



the peranakan

ISSUE 1 • 2012

Naga Nuggets
of Dragon Trivia

Cherished
Childhood Customs

Thanksgiving to
the Jade
Emperor

Barging Spirits
from Malacca

ZING OF THE WATER

DRAAGON

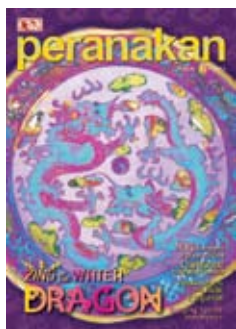
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Cover image: A late Qing dynasty scalloped-rim porcelain dish with dragon symbols, collection and courtesy of Norman Cho, Singapore. Photography by Norman Cho.



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Contents

ISSUE 1 • 2012



4



9



12



6

18



33



24

2 EDITORIAL

Traditions in Good Time

3 MESSAGE

Selamat Taon Baru Naga

FEATURES

4 Enter the Dragon

6 "Don't Sweep Away Good Luck!"

9 Legends and Rituals in Semayang Ti Kong

12 Setting Spirits Ablaze

DALAM DAPOR

15 Savoury Fare

HERITAGE

18 Singapore Collected

EVENTS

24 A Break with Convention

27 A Peranakan High Noon

29 A Newstalgic Sensation

30 When Nyonyas and Babas Roamed Bukit Brown

33 A Woman's Affair

NOTICEBOARD

34 Association's New CD

35 Peranakan Associations in the Region

36 DIRECTORY

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TRADITIONS IN GOOD TIME

“The young boy is not wearing shoes. It’s a wet year,” I recall my late mother-in-law, Ada Law, declaring as she pointed to the picture on the *Lak Jit*, the Chinese Lunar Calendar. It is a picture filled with symbolism. The one-page calendar, on thin paper, is a handy-size extract of the *Tung Shu*, or ‘the book that knows all’.

The *Tung Shu* is a marvel of astrology from two thousand years ago during the Han Dynasty. It is also called the *Old Farmer’s Almanac*, which farmers



used to find out the best time for planting. The Peranakans call it the *Buku Datok* (Divinity Book). This red book can give you an auspicious name and literally predict your life every single day of the year from the time you are born! My parents

went to the Peranakan temple at Devonshire Road to consult the *Buku* for a good date for my wedding. I can confirm it was spot on for us, 32 happy years on.

The *Lak Jit*, veritably a mini-*Tung Shu*, shows everything from full moon dates to good and bad dates for weddings, businesses, moving house; the zodiac animals and their compatibility; Chinese festivals and lots more, if you can read Chinese.

Which, I woefully cannot from Adam. Still, I am keeping my calendar which I received from Baba Peter Wee, who was given a stack from the Kwan Im Tng temple in Joo Chiat.

In 2012, the cowherd is wearing shoes. The sun is blazing red. A hot year! What else is in store? I will call upon trilinguist Baba Chan Eng Thai, who has cheerfully volunteered to *bacha* (read) for me. 2012 is also the year of the Water Dragon which, I am told, is good for the Rooster, which I am, but not for the Ox, Goat, Dog and oddly, for the Dragon itself. Some aunties say wear some form of dragon on the body to attract good luck. Or, just pray hard!

Who knows? But no harm to be aware of superstition, or be mindful of tradition, the focus of this new year issue. Read about why Peranakans revere the dragon, the die-hards during Chinese New Year, prayer foods for the Emperor of Heaven, why spirits are shipped to Heaven from Melaka, and more. We also laud the generosity of the late Lee Kip Lin who donated rare documents of old Singapore for research and public viewing.

Finally, we warmly welcome the Peranakan associations of Indonesia and Kelantan to our ever-growing community in the region. A splendid start to 2012!

Linda Chee, Editor

LETTERS

I heard The Peranakan Voices sing for the first time at a Peranakan-themed dinner at Serangoon Country Club on 18 March. Wow, I have not heard such wonderful voices; the songs were great, too! The Peranakan choir is a GEM! They brought back wonderful memories for me as I recalled my late grandmother - she used to spring up with a song or two for us!

Eunice Ann Chew,
Nyonya-campur-with-Cina-Serani, Singapore

Very good work. Keep it up!

Leong Weng Kam, *The Straits Times, Singapore*

I love the magazine and learn something new with each edition. I look forward to every copy. Well done!
Ivan Heng, *Wild R!ce, Singapore*

Congratulations on the consistent publication of *The Peranakan* for the past 18 years. I was extremely happy to be able to get to read all the back-issues, conveniently accessible via your association’s website. Credit goes to Baba Lee Kip Lee, who conceptualised the newsletter and diligently saw it through all these years, with the support of the great team you have now.

I am looking forward to continued high quality editorial, layout, graphics and most importantly, information and contemporary news regarding our very small but significant community in Singapore and around the region.

Kamsiah banyak banyak.

James Kuake,
Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

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SELAMAT TAON BARU NAGA

A Chinese New Year message from our President, Baba Peter Wee

As we enter into the year of the Water Dragon, it gives me a great sense of pride to reflect on our past and the history we have upheld for 111 years. I always advocate knowing the past in terms of how we came and how our ancestors played an important part in building up Singapore and our Association to what it is today. I cannot help but feel grateful and thankful for our long and rich history, and how our culture has been so warmly received and embraced especially by the younger generation of babas and nyonyas in recent years.

I hope that Peranakan families of today will uphold the tradition of the reunion dinner at home. This strengthens the family bond especially in the partaking of traditional reunion dishes that strongly reflect our heritage and culture. I also hope that the honouring of parents and grandparents in our tradition of *soja*, i.e. bowing or kneeling to respect our elders, will be retained by the younger generation.

I would like to thank all members and friends who have volunteered their services and assisted the Association these past years. A special note of thanks too, to all the agencies and the various associations in the region for your strong support. It has been a very active year with a multitude of activities and awareness of our culture spreading far beyond the region.

Let us collectively build up the Peranakan culture to even greater heights in the years ahead.



