thirty slaves, who originated from as far afield as Thailand, southern India, the Malay peninsula and across Indonesia from Sumatra to Sulawesi. These are well documented in estate papers from the archives of the VOC or Dutch East India Company presently kept in The Netherlands, Indonesia and the United Kingdom.

Another important source is the archives of the Chinese Council of Batavia (present-day Jakarta), the Kong Koan, which is replete with references to Chinese ladies with Balinese mothers. Hokkien Chinese merchants and labourers arrived in Batavia in droves after it was established by the Dutch in 1618. The Dutch continued the Portuguese system

of appointing *kapitans* or leaders of the various communities, who maintained law and order in their own communities. By the middle of the 17th century there was already reference to the Balinese widow of a Kapitan China of Batavia, who succeeded her husband for seven years as the only female *kapitan* in the city's history with a seat in the Chinese council.

Chinese woman a rarity

Chinese women were a rarity out of China. In late 17th century Batavia, the appearance of a real Chinese lady caused such a commotion that many local residents went to gawk at her as she disembarked from the ship, and even the Dutch governor invited this lady to the *Stadhuis*. It was only in the 19th century that Chinese women began to arrive in bigger numbers. C. B. Buckley notes in his *Anecdotal History of Singapore* that the wives of Chinese merchants from Amoy arrived in late 1853, to escape the turbulence of the Taiping Rebellion.

In the kingdoms and sultanates of the Malay and Indonesian archipelagos, as in Thailand, the influential Chinese became part of the ruling classes and soon integrated into the local societies. They were often bestowed with titles and names of their adopted countries. However, colonial rulers encouraged communities to stay apart, which resulted in the develop-

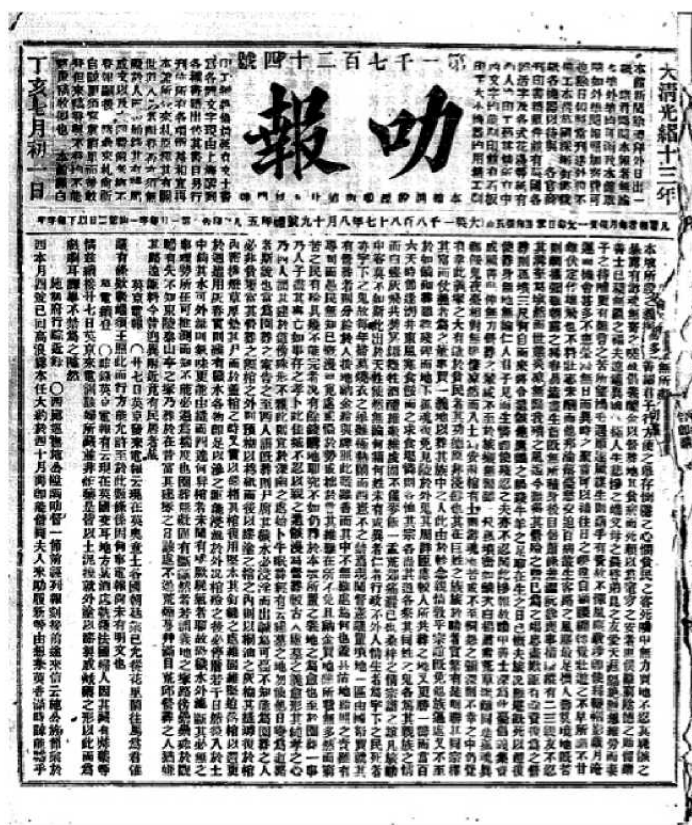
ment of separate Peranakan communities that did not totally integrate with the local communities. It did not take many unions between the Chinese immigrants and slave girls from all over the region, to produce the first generation of Chinese Peranakans, who would marry other local Chinese Peranakans, or the next wave of Chinese immigrants. In this way, the Chinese Peranakan community was able to maintain its identity.

Chinese literacy

It is clear that the early Peranakan Chinese community expressed themselves culturally as Chinese. The local temple became the centre of culture and learning. Cheng Hoon



A Batavian slave, c.1647, illustrated in Schmalkalden's diary (p.99).



Teng, founded in the early 17th century, is the oldest extant Chinese temple in Malaysia and possibly in Southeast Asia as well, and the fact that Chinese scholars were present is well-documented in the various inscriptions still to be found within its walls. Even in the early 20th century, the emphasis on Chinese education was very strong and there were several Chinese schools in Malacca and Singapore with Chinese tutors. Baba youths were all educated in Chinese up to the late 19th century. The will of the Malacca shipping tycoon Tan Choon Bock makes provision for the employment of a Chinese tutor for his sons and nephews, one of whom was Tan Keong Sam, who became a prominent writer and contributor to the *Lat Pau*. (left) Singapore's and southeast Asia's first Chinese newspaper, founded by a Baba, See Ewe Lay (a grandson of Malacca tycoon See Hood Keh) in 1881. Chinese literacy is further proven by the huge numbers of Chinese novels translated by Babas into Baba Malay, the famous *Chrita Dulu Kala*.

The Chinese taught by the tutors would have been Hokkien, while Baba Malay clearly became the language of the home. Educated Baba males were thus effectively bilingual.

In its political and social aspirations, the Peranakan Chinese world up to the late 19th century was focused on



Completed in 1841, the Thian Hock Keng on Telok Ayer Street was built with funds donated by many Baba Community leaders and businessmen.

the establishment or renovation of temples, schools, clan associations and ancestral village associations. Many of the oldest of such institutions in Singapore and Malacca were founded by Babas, including the Thian Hock Keng, Hokkien Huay Kwan, Eng Choon Huay Kwan, Tan Si Chong Su (Tan Clan Temple) and schools such as the Chui Eng Free School and Tao Nan School.

While the bilingual Peranakan Chinese intellectuals in the early 20th century such as Dr Lim Boon Keng sought to purify Chinese thought, customs and traditions through a thorough understanding of the Confucian classics, the leading intellectuals of the mainland were more concerned with radical social, cultural and political change. As the 20th century progressed, the Chinese language literati of Singapore and China thus drifted further and further apart.

English Education

At the same time there was a perceptible shift in the late 19th century towards English education. Baba youths were sent to schools where the language of instruction was English, such as St Xavier's Institution in Penang, which began as a free school in 1825. The Babas would also subsequently be important founding patrons of English language educational establishments such as the Anglo-Chinese School, the Methodist Girls' School, Gan Eng Seng School and the Singapore Chinese Girl's School.

Until the early 20th century, the Peranakan community strictly adhered to all the major Chinese life cycle ceremonies, and seasonal festivals of the Chinese lunar calendar. From birth to death, from the first lunar month to the twelfth, the Peranakans reaffirmed their connections to the ancient traditions of their motherland. However with the downfall of the Qing dynasty and the decades of turmoil that followed, and the abandonment of traditional customs and ceremonies there, coupled with the increasing shift among the Babas to the English language as a medium of educational instruction, the gap between



Dr Lim Boon Keng (1869-1957), a multilingual Baba.

the Peranakan Chinese and their mainland cousins increasingly widened.

By the middle of the 20th century with the establishment of Communist China, all links to the motherland came to an abrupt end. The Peranakans had lost their literacy in Chinese. With the founding of Singapore and the increasing emphasis on the English language, the ability to speak Baba Malay has also diminished.

Ethnic Chinese

So at the end of this ramble, it is possible to establish that the Peranakans are ethnically Chinese, although there would be a non-Chinese ancestress somewhere in the family tree, and who observed Chinese customs and celebrated Chinese festivals until the mid 20th century. Some male Peranakans, especially the sons of wealthy

families, were literate in Chinese until the early 20th century, and spoke Baba Malay at home. Today, the young Peranakan is likely to be literate in English and perhaps Mandarin, and to be able to speak Baba Malay only imperfectly. He or she would also be largely ignorant of the old customs and traditions, although retaining a Chinese surname and name, and perhaps some awareness of family ancestry.

If cultural continuity is maintained by living traditions and language, the Peranakans have largely lost both! Perhaps the only part of the heritage that is still alive and kicking is food heritage. Yet this crisis is not unique to the Peranakan. All the Chinese dialect communities are facing the same problems. The Peranakan's mainland cousin today would probably be equally ignorant of the old customs, although he would



Baba wedding rites and costumes rigidly followed Chinese traditions.

be literate in Chinese. He would generally be concerned only with contemporary, popular Chinese culture. As long as Peranakans continue to articulate themselves as a community, the more they will be able to break away from the idea of a monolithic Chinese culture, and establish a separate creative and unique brand of 'Chineseness', whatever that may mean. ■

BACK TO OUR ROOTS

The Chinese Influence on Peranakan Cuisine.

By Noreen Chan

It is no surprise that Chinese influence runs right through Peranakan culture.

Our forefathers came from southern China and like so many areas of the Chinese diaspora, some aspects of the culture remained near “frozen” while others comingled with local cultures.

The oldest Peranakan traditions are essentially Chinese (especially Hokkien) at heart. The customary rites around life's important occasions, following the lunar calendar with Taoist-Buddhist religious practices, the importance of ancestral worship, even the way of addressing (*teriak*) one's elders, all hark back to our Chinese roots.

And so it is with Peranakan cuisine. As with all fusion cuisines however, many different influences can be identified, reflecting the great cultural melting pot that was the Southeast archipelago of a century and a half ago. Some dishes are easily recognizable as Chinese to other dialect groups, such as *lorbak* (or ngoh hiang), *hee pio* (fish maw) soup, *popiah*, *mee sua thau* and *itek tim* (duck and salted vegetable soup). Some of these became firm family favourites, such as *loh kai yik* (Cantonese for braised chicken wings); which was delicious but oh so time-

consuming to prepare. As children our sharp eyes were put to use pulling hairs from the pig skin with tweezers!

Other dishes may feature some ingredients commonly used in Chinese cooking but also include those native to Southeast Asia, such as tamarind, coconut milk, local herbs and belachan. An example is *babi asam*, of which there are two versions: one version – also called *babi asam goreng* – has belly pork marinated with asam (tamarind), lightly cooked in the marinade, then sliced and fried, to be eaten with a sweet-sour dipping sauce. The other version calls for sliced pork to be cooked with *rempah titek*, lemon-grass, asam and *tauchio*.

In my family, during Grandma's childhood, the cooks or *chong poh* were all Hainanese men – one reason why unmarried girls were not allowed into the kitchen – so they brought their own cooking styles into the family repertoire. My great-grandfather Chia Keng Tye was the Compradore of the Mercantile Bank and occasionally entertained the bank governors and other senior officials, so Western style dishes sometimes featured in the menu. My great-great-grandmother, Mrs Chia Hood Theam, who also went by the

name Nyonya Batawee, had family in Batavia (present day Jakarta) and so Indonesian and Dutch colonial characteristics crept in. But more of those influences later. It is time to take a stroll through Mama's recipe book.