I wish all babas and nyonyas and friends, *Selamat Taon Baru Naga, Panjang Panjang Umor* (Happy New Year of the Dragon and Long Life!).

Baba Peter Wee

President, The Peranakan Association Singapore

SELAMAT TAON BARU NAGA

Panton composed by Baba Cedric Tan

*Tokwee naga sulam emas,
Terbang lima pergi balek.
Tembaru datang banyak lekas,
Tiga puluh dua hari lepa'ir Tang Chek.*

*Harimo naga binatang berkat,
Penjaga bio serata tempat.
Taon naga mintakkan selamat,
Apa yang hajat tentu dapat.*

*Table valance with gold embroidered dragon,
To and fro these five mythical beasts play.
Lunar New Year is fast approaching this year,
Thirty-two days right after Winter Solstice Day.*

*The tiger and the dragon, two blessed creatures,
Guardians of the temple throughout the country.
May the world be peaceful in the coming year,
May whatever we wish for, fulfilled be.*

ENTER THE DRAGON

Baba Norman Cho tracks down tales and trivia about the mythical animal

The most iconic symbol in Chinese civilisation is undoubtedly the dragon. This legendary creature dates back to ancient times, several millennia ago. It is the fifth and only mythological animal found in the Chinese zodiac and symbolises strength, power and good fortune.

Origins

Although the origin of the Chinese dragon is uncertain, archaeologists have found evidence of its depiction as far back as 8,000 years ago to the Neolithic Period. Ancient texts have suggested that the dragon could have been inspired by the crocodile. The



Above right:
Dishing up
dragons.

Above: Dragons
adorning the
tokwee (table
valance).

story of Zhou Chu from the Jin Dynasty (265AD – 420AD) recounted the tale of a warrior who killed a “dragon” that infested the waters of his village, which was probably a crocodile. The powerful scaly four-legged giant lizard which is adept both in water and on land closely matches the physical attributes of the legendary dragon. Over time, the physical representation of the dragon evolved into what we know today - one with a serpentine body with four-clawed legs and the horned head of a *qilin* (the Chinese horned-chimera).

The naga

In Baba patois, the dragon is known as *naga*. It is derived from the Sanskrit term for snake or cobra that has been widely used throughout Hindu and Buddhist regions across Southeast Asia for centuries. Although the dragon and *naga* are distinct entities, they are one and the same to Peranakans because there is no Malay equivalent for the word *dragon*. Both these mythical creatures are regarded as benevolent in nature, as opposed to the common Western depiction of dragons as being dangerous, destructive and even evil.

The *naga* is said to be the protector of temples and was reputed to have sheltered Buddha from the elements of nature as he meditated. It was also believed to bring rain to the land and good tidings of prosperity to the people.

Dragon emblems

The dragon is revered as sacred and powerful. Thus its image is used with respect. There is the fear of *cheong* (astrological conflict) befalling an individual or an entire household if their *oon*

FEATURE

(spirit) is not in harmony with the dragon. As the emblem of the Chinese emperor, it was reserved for very important places like the palaces or the temples.

Only those who held high positions or were bestowed with important titles, like the *Kwah* (Chinese court officials) or the *Kapitan Cina* (Chinese community leaders appointed by the colonial government), could incorporate the dragon on their attire or in the architectural details of their homes.

However this custom was not strictly adhered to and after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the dragon symbol became popularised.

In the homes of the average Peranakans, the image of the dragon was confined mainly to the altar or wedding paraphernalia. It is fairly common to find dragons on the *tok-datok* (altar table) or the *tokwee* (table valance).

Occasional dragons

Dragon motifs would grace important occasions like the Chinese New Year or weddings. In traditional Peranakan weddings in Malacca, the bride would wear a dragon hairpin (*thau tok*) inserted just below the headdress as a symbol of imperial favour (A *Baba Wedding*, by Cheo Kim Ban, page 57). The groom would wear buckles and robes embellished with dragon motifs.

The Peranakans probably share the same sentiment as the Malays about the bridal couple being *Raja Sehari* (King and Queen for the Day), when they would have the blessings to use dragon motifs during this very auspicious occasion. A pair of red wedding candles would be lit on the *choon tok* (ceremonial meal side-table) in the bridal chamber. Papercuts of a dragon and a phoenix would be affixed onto each of the candles – the dragon representing the groom and the phoenix, the bride. It was believed that whichever candle extinguishes first meant that the party it represented would be the first to depart. The representation of *yin* and *yang* in the form of a pair of mythical animals - phoenix and dragon - originated in China during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) and is abundantly used during



Above: Accessories with dragon motifs.

weddings. The dragon represents the male, the emperor, while the phoenix represents the female, the empress. The paired dragon-phoenix motif can often be found in the specially commissioned famille-rose porcelain used at Peranakan weddings.

Dragon accessories

Kebayas, *kerosangs*, bangles and pendants with dragon motifs were not unheard of. However, *nyonyas* born in the Year of the Dragon are thought to be conferred the blessing to wear the zodiac sign of her year of birth. Even *nyonyas* born in the years of other animal signs would wear *kebayas* with dragon motifs to celebrate the Chinese New Year. When featured on embroidered slippers, sarongs or on belts, the dragon would often be joined by the menagerie of the other 11 zodiac animals.

Dragons are also perceived to have the power to avert misfortune. Thus, they often appear on talismanic pendants that mothers make their children wear for protection. These are often in the form of dragon-headed fish which were naturally known as dragonfish.

May the year of the mystical dragon bring you auspicious blessings, strength and good fortune. *Selamat Taon Baru!* (Happy New Year!) ❀

Photography by Norman Cho.

“DON’T SWEEP AWAY GOOD LUCK!”

Nyonya Sharon Wee remembers Chinese New Year as a child

Chinese New Year was the most important celebration in our family. It was marked with many traditions.

Months before, my mother would purchase new curtain fabrics from Katong Shopping Centre or Arab Street and sew the trimmings herself. Closer to the date, we had to cut our hair, buy new clothes and shoes, including underwear, something that always tickled my children and their friends when I explained our customs.

On New Year’s Eve, the home would witness a flurry of activities. The maid would be mopping the floor several times, the last one right after our family’s reunion dinner. This was in anticipation of the need to put away the broom. It was believed that to sweep on the first day would be to sweep away good luck coming in. We would be sure to put out brand new bed linens, curtains and towels. My sister would be fluffing the cushions and laying out home-baked cookies in Corningware containers. The rice jar had to be filled to the brim to ensure a year of bounty. My favourite task was to fill in the crisp, new dollar notes for the little red packets (*ang*

pow). My mother had different dollar amounts set for children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews and distant relatives.

Some of us went as far as swimming on New Year’s Eve to ‘wash away’ bad luck, or what we called *buang suay*. While we lived at Yarrow

Gardens, my mother made sure to hang the long red banner, or *chai ki*, across the front porch. On the morning of the New Year, it was also important that the main door would only be opened by a family member whose animal sign did not clash with that for the New Year. I recalled that this especially applied to fierce animals, such as the Year of the Tiger. All these customs were instilled in us from young, steps to

control our fortunes for the future. They are superstitions that can be very hard to shake off.

About eight weeks before Chinese New Year, my mother would begin her annual cottage enterprise. She would spread her efforts to include her popular pineapple tarts, almond cookies, cashew cookies, *achar* (pickles), fruit cake, *sugee* cake and *lapis spekkoeck*. She had a clear timetable of when to make certain items and in what order. The cookies came first, followed by the pickles, the tarts and lastly the cakes. I suspect this was to preserve the freshness of the goods accordingly.

She also made the traditional *kueh bolu*, similar to spongy French madeleines but in their own distinct shapes. My mother would set up a makeshift charcoal stove at the back of our house and spend a day making them. The special brass trays with mould cavities required a good memory as to which mould had been filled and when; and good judgment as to which *kueh bolu* was ready to be taken out.



Little nyonias in new dresses with nyonya mother Polly Cheang.



Sharon Wee and her late mother, Polly Cheang, who was a whiz at whipping up traditional dishes.

“All these customs were instilled in us from young, steps to control our fortunes for the future. They are superstitions that can be very hard to shake off.”

Chinese New Year also meant that most households would make *kueh bakol*. There were elaborate traditions and superstitious taboos associated with making this. The round cake looks like hardened honey with a glossy surface, the glossier, the better. The sides are wrapped with banana leaves and the middle of the surface pasted with intricate red papercuts. As a child, my eldest sister observed the older womenfolk fussing over making them. My grandmother would shoo all the little children out of the kitchen, and especially menstruating women. It was thought unlucky for unpurified women to have a hand in making what was considered a sacred offering to the ancestral gods. The *kueh bakol* had to turn out perfectly right, good enough for the gods so as to herald a good New Year.

Stories abound about the efforts made to ensure that certain cakes would come out ‘right’. There was a belief that you either had it in you to make a cake successfully or you did not. This applied not just to *kueh bakol* but to *kueh koya*, *apom bokua* or *tapeh* (glutinous rice liquor)

as well. It was not necessarily a lack of skills or talent, so measures were made to optimise one’s chances of success which included not talking while preparing the cake, not to *tergo* (criticise) while some apparently went as far as making the item in the nude!

The family always came together for Chinese New Year. My mother would wake up at the break of dawn to complete the cooking of our customary Chinese New Year dishes. Waking up to the aroma and warmth of my mother’s cooking will always remain in my memory and is a very special part of my childhood.



It was a custom for my married sisters to visit their in-laws first thing in the morning. They would then head over to my parents’ and have lunch at our home. My parents, considered senior members of an extended family, would remain at home on the first day to receive guests. These could include their nieces and nephews or in earlier times, their younger siblings. Upon coming into the home, my parents were paid respects by children and grandchildren kneeling down one at

Queuing up happily to *soja* and be rewarded with a red packet (*ang pow*).

a time to *soja*. My eldest sister would set the process going. I would kneel down, clasp my hands up and greet them with the saying, *panjang panjang umur* (long life). In return, I would get an *ang pow*!

Lunch was a *tok panjang*. Peranakan Chinese families often owned an extendable table specifically for

A grand-niece paying her respects to grand-aunt Polly.



the *tok panjang* feast. This is a habit I have kept, living in New York. I own one such table and conveniently extend it when I throw dinner parties.

On the table, we laid out a full spread of the soup and gravy dishes, pickles and sides served on our best china. The main dishes included *ayam buah keluak*, *hee pio*, *pong tauhu*, chicken curry, *ngo hiang*, *sambal timun* and *itek tim*. The china came in various sizes, some of them smaller plates for the *hati babi* and *ngo hiang*, some of them shallow bowls for gravy dishes such as *buah keluak* and then soup bowls for *hee pio* and

FEATURE

Left: Polly Cheang in her younger days wrapping *hati babi* (liver balls in pig's caul).



Right: Bibiks and nyonyas lunching on a feast of traditional dishes.



pong tauhu. *Sambal belachan* was served in tiny dishes. Unlike Chinese families, we never used chopsticks. Instead, we used forks and spoons, with the exception of Chinese soup spoons to accompany the soup bowls. Old family friends

and relatives would join us for lunch. Of course, my father, being the patriarch, ate first, along with more senior relatives and guests. There was a pecking order as the brothers-in-law and finally the youngest ones took their places after the elders had relinquished their seats. The dishes were continually replenished. My sisters and the maids were always rushing about the kitchen bringing full plates out and taking empty ones back in while my mother was on hand to control the warming up and dishing out of her precious soups and gravy. We had to place *sambal belachan*, *chili chuka* and *achar* around different parts of the table to ensure everyone had access to them. This *tok panjang* would go on throughout the afternoon and by dinnertime, the whole process would repeat at itself.

Most of the *tok panjang* dishes required a few days of preparation. The preference was to cook most of the food by the eve of Chinese New Year. Some of that food could then be served at the reunion dinner, leaving the rest for the big day itself. This took away the burden of trying to cook everything in time for our *tok panjang* lunch on New Year's Day. Most nyonya dishes, being so flavorful, often 'blossom' and taste better if cooked a day or two in advance. My mother never ate a full meal on that first day, often saying that the cook rarely ate her own food because she felt so full from just preparing it.