CHAP CHAI

This is a versatile dish of mixed vegetables braised with *tauchio* (salted yellow bean) that can be purely vegetarian (no meat/seafood, garlic or onions), that some Peranakan families have adapted by cooking it with chillis and shallots – also known as *chap chai chilli bawang* or *titek*.

Ironically, the following recipe was adapted from Mrs Lee Chin Koon's and the *chilli bawang rempah* was removed. We always have this dish for Chinese New Year and it is compulsory to have *sambal belachan* on the side.

- 320g small prawns, peeled (use shells for stock)
- 320g belly pork, boiled and sliced (keep stock for gravy)
- 40g *kim chiam* (golden lily buds), softened in water and knotted
- 12g *bok ji* (wood ears), soaked in water, hard bits cut away
- 12g *tung ku* (Chinese mushrooms)



CHAP CHAI



SAMBAL BELACHAN



NONYA MEE



SEK BAK

2 pieces *foo chok* (beancurd skin), cut into 2" squares
6 pieces *tim chok* (sweet beancurd), cut into squares
250g cabbage cut into pieces
25g *tung hoon* (glass noodles)
Rempah to grind: 2-3 tablespoons pounded garlic, 2-3 tablespoons pounded *tauchio*, 1 square of *nam-ye* (red beancurd), 2 teaspoons of stock granules.

Method: In hot oil fry garlic, *tauchio* and *nam-ye* until a nice fragrance rises. Add pork, fry a while, then add the two soups (pork and prawn stock), let boil. Throw in the *kim chiam* and *tung koo*, let boil till soft then add the rest of the vegetables and the prawns. The *tung hoon* should be put in before serving.

SAMBAL BELACHAN

Pound together:
20 red chillies (1/2 seeded for medium "heat")
12 daon *lemo perot*
1/2 tsp salt
5 heaped tablespoons pounded toasted *belachan*

MEE CHAR SINGAPURA or NONYA MEE

What distinguishes this from other noodle dishes is the accompanying relish of pineapple and cucumber, plus of course the inevitable *sambal belachan*. The gravy can be made ahead of time, and reheated before

the noodles are added, just before serving.

1 kati (600g) yellow mee
1/2 to 1 kati *tauge* (bean sprouts)
1 spring onion, cut into 1" lengths
1/2 kg pork (belly pork preferred), boiled and sliced
1/2 kati prawns, peeled (use the shells for stock)

Garnishes: Fried shallots, 1 egg omelette cut into strips, cucumber cut into strips, 1 chilli seeded and sliced thin lengthways, *yim sai* (coriander).

Method: In hot oil, fry 1 tablespoons pounded garlic and 3 tablespoon pounded *tauchio* until a nice fragrance rises. Add pork, prawns, stir in prawn stock, salt to taste, *tau-yu* (dark soya sauce) for colour. Switch off fire. Put aside. When time to serve, reheat the soup until boiling, add mee, *tauge* and spring onions. Serve with garnishes.

SAMBAL NANAS:

1 peeled cucumber and half a pineapple, diced into small cubes. Mix with *sambal belachan*, sugar and salt to taste. Peel 1 or 2 *lemo keturi* (small limes), shred skin finely and add to the salad along with the juice.

SEK BAK

Peranakans love pork and would eat all of the pig, including the innards (or "spare parts" as we refer to them in my family). It is not easy nowadays to

find the lung to make *char tihi*, or the kidney to cook *charbek*, and sometimes even more difficult to find people to eat them. But this braised pork dish should satisfy the health-conscious and taste-conscious.

1 kati (600g) belly pork
1 kati lean pork
20 *tau pok* (soya bean puff) or *tau kua* (soya bean cake)
10 *hu-pia* (fish cake)
5 hard boiled eggs
2 cucumber

Cut pork into strips about 5" by 2". Marinate with 2 tablespoons black soya sauce, pepper at least one hour. Fry 6 tablespoons pounded shallots (squeeze out excess juice) with 6" *kayu manis* (cinnamon bark), 4 *pek kak* (star anise), 4 pieces *lengkuas* bruised and 4 stalks lemongrass bruised, until browned. Add pork and mix well. Add 1 teaspoon salt and 4 tablespoons sugar (or less if unsure, can always add later). Add enough water to cover and simmer until tender. Halfway through cooking, add the *tau hu pok*, *hu-pia* and eggs. Top up water if the dish is getting too dry.

To serve, cut the pork into thin slices and arrange on a plate with the sliced *tau hu pok*, *hu-pia* and eggs. Decorate with sliced cucumber and pour gravy over. Goes well with chilli *chukka* (chilli with vinegar dip). ☐

ANNOUNCING THE NEW YEAR WITH LIGHT AND COLOUR

Decorate your house entrance with the traditional teng and chaiki to usher in good fortune, happiness and prosperity.

By Cedric Tan

As we approach the Lunar New Year, it is time to revisit the traditional manner in which the fronts of Peranakan houses were decorated. The two most fundamental elements of the decorations were the *chaiki*, a red bunting hung above the entrance, and the various *teng*, or lanterns, suspended above the entrance. Both have been documented in memoirs, pantons and old photographs as symbols of joy and happiness. These objects are Chinese in essence and retained by our forefathers as proud markers of cultural identity. They brightened the fronts of Peranakan houses, and the mere sight of these would I am sure spark memories for many, of the festivities, fun, food, (and *ang pows* of course) associated with New Year celebrations of old. However, there are many interesting customs relating to the display of these decorative objects, which are loaded with much symbolism and wishes for good fortune, happiness and prosperity.

Teng

The traditional Hokkien *teng* or lantern at the entrance has several functions. The most basic and practical one is of course the provision of light. The older examples had special metal holders for candles, which became obsolete with the advent of electric light bulbs. Such lanterns are painted with the surname of the resident family, thus providing information to the public about the identity of the



*Baba bride and groom before a house entrance, c. 1920, Lee Brothers Studio, Singapore. The *teng jseh* and *chaiki* can be seen in the background. Two *teng jseh* are evident on the right, suggesting that two pairs of lanterns, belonging to the bride's and groom's families, were hung at this wedding.*

householders. As in some cases sons-in-law and caretakers are the main residents of a house, the surnames on the lanterns can perhaps be more accurately described as that of its legal owners. A little mirror affixed to the base of the lantern provides another function of such lanterns — to ward off evil.*



The globular thian teng (above) and cylindrical teng jiseh (right).

There are two structural categories of lantern. The simpler version is a cylindrical basket or 'cage' made with fine, woven bamboo strips. Such lanterns are covered with paper and then painted with the Chinese characters of the surname on one side and business name (*jiho*) on the opposite side. They are more commonly found in temples (where the name of the temple instead of the family's surname is inscribed on the lantern) and are suspended from removable hangers which when removed and replaced by portable poles, allow the lanterns to be used in processions. Thus they are known as *teng berarak* or *teng kaki*. Some households own their own pair of *teng berarak*, which is used for wedding processions and are suspended on gilded poles (*tiang teng berarak*) or displayed on exquisite stands (*kaki teng berarak*). A few families also own another pair of such lanterns that is solely for funerals. These lanterns have a plain cream-coloured paper base with Chinese characters marked in yellow and black.

The other type of lantern is structurally more complex; it is also cylindrical in shape and has a wooden circular top and base and thicker vertical bamboo strips connecting them. The lantern's shape is held in place by a metal contraption connecting the top and base. The hook for the lantern is also attached to this metal component. In the past the lantern was covered with paper but nowadays cotton cloth is preferred for durability. The lanterns are also painted according to the requirements of the householder. The wooden base has carved designs of two dragons chasing the pearl, which is represented by

a decorative, circular piece of glass. A detachable wooden screw is affixed to the top of this base, which acts as a candle holder.

The typical lantern for the ancestral home and the more special wedding procession lantern have almost similar designs painted on them. One side, the character for the surname is painted in black and is accompanied by the character *hu* (*fu*, 'residence') in red, together denoting the 'residence of the X__ family'. Sometimes the lanterns are painted with the surname only without the accompanying *hu* character. The family business name (*jiho*) is painted in red on the other side of the lantern. The ground colour of the paper is normally off-white, and the empty spaces are decorated with neatly arranged arabesques of swirling white clouds. The spaces between the characters of the *jiho* and the surname are filled with outlines of Artemisia leaves together with an auspicious symbol or an auspicious word. Sometimes, these spaces are decorated with cartouches depicting the Eight Immortals. The top and bottom of the lanterns are decorated with decorative bands of green clouds and diaper patterns.

However lanterns for residences generally have slightly more elaborate decoration than lanterns for wedding processions. There are in fact two kinds of entrance lanterns for residences. The first is the *teng jiseh* or surname lantern.

■ NEW YEAR TRADITIONS ■

And the only difference between this lantern and the lantern for a wedding procession is the absence of the characters of the family's *jiho* in the *teng jiseh*. In its place the lantern is decorated with colourful illustrations of 'Eight Immortals Crossing the Ocean' (*Baxian Guohai*) and 'Fairy Princess Touring the Earth' (*Xiannü Xiaban*). The characters for the *jiho* however still maintain a presence in a small cartouche inscribed with its characters and held by two nymphs near the top of the lantern.

The other lantern is hung at the centre, above the main door, between two *teng jiseh*. This is the *thian teng* or 'heavenly lantern'. The Malacca version is round. Replacing the surname are the characters for *thian teng* boldly inscribed in red. The decorative cartouches are illustrated with images of the *Hok Lok Siu* (Fu Lu Shou, the Gods of Prosperity, Emoluments and Longevity). On older lanterns, the characters for the words *tian teng* are gold leafed against a solid black background. In Singapore however, the *thian teng* is traditionally a small hexagonal oil lamp with a brass or bronze frame and glass panels. In Penang, wealthy families used a similar type of lantern except the frame would be made of wood, carved and lacquered in the 'red and gold' style.