Many years after my mother's passing, cooking for Chinese New Year became more challenging. Even with six daughters splitting the work, we could not fully replicate what one mother served up! ❀

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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LEGENDS AND RITUALS IN SEMAYANG TI KONG

Baba Tan Kuning looks into the significance of celebrating the birthday of the Jade Emperor

The ninth day of the Chinese New Year is called *Ti Kong Seh* which literally means the birthday of *Ti Kong*. This is really a common expression in Hokkien to mean that it is the day of thanksgiving to *Ti Kong*, the god (in Taoism) who looks after the welfare of all human beings. This celebration is essentially of Hokkien origin although over hundreds of years some Cantonese have come to observe this annual ritual as well.

According to legend, there was once a wizard who lived in China. He boasted of being a linguist in that wherever he went, he would be able to speak the dialect of that region by simply drinking a cup of water from a well in each city. He travelled across China to speak on philosophy and religion to the people in their native dialect. He spoke so well that he was much admired by the locals. He became famous throughout the country and prided himself as a genius.

One day it was time for him to visit Fujian province. As usual he was welcomed by the people and was served a cup of tea brewed with water from the well. Happily he drank it and began to speak to the public. To his disappointment he could not speak the Hokkien dialect well. Ashamed, he took flight and retreated to a small hut in a remote village. He blamed the natives of Fujian province for his failure and planned to kill all of them, using his powers as a wizard. He poisoned all the wells and began to kill the children.

To counter this threat, the people harvested and stored tall sugarcane plants, roots and all, behind the main wooden door of their houses for two purposes. First, they could drink the sugarcane juice to quench their thirst and second, they could use these as weapons to beat up the wizard if he appeared. At the same time, they

prayed to *Ti Kong* for help. All this happened during the Chinese New Year period.

On the ninth day of Chinese New Year the wizard was found dead in his hut. All the wells were cleared of poison. The people believed that *Ti Kong* had answered their prayers. Every family, except those that had deaths during the period, made offerings of thanksgiving that day. A tradition was established.

This legend was related to me by Baba Ong Guan Bok, the doyen of *wayang Peranakan* (theatre) in the 1930s through 1950s. He knew my father and uncle through the theatre group called *Oleh Oleh Party* (1920s – 1950s). Ong's father was Ong Chwee

Tau, who owned a small pineapple plantation in Singapore in the early 1900s and migrated to Singapore from Chao An, Fujian, with his wife.

Offerings to *Ti Kong*

In the old days, many Peranakan homes made offerings on the eighth night of Chinese New Year between 11pm and midnight; the first hour of the day according to the Chinese concept of time. The altar structure for the offerings is three-tiered. It consists of a table on the floor (first



*Offerings are made to *Ti Kong* on the eighth night of the New Year.*



The elaborate offerings of fruits, cakes, tea and rice vermicelli.



tier), another table in front mounted on four chairs (second tier) and on top of that, a specially made box called a *chanab* (third tier) holding three skewers of *bunga chanab*. Each stick holds 'flowers' skilfully carved from fruits (papaya and pineapple) preserved in heavy syrup.

The offerings are placed in the porch of the

house in front of the main door. The altar table has two 'fronts' - one facing the house and the other facing the street. Both fronts must have a *tokwee* (table valance) embroidered with motifs of dragons or the eight immortals and words of blessings in Chinese.

The most important offerings are a pair of full length sugarcane plants, with roots and leaves intact. Each plant is to be placed on the left and right of the main door. Alternatively, each plant can be tied to the left and right sides of the three-tiered table. This is a reminder of how sugar cane plants saved the Hokkien people.

The fruits and cakes are also symbolic. One *kueh bakol* (a round honey-coloured steamed glutinous cake) and sections of sugarcane are arranged with mandarin orange segments at the front of the altar. *Kueh bakol* and sugar cane are symbols of longevity. Mandarin oranges (*lemo*

China or *lemo Taon Baru*) represent peace and harmony. The main offerings include three cups of Chinese tea and three small bowls of *mee sua* (rice vermicelli) in syrup.

A comb of *pisang raja* (the best variety of bananas), pineapple and a round steamed rice cake (*huat kueh*) symbolise good luck. *Lemoh jari* (Buddha's hand citron) is considered a sacred

fruit that brings blessings. These are the essentials. Other fruits like grapes and apples are optional.

Other traditional steamed cakes offered can include *kueh ku merah*, *kueh pitis*, *kueh ang pao* and *kueh bantal* which are all red in colour. *Kueh ku merah* (*angku kueh* in Hokkien) and *kueh pitis* are made

of glutinous rice flour filled with mashed mung beans (*tau sah*). *Kueh ku* is oval-shaped like a tortoise (*ku* in Hokkien) with the Chinese word for tortoise on the top. It symbolises longevity as tortoises are believed to live for a hundred years or more. *Kueh pitis* is the elongated shape of five Chinese coins placed in a row representing wealth. *Ang pao* and *kueh bantal* (pillow cake) are made of wheat flour without any fillings, representing good luck or wealth.

The upper table holds the *bunga chanab* container, the joss urn and three cups of Chinese



The third tier comprising the gilded chanab with flowers atop, carved from candied papaya.



tea. In place of *bunga chanab*, there could also be a small plate of *chanab* candy or *teh liow* ('tea time accompaniments') consisting of five types of specially-made candy each with a peanut inside (white and red candy are considered two items), a few strips of peanut candy baked with brown sugar (*kueh kacang*), preserved red dates (*ang cho*) and dried longan (*mata kuching kering*) or strips of dried water melon preserved in sugar (*tang kueh*). This plate of *teh liow* symbolises unity for peace and harmony in the family. A pair of metre-long red candles are perched on copper candle stands and lit.