There are precise customs for how and when lanterns are to be hung. The *teng jiseh* displaying the family surname must be hung on the right of the house's entrance. On the

left, the other side of the *teng jiseh* faces the the street, displaying either the characters of the *jiho*, or illustrations of scenes of the 'Fairy Princess Touring the Earth'. The middle position above the doorway is reserved for the *thian teng*, which is hung with the side where the characters for *thian teng* face the street. The lanterns are hoisted into place together with the *chaiki* on the eve of certain events and taken down immediately afterwards. The *thian teng* is hung at the entrance and lit only on the eve of a new moon, full moon and the birthday of a deity and taken down after evening prayers the following day. The pair of *teng jiseh* is hung without the central *thian teng* on the eve of *semayang abu* or ancestral worship day, in order to invite or *chiah* the spirits of the ancestors to return home. All three lanterns are displayed during important family celebrations, such as weddings and birthdays. Rarely does one see five lanterns adorning the porch. This would indicate that a '*dual cheo thau*' or the pre-nuptial hair combing ceremony for both the bride and groom would be conducted in the premises. Two pairs of *teng jiseh* would then be hung, with the surnames of both the bride and groom. The house-holder's lanterns would occupy the outermost position while the 'guest' family would display their lanterns on either side of the *thian teng*. If a wedding procession were to be part of the wedding programme, then an additional pair of the householder's

teng berarak or wedding processional lanterns would be propped up with poles and placed in front of the main pillar of the entrance porch. That would be the only time when seven lanterns adorn the front of the house.

Chaiki

Chaiki (*cai qi*) can mean in one sense, 'prosperity rising'. However the word is commonly associated with another meaning: the red cloth bunting or banner called the *chaiki* or more precisely *kain chaiki*. The fact that there is an auspicious pun for such an object is typical of Chinese tradition. Hanging a *chaiki* at the door announces an auspicious occasion in the house, such as the celebration of the New Year, weddings and grand birthdays, as well as other important events, such as moving into a new residence, and the entry of the image of a deity into the home during a religious procession. It is also necessary when the body of a deceased member of the household who has passed away outside the house, enters the house for the wake and funeral. Hanging the *chaiki* expresses a form of respect and a level of pomp and ceremony befitting the status of a member of the house. After circling the ancestral hall, the body is placed in the main hall whence the *chaiki* is immediately taken down, and the mourning officially commences. The *chaiki* is also hung during the first *beng ki* (posthumous commemoration of a birthday) of the deceased,

THE COLLECTION OF KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

Selamat Taon Baru



208 East Coast Road Singapore 428907
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■ NEW YEAR TRADITIONS ■



Pleating the chaiki (above).
The finished chaiki teratai (below).



and on the day of *bukak tuaha*, when the official mourning period ends.

The *chaiki* is made from a piece of coarsely spun red cotton with one white line half inch away along both edges of the entire length of the material. The Peranakans prefer the *kasair* (coarse) version even though other materials such as satin are available now. The correct way to hang a *chaiki* is to completely drape both the door posts and upper frame. Before you purchase one, you first need to measure the total length of both door posts and the upper frame. Then add another four yards to the initial length and then round the figure to the nearest odd numbered yard. As it is a traditional Chinese belief that blessings do not come in pairs, odd numbers are considered more auspicious. The additional four yards is to enable you to tie four *bunga teratay* or lotus knots; two on either sides of the door. You then add yellow pom-pom tassels or trimmings at both ends, which ideally should just skirt the floor when it is hung, and also along both edges of the section lining the upper door frame.

The *chaiki* must be stretched taut along the upper section of the door thus leaving equal lengths of cloth for both vertical ends.

The *bunga teratay* looks best when it is double pleated and of equal size and height from the ground. For maximum effect the two *bunga teratays* knots must be about at least six inches apart. The pleating of the *bunga teratay* requires some practice and an expert can tie one properly and pull open the folds of the knotted loops (*kembangkan bunga teratay*) within two minutes.

Besides adorning doorways, *chaikis* are also used during wedding and religious processions; such *chaikis* are known as *chaiki berarak*. They are attached to fresh bamboo poles complete with leaves representing regeneration. Up to six *chaikis* can be used for the traditional wedding procession when the groom walks to the bride's house. They can also be used to provide a soft finishing to the four corners of the bridal sedan chair. If a car is used instead, a shorter *chaiki* is placed on the roof of the car. In temples, *chaiki balak* are seen streaming from the main beams of the porch. In most instances, they have gold Chinese words pasted on them. On the other hand, white and indigo blue *chaiki* (*chaiki puteh*, *chaiki biru*) strung from dried leafless bamboo poles form part of the paraphernalia of a funeral procession. A solitary white *bunga teratay* is usually placed on the bonnet of cars belonging to the family of the deceased.

The value of an object is fully realised when its function, meaning and symbolism are all understood. Otherwise it will remain soulless. It is my hope that this account will add meaning, life and colour to the appreciation of our material and cultural heritage. ☐

Wishing all readers a SLAMAT TAON BARU.

**Sambot Taon bukak pintu
Pasang teng gantung chaiki
Sohjah Slamet Taon Baru
Panjang umor murah jerki**

* There is also the hexagonal embroidered *kiong teng* ('palace lantern') carried before the bridal sedan chair or the funeral hearse. It is said that in the old days the 'privilege' of using a palace lantern was only granted at weddings and funerals.

(Photographs of tengs courtesy of Peter Wee)

TALES OF A CHINESE NEW YEAR FIRE

Munshi Abdullah's account of the Singapore Fire of 1830 showed that he was not a mere acquaintance of many Babas in his time. He was very much into our culture and language.

By William Gwee Thian Hock

The Great Fire of 1830

It was during the Chinese New Year celebrations of 1830 when a fire suddenly broke out in a blacksmith's shop (v. 33) in Circular Road which burned down Phillip Street along Market Street on Sunday, 7 February, on the 14th day of the lunar calendar (v. 30, see below for notes on verse numbers), i.e. the eve of the 15th and last day of the Chinese New Year festivities. Soon the adjoining buildings were engulfed by the raging flames.¹ At that time Munshi Abdullah was lodging with Ghee Ho (v. 7) whose Baba identity is confirmed later in the poem (v. 269). This is the only instance in his narration he had omitted the 'Baba' prefix for a Baba. Ghee Ho was most probably a well known Baba personality who needed no reminding that he was indeed one.

When news of the inferno reached him, Munshi Abdullah rushed to the scene and proceeded to record all that was unfolding before his eyes: the primitive and futile attempts to contain the conflagration with buckets of water, the employment of Sepoys to maintain a semblance of law and order, the dastardly acts of those who pretended to offer help but who looted instead, the arrest of these rascals, the 'heroics' of some colonial officers, the broken chests of opium lying around, the

citizens who watched helplessly as the flames consumed their livelihood, the merchants lamenting the destruction of their merchandise which had been obtained on credit, the desperate steps undertaken to save personal belongings, the steps taken to convey the bad news to Malacca, his third party version of what subsequently transpired in Malacca, the aftermath of the 9-day fire when sea gypsies scavenged whatever little they could salvage from the burnt down sites and the eventual discovery of stolen goods hidden and stashed in nearby locations.

Baba Chek and other Peranakans

Baba Chek's name was the first of Baba names to be mentioned (v. 26). The roof tiles of his home were used as missiles when misunderstanding erupted between two lion dance troupes that had clashed during their Chinese New Year performances before the outbreak of the fire. He was again mentioned (v. 165) during the fire when he was spotted carting away his property. Baba Ho Seng (v. 42) was less fortunate. He was seen in tears bemoaning his fate watching his goods going up in smoke and wondering how he would ever be able to pay his British and Bugis creditors. Later, armed with a

Munshi Abdullah: The Teacher of Language

Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, born in Malacca in 1797, was of part Arab and Tamil parentage. His strict Muslim education and upbringing made him proficient in the Arabic, Tamil and Malay languages from a very young age. At the age of 11, while teaching religion to Indian Muslim soldiers in Malacca, he also picked up Hindustani from them. They named him a munshi, a teacher of language, a title he used, and by which he became well known — either as Munshi Abdullah or Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi. In 1815, he acquired yet another language, this time English, from the missionary Reverend William Milne.

In his lifetime, Munshi Abdullah was a language teacher, an interpreter for missionaries, colonial officers and merchants and a prolific writer in Malay. When Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819, his interpreter and private secretary was none other than Munshi Abdullah. While on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1854, Munshi Abdullah passed away suddenly in October in Jeddah.

Singapura Terbakar

Among his literary works, his epic Malay poem *Singapura Terbakar* ('Singapore On Fire') reflects his direct reporting style of writing, documenting details of what he had personally witnessed and experienced. In the midst of the ensuing panic following the big fire, Munshi Abdullah was there with paper and pencil in hand to record the outcome of the inferno and its dire effects upon those who fell victim to it, directly or indirectly.

This work has been transcribed and analysed by the eminent Professor Amin Sweeney, Professor Emeritus (Malay Studies), University of California, Berkeley (Amin Sweeney, *Karya Lengkap Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi*, Jilid 2, *Puisi dan Cerefera*, Kepustakuan Populer Gramedia and École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Jakarta, 2006), and the verses mentioned in this article refer to the annotations in his book.

The Munshi's Babas

In the 363 verses divided into 4-line stanzas (rhyming a.a.a.a) of *Singapura Terbakar*, Munshi Abdullah revealed his association with the pioneering entre-

preneurial Baba businessmen, some of whom were managing on behalf of their Malaccan counterparts' commercial enterprises in Singapore when the fire took place. In this poem, he mentioned names of actual living Chinese, Caucasian, Indian and Malay personalities affected by the disaster. Out of a total of 34 Chinese names recorded by him, 22 of them were each specifically identified as 'Baba so-and-so' leaving the rest without the prefix 'Baba'. In addition, there was a lady's name mentioned but without the 'Nyonya' prefix. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that she was indeed a Nyonya (verse 259).

Unfortunately, he omitted any mention of the Babas' surnames, which would have afforded a measure of pride to their present descendants to learn that their forefathers had had a hand in the pioneering economic development of Singapore. This is not an oversight on Munshi Abdullah's part but, rather, the way Singaporean Malays had generally addressed their Baba friends up to fairly recent time.



Detail of a view in Singapore in Lady Sophia Raffles's Memoir of The Life and Public Service of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, John Murray, London 1830, p.525.

sabre, this bearded Baba decided to mount watch over whatever was left of his goods (v. 135). But Baba Eng Hwa (v. 105) was able to save his goods in time. Barebodied and similarly armed with a sabre, he instructed that his bales of cloth be moved out of the building and stood guard over them while arranging for them to be transferred to a barge.

It was a total loss where Baba Swee Lin was concerned. His shophouse was completely engulfed (v. 137) and he wasn't able to save any of his precious stocks of hall lamps, branched candlesticks, ordinary lamps, lanterns and Chinese paper and silk lanterns. A similar fate befell Baba Cheng San whose limbs went soft (v. 141) and who felt that, while he was suffering here in Singapore, Baba Poh Eng was having it good in Malacca (v. 142). Munsyi Abdullah did not elaborate on Baba Cheng San's relationship with Baba Poh Eng but later events were to show that Baba Poh Eng (v. 256) suffered no less a turmoil

when news reached him of the calamity.

There was no let up to the fire which soon consumed Baba Hup Long's shop (v. 162). He was seen in tears and walking in a daze. Next, it was the turn of a week-old business establishment which belonged to Baba Eng Koh (v. 170) who was in Malacca. It had not been recorded who had been assigned to look after this enterprise on the owner's behalf. As for Baba Kim Swee (v. 188), Munsyi Abdullah shuddered at the sight of the latter who was seen in panic and haste dumping his stocks of dyed clothing materials and fine white cotton into the river which he had mistaken for solid land.² Then, at the break of dawn, along with the din and clamour, loud cries were heard that flaming sparks had begun to cascade on Baba Tock Seng's shop (v. 194). Unfortunately, we are not likely to ascertain if this Baba was Tan Tock Seng, a name we are so familiar with in relation to the hospital first built by him in 1844.

■ NEW YEAR CHRONICLES ■

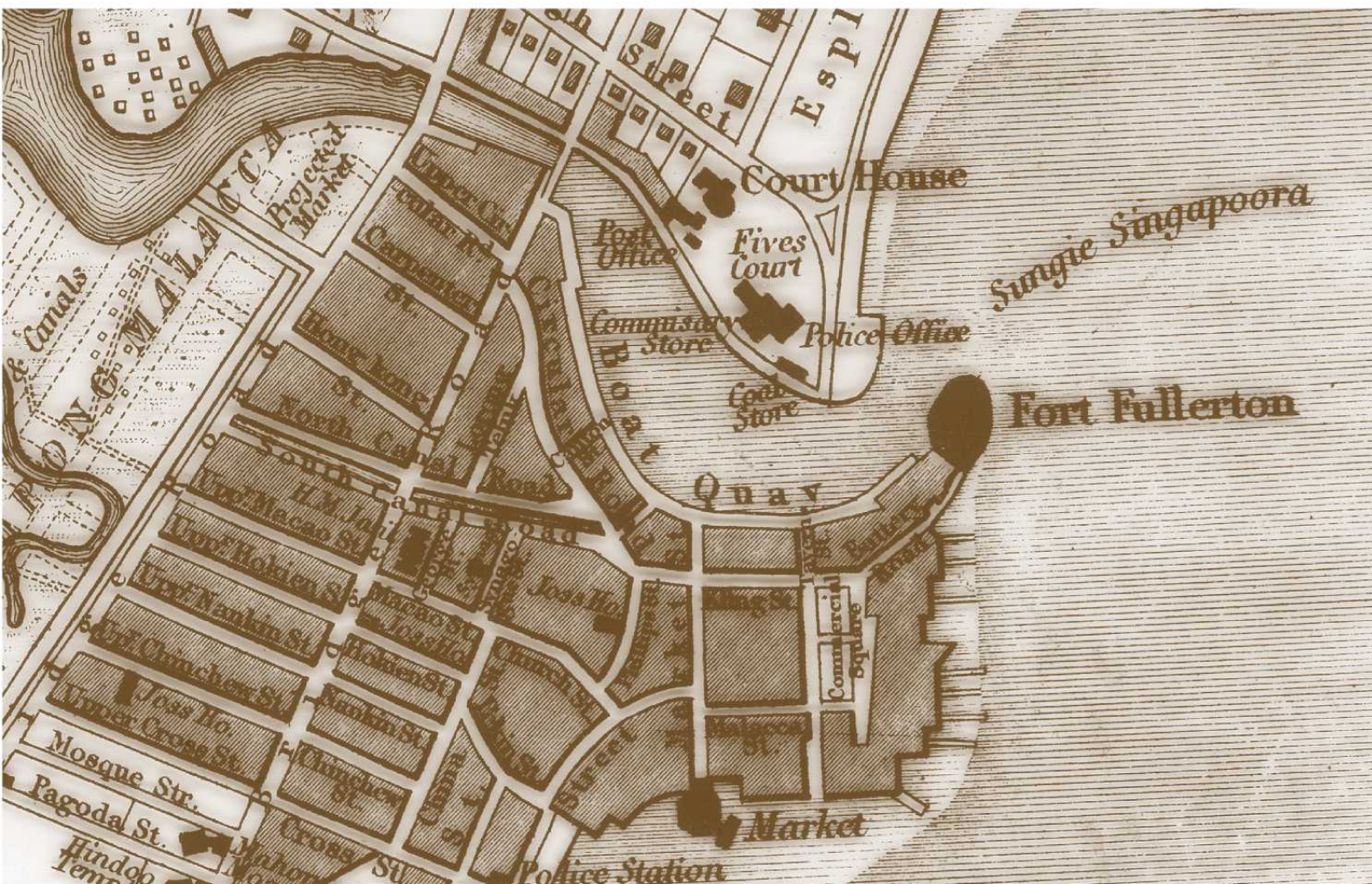
Baba Chong Long (v. 199) was among the fortunate ones who had time and opportunity to remove their properties from their shops or homes. Chua Chong Long was the son of the Chinese Kapitan of Malacca, Chua Su Cheong. A huge pile of merchandise, clothing materials and chestfuls of bird nests were seen stacked in front of his house.³ In contrast, Baba Yan Leng (v. 209) was seen running and soliciting assistance to remove his goods to safety because the fire was fast approaching and flaming sparks were already raining down upon the adjacent shop selling Indian Pelikat sarongs. Munsyi Abdullah dubbed Baba Hock Guan (v.210) as a resourceful person. He was seen grabbing with both hands all his goods that were hanging or dangling and unloading them safely at the beach.

Malacca gets the news

It was Baba Soo (v. 247) who commissioned and arranged for a boat to convey the news to Malacca without delay. Handing the crew a letter for Baba Koh Seng (v. 248) he instructed them to make haste and set sail immediately. It took a day and night to reach the

Malacca custom station. The curious bystanders at the station were rewarded with a sensational but exaggerated version of the fire (v. 250) when it was loudly proclaimed by the crew that the whole of Singapore was ablaze! Thereafter in his narrative Munsyi Abdullah must have obtained his information of what had transpired in Malacca from a trusted third party source.

Letters bearing the bad tidings were quickly handed to Baba Koh Seng, Baba Poh Eng and Baba Keng Seng (v. 252). On learning of the fate of their businesses they felt as though their very souls had abandoned them. Before long, visitors thronged their homes anxiously clamouring for news of their family members stationed in Singapore. Baba Poh Eng's (v. 255) entire household were devastated on discovering his shop had been totally razed. He sighed and attributed his misfortune to unavoidable destiny. He realized his huge loss had now brought heavy debts in its wake. Amidst the noisy clamour, the womenfolk were heard crying over the unknown fate of their daughters who had accompanied their spouses to settle in Singapore to either manage



Detail of a map of Singapore town from a survey by J T Thomson, 1846 (Courtesy of Lee Kip Lin).

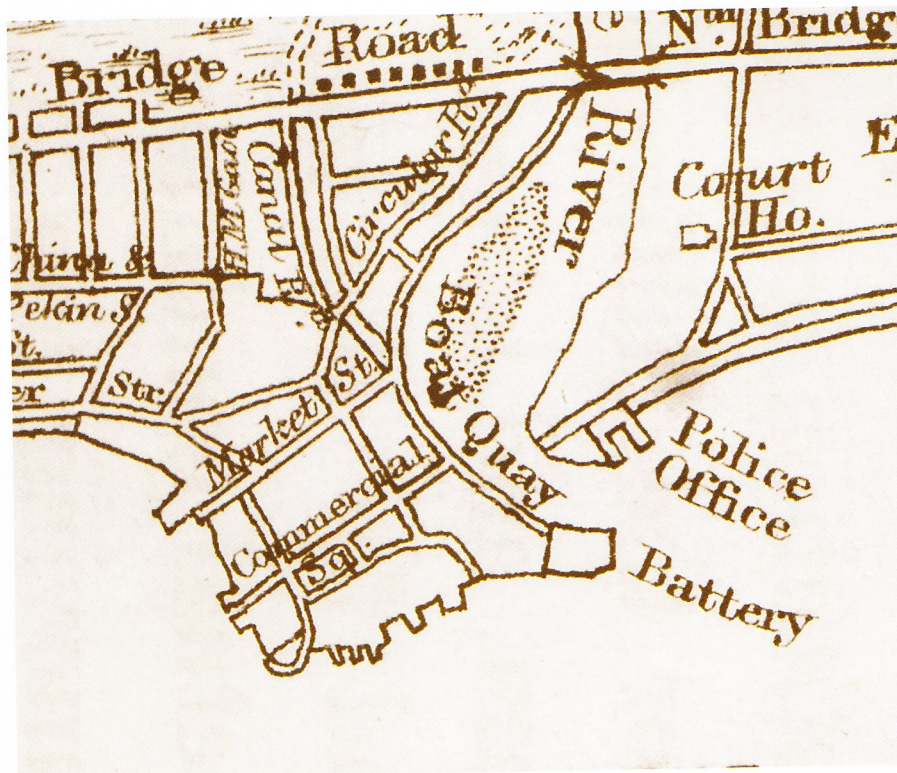
their own or their in-laws' businesses. Among those who had cried the most was Eng (v. 259) who had recently married and not accompanied her husband to Singapore. Since her name had been mentioned by members of the Baba community in their moment of despair, it can be concluded that Eng must have been a Nyonya who was probably a close family relation. Moreover, Nyonyas were not customarily addressed with the prefix 'Nyonya'.

Over at Baba Koh Eng's home (v. 263) pandemonium reigned as people from near and far came for confirmation of what they had heard. At Munsyi Abdullah's home, a rumour had it that he had perished in the fire (v. 264). Another version claimed he was last seen running in his shorts. This was superseded by yet another alleging that he was unable to run out of his house due to an ailment. Such negative news finally drove his wife to tears.

Baba Kim Guan's heart pounded hard when he was informed that his shop and assets had gone up in smoke (v. 266). His friends arrived in full force to offer help and awaited instructions from him. But he was in a dilemma. What he had heard had not come from any letter from Singapore but had originated from hearsay. Thus, he was at a loss as to what to believe. Baba Teang Hwei (v. 268) was detected running drenched in sweat and with legs about to give way. He was heard muttering: "This is the ultimate damnation!"