When the altar is ready, the head of the family will *semayang* (pray) by kneeling in front of the altar, clasping three joss sticks with both hands to give thanks to Ti Kong for a good year that has passed. Then he bows thrice touching his head to the floor. He makes his wish and vows (*angkat niat*) to give thanks the next year if all is well again.

Semayang Ti Kong is characterised by the burning of Ti Kong *kim*, the 'gold' paper with the three figures of the gods of luck, happiness and longevity (*Hock Lock Siew*). Each slip of paper is 8 by 10 inches, much bigger than the ordinary 'gold' paper offered to smaller gods which is usually 3 by 4 inches. The Ti Kong *kim* are folded origami style to represent the shape of ancient Chinese gold ingots. These are strung together with thread to form a line of 50 nuggets. Another feature is the long strips of thin yellow paper called *tng chi* to symbolise longevity. *Semayang* Ti Kong culminates in the burning of the 'gold ingots' and *tng chi* with the sugarcane plants. All the fruits and cakes offered are then consumed by family members



Left: Sugarcane plants are placed at the main door to protect the house.

Right: The Ti Kong kim or gold paper, impeccably folded to resemble a lotus flower.



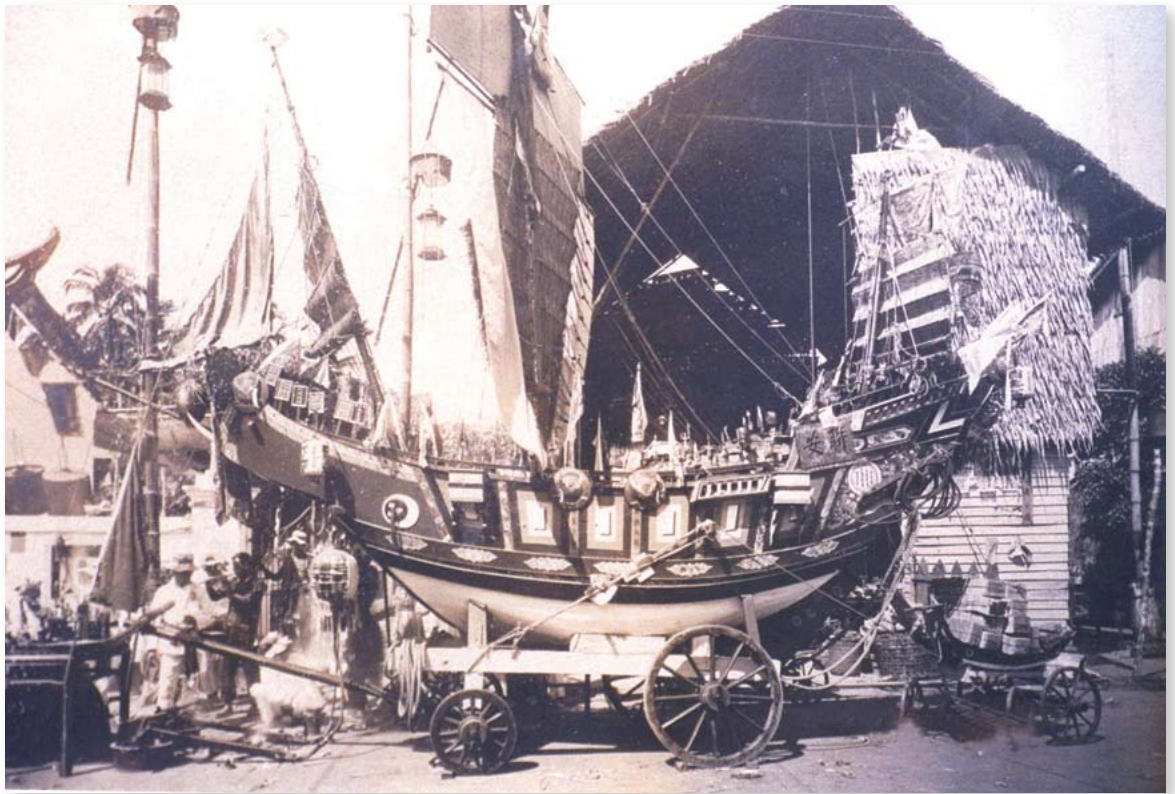
Left: The 'gold ingots' are burned to 'transport' them to Heaven.

for good luck, good health, peace and harmony throughout the year. ❀

Photographs taken by Baba Ee Sin Soo at the home of Baba Ong-Loo Ban Hoe in Malacca.

SETTING SPIRITS ABLAZE

Baba Cedric Tan sheds light on Melaka's Wangkang Festival



Right: A Wangkang outside the shed where it was built in 1933.

The Wangkang Festival originated as a means to round up the spirits behind all epidemics, scourges and anarchies. The spirits would be contained in a *Wangkang* or Royal Barge, which was set ablaze to send them on to the Unknown.

In Malacca, the first recorded *Wangkang* Festival dates to 1846. The festival was held sporadically until 1933 after the Great Depression. Following a lapse of almost 70 years, it was reenacted in 2001. The festival was held only on lunar leap years on the 10th day of the 10th lunar month except in the 21st century when it has been held on *Chap Goh Meh*, on the 15th day of the 1st lunar month.

History

According to the late Dr Tan Seng Tee of Malacca, a famous Daoist priest named Teo Tian Soo (Zhang Tianshi) who lived during the reign of Emperor Yong Le of the Ming Dynasty was summoned by the emperor to rid his palace

of ghostly sounds plaguing the premises. Teo rightly identified the noise as muffled music produced by 360 Chin Soo (Jinshi) scholars imprisoned in an underground chamber under orders from the emperor himself. Teo said he could execute all the scholars, but only if the Emperor took responsibility for this act. Yong Le readily agreed. Invoking magic, the priest sprinkled rice and salt on the floor and then struck it with his sword. This action severed the heads of all 360 scholars.