Baba Kim Ann (v. 269) brought further news that all the shops adjoining Baba Koh Eng's had been burnt down. And he also wondered over what might have happened to Ghee Ho (v. 269). Although no 'Baba' prefix had been placed before Ghee Ho's name, Munsyi Abdullah must have thought that it was not necessary as this gentleman might have been a well known Baba personality at that time. In his anxiety for news, Baba Bo Liok (v. 270) ran helter skelter to the custom house without even wearing a belt. There he received temporary respite with unconfirmed news that his shop had not been affected. As the news spread further, many inhabitants of the Bukit China and Bunga Raya neighbourhood cried because many of them had family members residing in Singapore.

It is evident that Munsyi Abdullah was not a mere acquaintance of many Babas, he was much into their culture and language too. A few days prior to the fire, he described the display of Chinese martial arts by 2



Detail of a map of the town and environs of Singapore from a survey by G.D. Coleman, in T.J. Newbold's *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, John Murray, London, 1839.p.288

rival lion dance troupes performing in the streets during Chinese New Year celebrations as *kuntau* (v. 21) an expression commonly used by the Babas, *kun thau*, to mean the same. When this rivalry got out of hand leading to a fight where Baba Chek's roof tiles (v. 26) were used as missiles, he identified the day when this happened as the 9th day of the Chinese New Year and went on to elaborate that it had happened on 'Ti Kongsì' (v. 29) which is 'Ting Kong Seh', birthday of the Heavenly King, a day of religious worship of Babas who practised the Chinese form of worship. In several instances, Munsyi Abdullah had used the lunar calendar dates as the Baba community was wont to do.

At the height of the fire, a Nyonya housewife who could not locate her husband, who she suspected to be at his mistress' home, swore at him with the word *tangkapan* (v. 84) which, to the Babas, means 'wretched one' (*tengangkapan*), a common Baba word of rebuke. This word was repeated in verse 118 when some of the fire's victims hurled this curse at the fire. Those who did not resort to curse, prayed instead. This was recorded as *tersoja-soja* (v. 117), a Baba expression denoting praying with palms clasped flat together. When the flames reached Telok Ayer, many Chinese were heard to lament *chekwa* (v. 140), a term of Hokkien origin, somewhat misspelt by Munsyi Abdullah, used by the Babas when in despair, i.e. *chek ak* ('what a pity'). This word occurred again in verse 146 when Munsyi Abdullah described the manhandling of some Chinese suspected of stealing by the Sepoys.

The fire eventually consumed animal life such as that

■ NEW YEAR TRADITION ■

of pigs as well as properties such as the *ranjang loksan* (v. 223), the Baba bridal bed. In the aftermath of the fire there was a search for stolen properties and the hunt led to the Tanjong Pagar area. There, when some of the culprits were caught red handed, they were punched by members of the search party who also administered hefty kicks which Munsyi Abdullah had spelt *terjang* (v. 225) for the Baba word *terajang*.

Apart from the huge financial losses, the fire also brought about social and emotional consequences. This poem also recorded instances of marriage plans being aborted as the result of loss of wealth. Among the many rites and rituals of the traditional Baba wedding, the most important one is where the birth horoscopes of the intended bride and groom are checked for compatibility before any further marriage arrangements be made. The Baba term for birth horoscope is *pek ji*. In verse 260, Munsyi Abdullah mentioned an instance where, despite the *pek ji* having been exchanged (and probably found to be compatible), the marriage proposal was annulled because the shop had burnt down.

With his use of other typical Baba expressions such as *laki gua* ('my husband', v. 276), *anak laki* ('male family members', v. 278/279) and *anak buah* ('all one's children', v. 273) Munsyi Abdullah left the impression as

though he had a Baba readership uppermost in his mind when he recorded the 1830 fire in Singapore for posterity. ■

Notes

1. Song Ong Siang notes that 199 leases for land in this area were given to the Chinese inhabitants in 1827, and therefore many of the houses were not more than three years old when the fire occurred (Song, p. 26). The fire and Munsyi Abdullah's account of it in the *Hikayat Abdullah* is described by Song Ong Siang (p. 28-29) and C.B. Buckley (vol. 1, p. 209-210).

2. Yeo Kim Swee was later to become the owner of one of the largest godowns on North Boat Quay which was built by G.D. Coleman in 1842. According to Song Ong Siang he had businesses along Boat Quay from Market Street to Bonham Street.

3. Song also notes that Chua Chong Long "was apparently a man that you could not impose upon or take liberties with. To this day, the following panton is still remembered:-
Tinggi tinggi rumah Chek Chong Long
Di-bawahnya buat kedai kain
Alang-nya bias ular tedong
Bulih-kah tangkap buat main?" (Song, p. 30)

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Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, John Murray, London, 1923.



The Peranakan lifestyle store
Authentic Peranakan cuisine and food produce
Traditional Nyonya kebaya, sarong and tableware
Modern intricate souvenirs and other accessories
A Nyonya treasure trove



COMMISSIONED PORCELAIN

By Dr Lye Wai Choong



Kek Chuan bowl, diameter 14.4 cm



Kek Chuan mark on bowl.

Porcelain is the most widely recognised category of Peranakan material culture. Although Peranakan porcelain has been of interest among a small group of collectors since the 1970s, there was a surge of interest in the 1990s with the involvement of auction houses. Most collectors are familiar with the basic types of Peranakan porcelain which may be categorised according to colour, motif, form and usage.

However one aspect remains neglected. This is the porcelain with the personal mark of the individual or family who commissioned it. It is of immense interest because it provides a glimpse into the story of its owner and enlivens what is otherwise an inanimate object. Here are a few examples of

commissioned porcelain across three periods of production, from the second half of the 19th to the early 20th centuries.

Kek Chuan Bowl

This white ground ribbed bowl, from Penang, is decorated with flowers of the four seasons and would be unremarkable

except for the handwritten characters *Kek Chuan* on its base. These characters may denote the name of a person, home, hall or company. Here, *Kek Chuan* most probably is the name of a person. Although without a surname, it may have belonged to a prominent Penang merchant by the name of Lim Kek Chuan who was born in Penang in 1858 and was educated at the Free School. Lim started business as a rice merchant with shops in Rangoon, Mandalay

and Calcutta. Subsequently he went into tin mining in Perak and held numerous licenses for opium and spirit farms. Lim was a Fellow of the Society of Arts, London, and President of both the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Recreation Club.

In Penang, his office was at 15 Church Street and his family home at Diamond

Jubilee Lodge at Mount Erskine Road. His eldest son, Lim Soo Chee, was born in 1880 and married a great granddaughter of Khaw Soo Cheang, governor of the Thai province of Ranong. Marriages between prominent Penang Peranakans and those with Thai connections were common in that period, resulting in Peranakan influences among the Southern



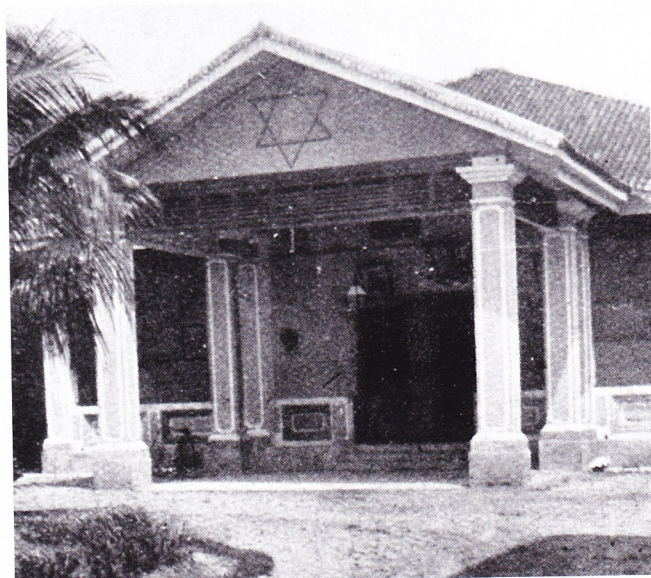
Lim Kek Chuan & family.



Yellow ground bowl and lid, diameter 21.9 cm



Xuanton mark with 'Chinese numeral



Diamond Jubilee Lodge.

Thai Chinese. The footrim and enamels of the bowl are characteristic of the Guangxu period (1875-1908). The bowl may have been commissioned for Lim Kek Chuan's wedding in the late 1870s.

Yellow Ground Wares

Yellow ground wares are considered rare among collectors of Peranakan porcelain. This lidded bowl with the Xuanton mark may have been part of a dinner set commissioned by the Chan family of Tranquerah, Malacca. The patriarch Chan Say Peng was born in the Malay peninsular, possibly in Malacca, in 1839. He set up a provision shop in Kampong Pantei in the mid 19th century and engaged in tapioca, gambier and pepper cultivation. In the fourth quarter of

the 19th century, he started rubber planting and by the end of the century, was a wealthy land owner. In 1899, he purchased a house in Tranquerah Road in Malacca for \$6,000, which became the Chan family's ancestral home or *rumah abu*.

According to a descendant, the yellow ground dinner service was commissioned by Chan Say Peng. The porcelain is characterised by its lemon-yellow ground with a salmon pink rim, decorated with a phoenix standing on rockery or phoenix in flight. The base of each piece has a stamped Xuanton mark. The peculiar feature of the mark is the Chinese numeral in the centre of the mark. As such they have been referred to as 'numbered pieces'. However, only the numbers 0, 1 and 10 in Chinese characters have been encountered by this writer. It is unlikely that each piece had its own number, but perhaps the numbers were production codes for different batches of porcelain. The porcelain, footrim and enamels are consistent with the Xuanton period (1909-1911). It might be deduced that the set was commissioned in 1909 for Chan Say Peng's 70th birthday. Or, for the marriage of his son Chan Teck Chye in 1902. However, this would be unlikely because 1902 is still in the Guangxu period.

Khoo Joo Bee Rice Bowl

This bowl with the mark of Khoo Joo Bee originates from one of her descendants in Penang. The mark reads *Qiu Ru Mei Zhi*. *Zhi* ('to make or manufacture') implies that the porcelain was made for the person whose name is on it, whereas *zao* ('to make or create') would imply that it was made by the person or shop. Therefore, *Qiu Ru Mei Zhi* possibly means that it was made for *Qiu Ru Mei*, the Mandarin pronunciation of the name Khoo Joo Bee.

Khoo was the sixth wife of the Kapitan China of Perak, Chung Thye Pin, who was the illustrious fourth son of Kapitan China of Perak, Chung Keng Kwee. In 1841, the latter arrived in Malaya from Guangdong at the age of 20 years to look for his father and elder brother who had preceded him. He became very wealthy



Chan Say Peng

from tin mining and the coolie labour trade and acquired an official rank from the Chinese imperial government. He was the leader of the Hai San Society, which fought with the rival Ghee Hin Society in the Larut conflicts over tin mining rights. When he died in 1898, a temple was erected to commemorate him at 29 Church Street, Penang. Two roads in Penang, Lebu Keng Kwee and Lebu Ah Quee were named in memory of his contributions.

Chung Thye Pin was born in Taiping in 1879 and was educated at the St. Xavier's College, Penang. He expanded his father's tin mining business in Perak and held large interests in some of the Straits Government's monopolies. He was made the last Kapitan China of Perak in 1921 and died in 1935. His mansion was palatial and was featured as a Chinese Palace in postcards from that era. In her memoirs, Queeny Chang, daughter of a Kapitan China from Medan, described the mansion as a castle built on a hillock. According to her, the subterranean dining room had a glass ceiling through which she could see fish swimming above. Unfortunately, the mansion was converted into the Shanghai Hotel and eventually demolished to make way for a condominium.



Chan ancestral home, Malacca.

Peranakan porcelain inscribed with the Khoo surname is common in Penang. It is likely that the owners of the porcelain are related to each other. As Chung Thye Pin's fourth wife, Oh Jit Kwai, was born in 1908, her wedding would likely have taken place somewhere between the years 1925 – 28.



Khoo Joo Bee bowl and mark, diameter 9.4 cm.

■ COLLECTING ■



Kapitan China Chung Thye Pin.



Kapitan China
Chung Keng
Kwee.



The residence of
Chung Thye Pin,
Penang.

Therefore, Khoo Joo Bee's wedding could have been held between 1930 and 1935. This is consistent with the date of the bowl, which has features of a piece from the period of the Chinese Republic. According to her descendant, the most likely reason for commissioning the Khoo Joo Bee dinner service would be her wedding. During the wedding feast, porcelain was also borrowed from other members of the Khoo family. Because of this, he was left with a collection of porcelain with different Khoo names.

Many other commissioned pieces of Peranakan porcelain remain to be studied. Powder-blue ground wares from Penang are believed to have been commissioned by just one family and the porcelain with the *chongchai* motif is purported by some collectors and dealers to have been commissioned by the Chee family of Malacca. Although it has been less than one hundred years since the heyday of

the Peranakans, it is sad that so little is known about the owners and the reasons behind the commissioning of such wares. ■

If there is any inaccuracy in this article or if there is more information about these and other pieces, the author would appreciate any feedback.

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THE PENANG NYONYA TAY SAH (INNER WHITE BLOUSE)

By Christopher Lim

**Lemah lembut nyonya pinang,
Cheng (pakay) tay sah putih sama sarong berseri,
Ingatan mah-mah kita yang tersayang,
Cinta kasihnya terkenang di hati.**

Not much attention has been given to the plain white blouse worn by the Penang nyongyas of old, also known as the *tay sah* in Penang Hokkien or *baju pendek* (short garment) / *baju dalam* (inner garment) in Baba Malay. It is much less appreciated as it is worn beneath the colourful *th'ng sah* (*baju panjang*), overshadowed by the *batik sarong*, accessories & jewellery.

Through the years, the *th'ng sah* material evolved from the thicker chequered *kain bugis* (Bugis cloth) of limited colours or *teng see* (hard material) to the *teik kok see* (Penang Hokkien for German organdie) or *nooi see* (soft material).

In the era of *kain bugis* (circa 18th – early 20th Century), the heavily starched *th'ng sah* worn over the *tay sah* gave the nyongyas confidence and a dignified air when appearing in public functions. Other times, they could appear without the *tay sah* as this informal dress code was also acceptable as beneath the upper portion of the *th'ng sah* was stitched an inner white cotton material.



My mother at home in her tay sah and batik sarong.

Our Burmese Inspiration

In Penang, due to intermarriage, trade and close cultural bonds with Rangoon, the *tay sah* design was partly inspired by the design of the Burmese ladies' *eng jee* white blouse.

The Penang Peranakan *tay sah* is worn and buttoned up differently. The Burmese *eng jee* is first buttoned up by criss-crossing over the chest, ending up at the side while the Penang *tay sah* is buttoned straight down like their Malaccan/Singaporean counterparts.



An old photo of two Burmese girls in their eng jee.



Over the years, newly imported materials became finer and thinner, changing the way the *th'ng sah* was worn from the 1920s. The *tay sah* was worn beneath the *th'ng sah* to protect the genteel modesty of the nyongyas and to avoid catching a chill.

Peculiarly, the Chinese Hokkiens in Myanmar are identified by their *eng jee shay* (long sleeve blouse) and the Cantonese, their *eng jee toh* (short sleeve blouse), apparently distinguished by the blouse they wore.

It used to be that every nyonya took pride in sewing her own *tay sah*. In later years, "home-based" tailors around the neighbourhood would tailor for older nyongyas, cloning the existing blouse into perfect copies. Till the late 1960s, Penang nyongyas could still be seen wearing the *tay sah* with the *th'ng sah*. Our family friend,

■ TRADITIONS ■

Nyonya Annie Kam, wore such attire at home and styled her hair in the *sanggol nyonya ean oh eak imm boey* (nestling swallow coiffure) fashion till she died in 2004.

There are still a handful of old tailors skilled in sewing the *tay sah*. My mother's tailor can be found in Keng Kwee Street (on the same street where the Penang Road famous *chendol* is located). Sadly, this is a vanishing trade and the lack of demand for the *tay sah* does not make it an incentive for others to learn this skill.

Structure of the Tay Sah

The *tay sah* has a high mandarin collar and full sleeves running down to slightly above the wrist. The sleeves are sewn to the top of the blouse without the *pesak* (a gusset) for easy movement. The hem of the blouse reaches the hips. Both the cuffs and hem are decorated with homemade crocheted lace of a matching white colour. There are four pockets on the blouse. The two top pockets positioned at the bosom served as a protective padding as nyonias of circa 1800's – early 1900's did not wear the western version of a brassiere.

Two lower pockets were for keeping cash & coins tied into a knot at the end of the *pan ewe* (handkerchief). Like



A postcard of a Burmese girl in traditional costume.

its Burmese original, the whole assembly is fastened by five removable gold coin buttons with cameos of English monarchs of the colonial era. Usually, the collar is fastened by one button and the other four on the main part of the blouse. However, most nyonias preferred to have two small diamond buttons on the collar for a daintier appearance.

Daily and practical dressing

The Penang nyonya usually wears the *tay sah* at home. The exception to this rule was when she entertained close female relatives and friends, enjoyed a *cherki* card game and afternoon tea of locally brewed coffee and homemade *kueh kueh*. However, for formal functions at home and venturing outside her domain she would wear the *tay sah* with the *th'ng snah* and a matching batik *pan ewe*.

At the end of the day, the home maids would go around collecting the *tay sah* for washing after safely removing the gold buttons. The buttons would be refastened after ironing the starched *tay sah*.

With the arrival and wider use of the *puah th'ng tay* (*kebaya*), the *th'ng sah* was gradually replaced. Initially it was common to wear the *puah th'ng tay* with the *tay*



In this family photo, most of the younger ladies are dressed in German *organdie th'ng sah* with the high collar *tay sah* while the matriarch seated in the middle is dressed in *kain bugis th'ng sah*.

■ TRADITIONS ■

sah underneath it. Only later did the more liberated nyonys have the courage to wear the *th'ng tay* with an embroidered camisole.

In Penang today, with the strong tide of westernisation, such forms of clothing have completely lost their use and meaning. What was once worn by nyonys at home or visiting friends is only seen among a handful of older nyonys. Being adaptable and innovative, the present nyonys have also occasionally opted to have either a round neck or western style collar, interchanging the white colour with floral prints, replacing the removable buttons with modern sewn-on ones as well as lengthening the hem while doing away with the traditional embellishment.

I remember vividly both my great-grandmother, Nyonya Teh Siew Kim and my Kim Poh, Nyonya Tan Kim Moey, in their *sanggol nyonya* and donning their own homemade *tay snah* with *sarongs* at home. My

mother Nyonya Khoo Leng Choo would occasionally wear it with her *th'ng sah* for family weddings, church and cultural functions.

Recalling the history of this blouse, its structure,

use and importance reminds me of the richness of Penang's Peranakan cultural heritage and serves as a link with our historical past. As the great philosopher Socrates used to say, "An unreflected life is not worth living". ☒



My sister greeting great-grandmother at Chinese New Year in the early 70's.



The *taya* with the *kebaya rendah* as worn by Datok Khoo's mother, Mrs. Jade Khoo. The *kebaya* fits loosely compared to the present shapelier *sulam* ones. This form was used before the invention of the embroidered camisole and the western kind of brassiere.

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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RUMAH BABA ZAMAN SEKARANG

Norman Cho's humble bachelor's pad gets the Peranakan touch.

Like the average 35-year old Singaporean, I was finally eligible to purchase a HDB flat. This sent me scurrying into the open market in search of my dream home. My very own bachelor's pad! While a condominium is desirable, a HDB flat offers me the luxury of space at a very affordable price.

I found a 4-room abode that was not too big while spacious enough to entertain guests, and near enough to my parents' home. I had expected Mum to persuade me to stay on in her protective nest. So I was a little disappointed at her "Sekarang gua sua boleh rest ... Tok-sa bersih-kan lu mya antique furniture lagi ... kurang satu orang mya kerja rumah." (Now I can rest ... No longer do I need to clean your antique furniture ... One less person means less household chores). Ah yes, she does deserve her much needed rest.


My greatest challenge was to design the layout and choose the right furniture. A home is an extension of its owner. As a Baba of the 21st century, this was to be my theme. My collection of antique furniture, *pinggan-mangkok Shanghai* (Peranakan famille-rose enamelled porcelain), *pinggan-mangkok Ban-Jee* (blue-and-white porcelain with key-fret design), silverware, beadwork and lacquerware, all these could be prominently displayed to intrigue my friends and introduce them to my culture. Mum would be so delighted with her extra home space she could now reclaim! My home should not look like

a museum. So I have chosen a palette of red, white and orange colours to cheer up the walls. The larger hall, filled with Peranakan period furniture, is for dining as I entertain a lot. Friends often comment how inviting this area feels, especially when savouring my Peranakan cooking.

The smaller hall, in white, is my living room. No television, such an unsociable invention. A modern Mies van der Rohe-style Barcelona chair faces a cabinet filled with colourful nonyaware. My kitchen is undoubtedly my favourite space. No more Mum chasing me out of her kitchen, complaining about the mess I made. Now, I have my own kitchen to conduct my culinary experiments. Pound cakes, apple crumbles, *buah keluak ayam*, *udang masak nanas*... friends are invited to sample and comment.