That night, the scholars' spirits appeared before the emperor demanding the return of their lives. Employing more magic, Teo captured all the spirits and sequestered them in a casket which was dumped into the sea. However, the casket washed ashore and was prised open by an unsuspecting beggar, freeing the spirits who drifted up to Heaven. There, they were canonised and granted the title of *Kim Tian Hoo* or High Commanders by the Jade Emperor. With their newly-acquired status, the spirits appeared before Emperor Yong

Le again. Acting on Teo's advice, Yong Le appointed them as *Ong Yah* or princes with the title *Tye Tian Soon Siew* (power of an Imperial Justice). Five of these princes, namely *Choo Hoo Ong Yah*, *Hoon Hoo Ong Yah*, *Tee Hoo Ong Yah*, *Lee Hoo Ong Yah* and *Pek Hoo Ong Yah* were widely worshipped in the counties of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou in China's Fujian province. Following the persecution of the Fujians during the Ching Dynasty, a significant number fled to Malacca and brought these deities along. Their ancestors continued to observe *Wangkang*.

Ceremonies and the Grand Procession

The ceremonies are centred in the Yong Chuan Tian Temple which houses *Tee Hoo Ong Yah* in Bandar Hilir, Malacca, and where all the other deities are brought in for the grand procession. However the first *Cho Choe* ceremony will be held in the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple. Blessings are sought from the deities in the *Cho Choe* Ceremony. Three tall bamboo plants adorned with lanterns are placed in front of the temple. Lighted lamps are released on the river to alert the water spirits. Prayers are made to the gods and ancestors to seek their blessings. Towards the end of *Cho Choe*, the main temple door is sealed for three days; it is 're-opened' first to female devotees for the next three days, and after that, to the general public.

Prior to the festival, a shed is built to house the construction of the *Wangkang*. Three ceremonies are held. The *Tiam Gan* or *Bukak Mata* (opening the eyes) ceremony involves dabbing the blood of fowl and red powder onto the eyes and bodies of the three effigies. These are *Mah Cho* – the Goddess of the Sea, *Chioh Kuah* – the Superintendent of the Workyard and *Tiong Koon Hoo* – the Captain of the *Wangkang*. Dabbing symbolises the entry of the deities into the effigies. The second ceremony is the *Ann Chiam* or laying the keel of the *Wangkang*. The *Kia Teng Koh* is the raising of a holy jar, lantern and a wand onto a bamboo plant at the entrance of the shed. The wand is for sprinkling holy water into the jar, symbolising blessings to the people.

Once the *Wangkang* is ready, a minor procession, including a *sampan* (small boat) will proceed to the Poh San Teng Temple at the foot of Bukit China to fetch some water from a well there. The water is stored in two clay receptacles



and then mounted onto the anchors of the *Wangkang*. Like a high tide, this action represents the hope that prosperity will flow inwards. The *An Kim An Leng Bak* or Painting of the Dragon Eye ceremony involves the festival chairman using a second mixture of fowl's blood and red powder to paint eyes on both sides of the vessel bow. Next, 12 small and three larger nails are driven into the bow.

The selection of oarsmen is a key aspect of the festival. They will be dressed as lotus plucking maidens or *Chye Lian* led by the *Chye Lian Tau* (Leader). A divination process known as the *puak*

Above: *Wangkang* and ceremony circa 2000s.

FEATURE

puay is used to choose 48 men from a total of 100 or so eligible men. The *puak puay* involves casting two kidney-shaped pieces of red-painted wood in front of the *Tee Hoo Ong Yah*. One piece facing upwards and the other downwards is a 'yes' by the deity. A 'no' is when both pieces face either up or down at the same time. The *Chye Lian Tau* must receive a 'yes' twice consecutively. It is a highly privileged position as he will hold the millipede flag standard and lead all the *Chye Lian*. The *Chye Lian Kah* or crew consists of four *Chye Lian Tua* (heads), 36 *Chye Lian*, four drum and gong beaters, two *Leong Bak* (dragon eyes) and two *Ong Buay* (bird tails). They must know the *Chye Lian* song by heart and walk barefooted throughout. This requires perseverance as the oars are not allowed to touch the earth. At each junction or bridge, culvert and temple, the *Chye Lian Tau* will swing his standard in a circle as an act of rounding up evil spirits.

“Sadly, as no one can recall the melodies nor how they are to move, a lotus float with nine carp is now paraded in lieu of the *Chye Lian*.”

The highlight of the festival is the grand *Wangkang* procession. This used to involve men who would play the roles of *Chye Lian* or singing damsels who entertained the *Ong Yah* onboard with their song. Sadly, as no one can recall the melodies nor how they are to move, a lotus float with nine carp is now paraded in lieu of the *Chye Lian*. The procession also includes all five *Ong Yah* mounted on sedan chairs and the gaily decorated *Wangkang* itself. They are complemented by lavishly decked floats and devotees from various clan houses and associations. Before the *Wangkang* is set alight, it is filled with provisions and the oars and hats used by the *Chye Lian*. Once the vessel is on fire, it is customary for everyone to return directly to the temple without looking back. The Festival is officially over when the bamboo plants are taken down a few days after this main event. ❀

For more information, please click on www.yongchuantian.com or check out Yong Chuan Tian on facebook.

WANGKANG ACTIVITIES IN 2011

The following precursor events took place in 2011 in the compound of the Yong Chuan Tian Temple:

- 1st day of the 8th lunar month – Constructing the *Wangkang* shed.
- 14th day of the 8th month – Raising the bamboo plant and lanterns, and installing all the deities in the shed.
- 15th day of the 8th month – Laying the keel of the *Wangkang*.
- 15th day of the 11th month – Christening the *Wangkang*, Chuan Ann (All in Peace).
- 23rd day of the 11th month – Fetching well water from the Poh San Teng Temple.

WANGKANG SCHEDULE FOR 2012

In 2012, the *Wangkang* Festival Procession will be held on Monday, 6 February, which is coincidentally *Chap Goh Meh*. It is also a public holiday in Malaysia in celebration of Prophet Mohamed's birthday. The following day is *Thaipusam*, another public holiday in certain states in Malaysia. The following events are on the:

- 10th day of the 1st lunar month – Inviting the gods to reside at the temple; painting the eye of the *Wangkang*.
- 14th day of the 1st month – All the *Ong Yah* arrive at Yong Chuan Tian Temple.
- 15th day of the 1st month – A grand procession featuring floats, lion and dragon dances, Chingay, stilt walkers, giant dolls and the unique Teochew gongs and drum ensemble.