The kitchen is painted a soothing *café au lait* colour that reminds me of hot chocolate. My Peranakan teakwood sideboard serves as a buffet and hutch to store my crockery.

Family photographs line the wall, many of them of my grandmother. Each time I whip up some dishes, she is my inspiration and I know she will watch over me whenever I cook. This is indeed the heart of the house!

Time may change many things but one thing remains constant ... The warmth of a home ... memories of the good times ... If only the walls could talk! I am blessed with a humble abode but to me it is a little castle of my own. 



A LOW-KEY PERANAKAN STATESMAN

Tan Siok Sun's portrait of Dr Goh Keng Swee

Reviewed by Colin Chee

I never gave much thought to it until I started reviewing Ms Tan Siok Sun's unofficial biography of Dr Goh Keng Swee, one of Singapore's first-generation political leaders. And it is this: that many of Singapore's key founding fathers are and were Peranakans: Lee Kuan Yew, Dr Goh Keng Swee, Lim Kim San and Hon Sui Sen.

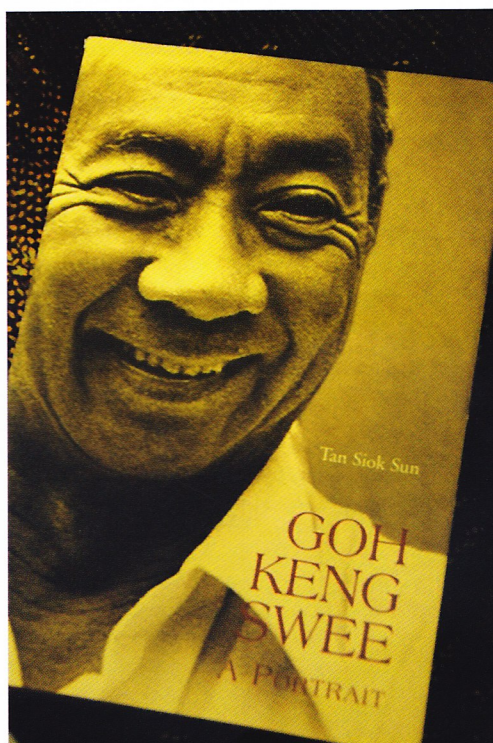
What could possibly have made Peranakans the political elite at the time? Peranakans dominated business and trade in the Nanyang in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but they were never a nationalistic political force in that time. Probably, many of the Chinese including the Peranakans still saw China as their motherland.

In a fascinating, well-researched book Ms Tan, who is Dr Goh's daughter-in-law, has painstakingly stitched together interesting and almost intimate anecdotes about the man. These snippets were unearthed in her research and interviews with family members, friends and colleagues. Goh was born in 1913 in Malacca. At the age of two he moved with his family to Singapore where his father, Goh Leng Inn, taught at Anglo-Chinese School. His mother, Tan Swee Eng, hailed from a wealthy pioneering Malaccan family.

Dr Goh proved to be a good student and pursued an arts degree at Raffles College and eventually obtained a First Class Honours degree in Economics and an Economics PhD from the London School of Economics. During his student years, he became more and more engaged in political dialogue and became an active participant in Singapore's push for self-rule and later, independence.

Becoming part of the larger federation called Malaysia in 1963 was like a dream come true for Dr Goh. He had hoped for a common market with the peninsular for a larger economic hinterland. This was not to be as tensions surfaced that tore apart this merger on 9 August 1965.

Dr Goh played a major role in the separation. Because he was seen by the Malaysian ministers to be more detached, they preferred to discuss with him alone their fears and concerns about merger with Singapore. Dr Goh was therefore pivotal in negotiating Singapore's separation from Malaysia. After the terms were agreed, Eddy Barker (then Singapore's Minister of Law) took care of the legal documents and Lee



Kuan Yew (then Prime Minister) had the onerous task of communicating this bit of news to the rest of the country when barely three years before, he and his team had convinced the electorate of the wisdom and need for merger.

Dr Goh keenly analytical, problem-solving and pragmatic intellect, coupled with a voracious reading appetite, was finely suited to trouble-shoot a budding nation's problems.

In the years following independence from Malaysia, Dr Goh brought his formidable intellect to bear on Singapore's defence, economic and education needs. He was the father of Singapore's armed forces, the architect of its economy, and he laid the foundation of the country's modern education. ☒

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YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW: THE FUTURE OF MALAY PANTON (POETRY)

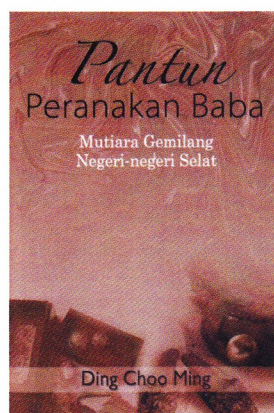
Seminar organised by Universiti Kebangsaan
Malaysia (Malay World and
Civilisation Institute)

Bangi, Selangor • 6 – 7 December, 2007

By Cedric Tan

Panton luminaries, critics and Malay linguists from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei converged on the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia campus over two days last December to delve into the future of the *panton*.

Speakers included academic Mohd Sidek Mohd Dollah from Malaysia, linguist Pak Tenas Effendy from Indonesia, Singapore's Djamel Tukimin and Brunei's Awang Haji Asri Haji Puteh. The most outstanding was elder politician-cum-historian Tan Sri Aziz Tapa. He delivered spontaneous gems as he shared experiences on how he drove home his point with *pantons* at numerous UMNO General Assembly debates in the past.



One issue discussed was the quality of new *pantons* which, while improving, seemed too direct compared to older *pantons* that retained flowery prose laced with subtle messages and puns. They noted that teenagers were most creative with *pantons* that touched on current issues. But the seniors had the edge in matters relating to emotion and wit. The unanimous

conclusion was that new composers should be given space to grow and the younger generation should be encouraged to apply the thought process used in older compositions.

Two books were launched at the seminar. The more notable title was *Pantun Peranakan Baba – Mutiara Gemilang Negeri-negeri Selat* ('Peranakan Baba Pantons – the Straits Settlements' Outstanding Pearl'), by Professor Ding Choo Ming and published by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. In his book, Prof Ding touches on the popularity of *pantons* within the Peranakan community, their creativity and finally the decline of Peranakan literature.

Prof Ding has archived many old Peranakan *pantuns* in www.malaycivilization.com and is now sourcing *pantons* from various parts of the Malay Archipelago. Amongst his recent finds is a collection of Makassarian *pantons* penned by Baba Ang Ban Teong. ☐

Contact Prof Ding to contribute more *pantons* or purchase his book at dingukm@yahoo.com, or by leaving a message on www.malaycivilization.com.

CHRISTMAS GIVING WITH THE MAIN WAYANG COMPANY

December 2007 was an active month for The Main Wayang Company. At the closing of the Baba Convention in Penang on 2 December, the company presented a 30-minute lively joget party. All their music CDs and DVDs on display were sold out! Christ Methodist Church invited The MW Rhapsody Choir to perform for their 'Christmas Celebration @ Telok Kurau Park' on the 8th. This was followed by a fund raising fun fair for Emmanuel Assembly of God Church in Upper East Coast Road on the 15th where the company gave two special performances and even produced a kebaya fashion show, modelled by the pastors and church staff!

On the 26th, both 'Babas & Bellz' performances at the Arts House Chamber were packed with teenagers, family members and fans, featuring traditional Hand-bells as well as Peranakan music, performed by The MW Rhapsody Choir, Anak Anak Wayang, The Anak Baba Band and The Ministry of Bellz. This concert also introduced young Babas and little Nyonyas who were emcees in the second half of the show.

On the 31st, The MW Rhapsody Choir and the Anak Baba Band performed for the Teck Gee Constituency's 'Ang Mo Kio Countdown Carnival', which was attended by 3,000 people. Immediately after the show, the performers were surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd of fans and enthusiasts. The company has exciting plans up it sleeve for 2008, including a multimedia musical, and creative outreach programmes! ☐



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20TH BABA CONVENTION, PENANG

30 November – 2 December, 2007

By Chan Eng Thai

*Chuchi kan berseri buah Pinang,
Lipat daon sireh sapu sama kapor,
Baba nyonya seluru dunia datang,
Hoa hi betol bila berbual champor.*

*Clean and prepare the betel nut,
Fold the sireh leaves and spread the lime,
Babas and nyonys the world over they come,
Mixing, mingling and chatting, how happy they are.*

Greeted like long lost kin, the 50 Singapore delegates arrived at the annual gathering with Peranakans of Malacca, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Phuket, and lost no time hitting the streets of Penang to savour the island's famous hawker food and, of course, shopping!

PA's 2nd Vice-President, Mrs Khoo Poh Neo, led the delegation to the 20th Baba Convention, which was officially opened on 1 December by the Chief Minister of Penang, Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon. At the grand dinner, Dato' Seri Khoo Keat Siew, President of the State Chinese Association, urged the Peranakan communities of the region to be in constant contact to exchange ideas and coordinate activities, in order to maintain the unity of the Peranakans. Hence, the theme of the Convention, "Promoting the Peranakan Alliance Across Borders".

I specially composed and recited a valedictory *panton* (poem) as a tribute to Dato' Seri Khoo Keat Siew, who initiated and organised the first Baba Convention in Penang two decades ago, in 1988.

*Panton Puji (Poem of Praise)
Isi nya manis si buah paya,
Kalau tak masak keras kelat,
Keat Siew johan adat baba nyonya,
Pasal dia budaya Peranakan kilat!*

*Taon Baru mak bapak kita sojah
Masak kari ayam tarok gantang
Di Pulau Pinang bukan kompolan saya saja
Baba nyonya seluru dunia suma datang*

*The flesh of the papaya is sweet
If unripe, it's hard and bitter
Keat Siew champions baba nyonya traditions
Because of him, the Peranakan cultures shines.*

*On Chinese New Year, our parents we bow to,
Chicken curry, with potatoes we cook
In Penang today, it's not my group only,
Peranakans the world over are here today.*

Dato' Seri Khoo's repartee was swift and humbling, in a performance that electrified the delegates.

*Balas Panton (Poetic Reply)
Isi nya manis si buah paya,
Biji nya tanam di Pulau Pinang,
Adat baba nyonya memang kaya,
Ikut sama hormat dia takan hilang.*

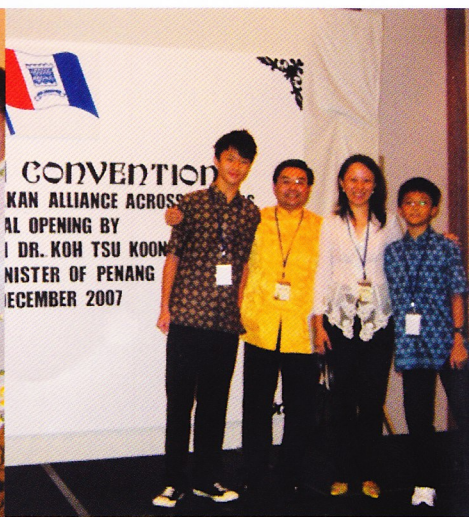
*Hormat mak bapak kita sojah,
Budak di-kolam tak pakay baju!
Kembangan budaya kita bukan saya saja,
Sokongan tuan puan dia selalu maju.*

*The ripe papaya is sweet indeed,
Its seeds are planted here, in Penang,
Baba nyonya traditions are indeed rich,
Practised and respected, long they shall endure.*

*Our parents we bow to, with respect,
The child at the pond has no clothes!
Our culture flourishes not only by my making,
But through the support of one and all here.*

At the convention, Dr Neil Khor spoke on the literary works of Penang's Baba writers while Ms Khoo Salma Nasution covered the historical links of the Penang Peranakans with Phuket. The afternoon was taken up visiting the Khoo Kong Si and the Temple of the Emperor of Heaven. The final day was a glorious street party lined up by our Penang hosts at Upper Penang Road.

The 21st Baba Convention this year will be held in Malacca. ☐



COME INTO THE GARDEN

"Kebon Bunga- The Peranakan Association's 107th Anniversary Dinner & Dance"

By Gavin Ooi

"..Come into the Garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown,
Come into the Garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone,
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the music of the rose is blown.
For a breeze of morning moves,
And the planet of Love is on high,
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves,
On a bed of a daffodil sky..." [Alfred, Lord Tennyson.
"Maud" (1855)]

And come into the Garden they did! The 107th Anniversary Dinner & Dance was a bash like no other. Held at the Raffles Town Club on Friday, 16 November 2007, the Dunearn Ballroom was transformed into a beautiful garden setting with flowers and plants adorning every possible corner of the Ballroom. The evening was hosted by the energetic Baba GT Lye and Baba Terry Lim with live performances by The Peranakan Voices,

the impeccable Vocaluptious and an intimate surprise solo performance by Mrs Elizabeth Lee, our Association's very own First Lady. Live music by the band, Adil and Friends, had us dancing *joget* all the night through. The organising committee under the capable stewardship of Nyonya Bebe Seet wanted to bring members back to the heyday where Peranakan garden parties were all the rage.

The garden theme was selected after much deliberation and debate. We Peranakans love our flowers and our gardens which have provided us endless joy with beautiful flowers to decorate or inspire, with spices to flavour and incite. Our lush green gardens still provide us that vigour at the start of the day, and that tranquility at day's end. Singapore is after all a Garden City, no less inspired, I am sure, by the Peranakans' perennial love affair with all things beautiful. Plants and flowers were not the only beautiful things at this party. These pictures from the party say it all. ☺



KUALA LUMPUR INTERNATIONAL BATIK (KLIB) CONVENTION & EXHIBITION 2007

Organised by the Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia in collaboration with
Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage
Kuala Lumpur International Convention Centre • 30 November - 2 December 2007
By Maurice Wee

This year's KLIB Convention & Exhibition, themed 'The Business of Batik', attracted world renowned batik enthusiasts and aficionados, writers and designers from as far as Sri Lanka, Japan, Indonesia, Belgium, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States. Rudolf G Smend, a prolific writer from Cologne, Germany, was also spotted at the event, which was opened by Dr Rais Yatim, Minister of Culture, Arts & Heritage.

C N L Creswell from the UK presented a paper on 'Modernisation and the Technique of Batik'. She touched on the origins of batik in different continents, focussing on Ro-Shibori, a tie-dye technique from Japan. Diane Gaffney, Chairman of the Batik Guild in the UK, spoke about the Batik Transition.

Baba Peter Wee, The Peranakan Association's First Vice-President, pleasantly surprised the audience by opening with a *panton* glorifying and praising the richness of batik culture. He spoke on the 'Sarong Batik Nyonya' in relation to the Peranakan culture, presenting his exquisite collection of over 30 batik sarongs from the coastal Indonesian towns of Cirebon, Pekalongan, Lasem and Kedungwuni.

Peppering and mesmerizing the audience with fond childhood memories of his late grandmother, Peter recalled anecdotes tied to her collection of *sapu tangan* (handkerchiefs), baby nappies, jewellery folders and a slew of other paraphernalia. ☒



Baba Peter Wee with Janet Stoyel (UK) and Rudolf G Smend (Germany).

PAST AND PRESENT TENSE

Remembrance of Scenes Past

Oil painting exhibition by May Oon • The Arts House Gallery

11 - 15 October 2007

By Cynthia Wee-Hoefer

Friends and acquaintances of this former magazine writer and public relations practitioner just hitting 50, arched their eyebrows at May Oon's new-found talent as artist. The subject of the vernissage is Peranakan Women, a familiar sight to most but for the fact that it is May's declaration of her Peranakan upbringing, that there must be more. There must have been over 200 people - architects, artists and A-list personalities - who flowed in and out of the hall. Could it be a woman artist pulling off a Peranakan-themed exhibition?

May relied on old family photographs, archival shots and pages of picture books to revive her Peranakan past which she had seemingly abandoned, once she left her family home to marry a foreigner. As she studied the faded prints, she was enthralled by the Peranakan nonya, the nominal head of the household.

"I only knew my grandmothers; both grandfathers had passed on before I was born. Our house was often filled with women, and when I began to create a visual correspondence with my Peranakan past, the

memories of their personalities, stories, triumphs and disappointments, all came flooding back," she wrote in the catalogue.

May chose to free herself of the colours of these rich recollections. "For the simple reason, I don't like colour. I am interested in the topics, I am not a colourist." Quietly over the last five years, she has been taking private art lessons and readying herself. May's debut exhibition sold 13 out of 15 artworks, raising over \$20,000 for Tan Tock Seng Hospital to care for needy HIV-positive patients. ☒

Out of the camaraderie of the crowd, an elegant silver-haired nonya traipsed across the room. It was none other than May's 82-year-old mother Madam Tan Poey Liew, granddaughter of Tan Kheam Hock.



ASSOCIATION'S CULTURAL OUTREACH

The Association staged a Baba wedding re-enactment and a fashion show for NTUC at a lunchtime event, 'Tribute to our Seniors — Peranakan Style' at the Hilton Hotel on 11 November. Ms Bebe Seet showcased the history of the sarong kebaya and her models demonstrated how to wear a sarong. Details of this can be found on our website: http://www.peranakan.org.sg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=110&Itemid=2

The MC for the occasion was Baba GT Lye and Baba Chan Eng Thai, and The Peranakan Voices entertained the audiences with their signature colourful costumes and original songs as well as familiar Peranakan evergreens. **For more information on our cultural programmes, please contact the Hon. Secretary Mrs Lim Geok Huay at Tel: 62550704.**



SOON, THE NEW CHEMPAKAS

By Maurice Wee

'Chetty Melaka, Peranakan Indians Singapore'. In short, Chempakas. This sub-culture of the Peranakans plan to form and inaugurate the association by organising a special dinner and stage performances at the Regional English Language Centre (RELC) at 30 Orange Grove Road on Saturday, 19 January, 2008.

Guests-of-Honour for the evening will be none other than the President and Mrs S R Nathan. The invited guests include high commissioners, VIPs from the various ministries and various association presidents such as the Peranakan and Eurasian Associations, Gunong Sayang Association, academicians from the Institute of South East Asia Studies (ISEAS) and other dignitaries.

One of the many highlights for the evening will be the launch of a book on the Peranakan Indians, titled 'Peranakan Indians of Singapore and Melaka', by Samuel Dhoraisingam. ■



From left: Peter Wee with Chempakas president, Leitchmenon and treasurer, Sanasee Philips Roy.

MARI KITA SEMUA SAMBOT TAON BARU TIKUS!

Peranakan Chinese New Year's Eve Mass

11pm Wednesday 6 February 2008

Church of the Holy Family,
6 Chapel Rd, Singapore 429509.

The Mass will be celebrated in Baba Malay.

**Satu genggum bungah chingkeh,
Burung lebah terebang bersama,
Peng ann Tuhan dalam changkir,
Tumpah keluar kepada semua.**

**A clump of cloves together,
Birds and bees in flocks they fly,
God's blessings in a cup,
Shall overflow to one and all.**



BABA MALAY BIBLE

A new edition of the Baba Malay New Testament Bible, first published more than 75 years ago, is now available in the latest publication by the Bible Society of Singapore. For orders, please contact Steven at Tel: 65-63373222 ext.22 or email info@bible.org.sg. ■

WELCOME

We welcome our new lifemembers:

Mr Ang Hock Leong, Edward
Mr Chia Chian Lock, Reggie
Ms Choo Kok Cheng
Mr Foo Khee Kang
Dr Ling Moi Lin
Mr Eric Oey
Ms Ong May Chern, Christina
Mrs Quek-Ng Kooi Lian

Mr Alexander Sassarak
Ms Tan Bee Hoon
Mr Tan Yonghui, Adrian
Ms Elizabeth Tng
Ms Wong Lai Wah, Diana
Ms Wong Phek Lian,
Doreen
Dr Gibert Yeo Tian Seng

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THE PERANAKAN GUIDE SINGAPORE

MUSEUMS

Asian Civilisations Museum. Visit the Mary and Philbert Chin Gallery at the ACM Empress Place to view some outstanding pieces of Peranakan gold jewellery. The ACM at Armenian Street, which housed most of the Museum's Peranakan artefacts, is closed for renovations. It will soon be transformed into a dedicated Peranakan museum at the end of April 2008.

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, National University of Singapore. Objects & Desire is a project challenging eight invited talents to present works inspired by the Baba House, expressing their personal contemporary interpretation of the Straits Chinese lifestyle (Until 30 April). NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Tel: 65162492, 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
For programmes related to the exhibition, see <http://www.nus.edu.sg/museums/cattani.html>

The Baba House — COMING SOON! This new heritage house museum at 157 Neil Road will open in mid 2008. 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.

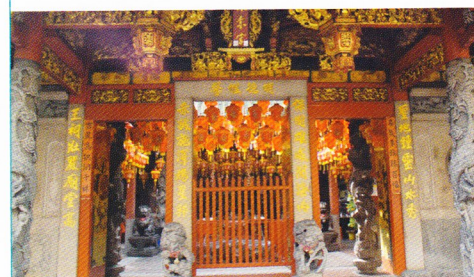
http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html
<http://www.myjoochiat.com>

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.





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