The grand procession commences at 7.00am from Yong Chuan Tian Temple and winds through town before concluding back at the temple. The final journey for the *Wangkang* is expected to begin at 7.30pm. It will end at Pulau Melaka with a final prayer before being set alight.

SAVOURY FARE

Nyonya Sylvia Tan certainly knows how to whet our appetites

We are all familiar with the sweetmeats tray for Chinese New Year where well-loved cookies and cakes are offered to guests – *kueh belanda*, *kueh tart*, *kueh bangkit*, *kueh koya*, *kueh bengka* and so on. In the old days, families would make their own *kueh*; these days, it is all too easy to purchase the lot and word gets round fast as to which supplier offers the best confectionery.

In my home, aside from the sweetmeats tray, we also offer a savoury tray filled with salty tidbits such as ham cubes with pineapple, top shells with ginger, chilli and lime, Chinese sausages and our very own nyonya favourites, *hati babi bungkus* (liver balls) *otak otak* and *babi asam garam* (tamarind pork). *Kueh pie tee* and *sambal sandwiches* also make great alternatives to the traditional sweet cakes and biscuits. I adore these tidbits for their versatility: aside from working well as a Chinese New Year savoury tray, they also make excellent starters to a meal, or as canapés at cocktail or drinks parties.

Their preparation involves simple assembly. There's no fuss in opening a can of top shells, slicing them up, topping with ginger and chilli strips and squeezing some lime juice over the dish. We can also use Chinese liver sausages – served with the traditional mustard leaf pickles (*luak chye*) – to save ourselves the effort of making traditional

liver balls from scratch. Their taste is almost identical, though I would add a dusting of roasted coriander spice over the sausages just before serving to enrich the flavour.

As for my favourite *babi asam garam*, I now make it in the oven. It beats having to fry the marinated pork slices, with all the attendant splattering, before serving them. I am happy to share this easy way to prepare a traditional dish retaining all the original flavour as well as two other recipes for savoury snacks which you can serve during this festive season and any time the occasion arises.

BABI ASAM GARAM

(Tamarind Pork)

(Serves 8-10)

While the original recipe states that the marinated belly pork should be boiled then fried, I grill the pieces of pork in the oven. The idea of meat marinated in tamarind juice probably comes from the Portuguese who had a habit of curing meats in vinegar to preserve them.

1½ -2kg belly pork
3 heaped tbsps tamarind paste
1 cup of water
1 tbsp salt
2 tsps sugar



Photography by
Jason Ong.

DALAM DAPOR

Method:

Using tweezers, pluck the pork skin clean of bristles. Make a marinade by mixing the tamarind paste with water. Add salt and sugar. A thick consistency should result. Marinate the whole piece of pork in this mixture overnight and covered in the fridge. The next day, boil the pork and marinade over a moderate fire till the meat is tender. Just before serving, slice the pork into fairly thick pieces. Lay out pork slices, without overlapping them, on an oven tray and grill under a hot oven until brown. Meanwhile, reduce the marinade in the pan to thicken. Spoon a little over each slice of grilled pork and serve with a dip of chopped garlic and vinegar to temper the richness.

Tip: For the carb-conscious, serve this delicious grilled pork with a fresh green salad on the side. Add water to the drippings from the grill pan, scraping while heating the pan over the fire, to make a savoury dressing for the lettuce leaves.

OTAK-OTAK

(Spicy Fish Quiche)

(Serves 8-10)

Otak-otak is essentially a spicy fish custard. Previously painstaking to make, I use a food processor to mince the fish and mix the custard and bake it in the oven.

Lemak spice paste:

2 red chillies

2 slices galangal

Thumb-sized piece of turmeric

4 candlenuts

1 tbsp *belacan* (shrimp paste)

10 shallots, peeled

1 tbsp coriander powder

500g fresh snapper fillets

500ml coconut milk

3 medium-sized eggs

Dash of white pepper

2 tps salt

2 tps sugar

Finely shredded kaffir lime leaves

Method:

Heat oven to 160°C. In a processor, place chillies, *galangal*, turmeric, candlenuts, *belacan* and shallots. Chop till fine and add coriander powder. Cut fish fillets into pieces. Add to the spice paste in the processor. Process to break up the fish and to obtain a firmer consistency if preferred. Add coconut milk, pepper, salt and sugar to the bowl. Break the eggs first into a basin (to check if they are fresh) and pour into the bowl. Process till all is amalgamated. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed. Pour spicy custard into a 28 x18 cm baking pan lined with a banana leaf. Place pan on a baking tray and pour enough water into the tray to reach about halfway up the pan. Carefully place tray into oven on the middle rack and bake for 15-20 minutes or till custard sets. If you prefer a browned crust, use a



kitchen torch to scorch the top of the *otak* just before serving. Garnish with a sprinkling of shredded fresh kaffir lime leaves.

Tip: Instead of making spice paste from scratch, use 3 tablespoons bottled nyonya *sambal* chilli. Add 1 tablespoon coriander powder and 1 teaspoon turmeric powder. Proceed with the rest of the recipe, omitting the salt and sugar.

KUEH PIE TEE

(Serves 10)

Really no more than popiah filling spooned into crisp pastry cups, which are now available commercially, this snack is highly popular, thanks to its crunch, the lashings of prawn and crabmeat and the bite of chilli. I recommend a simplified version with a few main ingredients that already make for a great mouthful.

500g *bangkuang* (jicama), peeled and shredded

200g small prawns

1 tbsp garlic

1 tbsp light soya sauce

½ tsp salt

1 tbsp sugar

100g prawns, boiled, peeled and halved lengthwise
or 100g crabmeat (available peeled, in tubs)

Fresh coriander (leaves only)

Fried garlic bits

50 *pie tee* pastry cups, available off the shelf

Bottled garlic chilli sauce, thinned down with lime juice and sweetened with sugar to taste.

Method:

Peel and shred the *bangkuang* with the help of a shredding disc from a food processor. Soak in water to rid of the starch, and then drain thoroughly. Peel prawns and reserve meat. Place prawn shells in a pot, barely cover with water and boil for half an hour to make prawn stock. Strain stock and leave aside. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a wok. Fry garlic till fragrant, add the peeled prawns, then the shredded *bangkuang*. Season to taste with light soya sauce, salt and sugar. Add prawn stock and simmer till *bangkuang* is tender. Leave aside. To serve: place a spoonful of filling in each pastry cup. Top with a boiled prawn half or crabmeat. Garnish with fresh coriander and garlic bits. Offer chilli sauce on the side. ❀

Sylvia Tan is a cookbook author with eight publications to her name. Her latest, *Modern Nonya*, is a collection of nyonya family recipes. While the taste is traditional, the methods have all been modified to suit today's lifestyle, with the help of kitchen conveniences and employing modern presentation styles.

May the God of Hope fill you in this Year of His
Presence and Crown you in Goodness And Glory!
May you walk by Faith and not by Sight (2 Cor 5:7)
Open your Spirit to the battle that rages beyond this
mortal existence and grant you the eyes of Faith to
Live from an eternal perspective



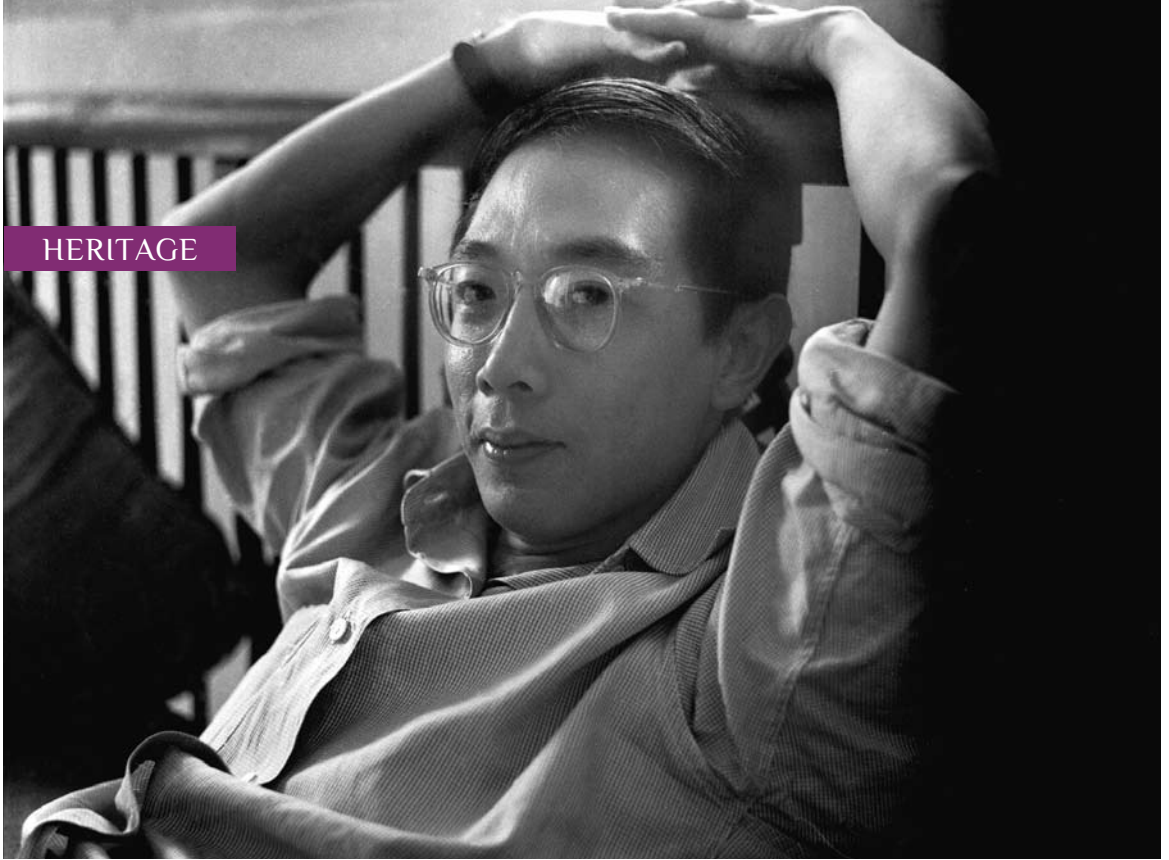
*B*e enthralled with the timeless craftsmanship of beauty in gold, intan and old european cut diamond jewelleries, nonya porcelain and beautifully embroidered antique kebayas which are the Footprints of the Peranakans here at Timeless Treasure!

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HERITAGE

Lee Kip Lin, c.
1940.
Photography by
Lee Kip Lee.



SINGAPORE COLLECTED

Baba Lee Kip Lin was selfless and passionate in his love for, and pursuit of, Singapore history. The architect-lecturer-author left a lasting legacy of rare Singapore memorabilia amassed over half a century to benefit future generations

Baba Lee Kip Lin (11 February 1925 – 9 July 2011)

Baba Lee Kip Lin was a committee member of *The Peranakan Association Singapore* in the 1970s and the brother of our Life President, Uncle Kip Lee. He trained as an architect at University College London but gave up a successful practice to lecture at the Singapore Polytechnic, then at the NUS School of Architecture from 1956 until his retirement in 1984. A well-known architectural historian and keen researcher, he published three well-illustrated monographs on Singapore's architectural history that have become landmark reference tools for architects and students. These are *The Singapore House 1819-1942* (1988, reprinted in 1995), *Emerald Hill: the Story of a Street in Words and Pictures* (1984), and *Telok Ayer Market: a Historical Account of the Market from the Founding of the Settlement of Singapore to the Present Time* (1983). Throughout his life, Lee was a vocal advocate for the conservation of old buildings, way before the preservation of heritage became fashionable. In 2008, his collection of rare Singapore memorabilia was donated to the National Library.



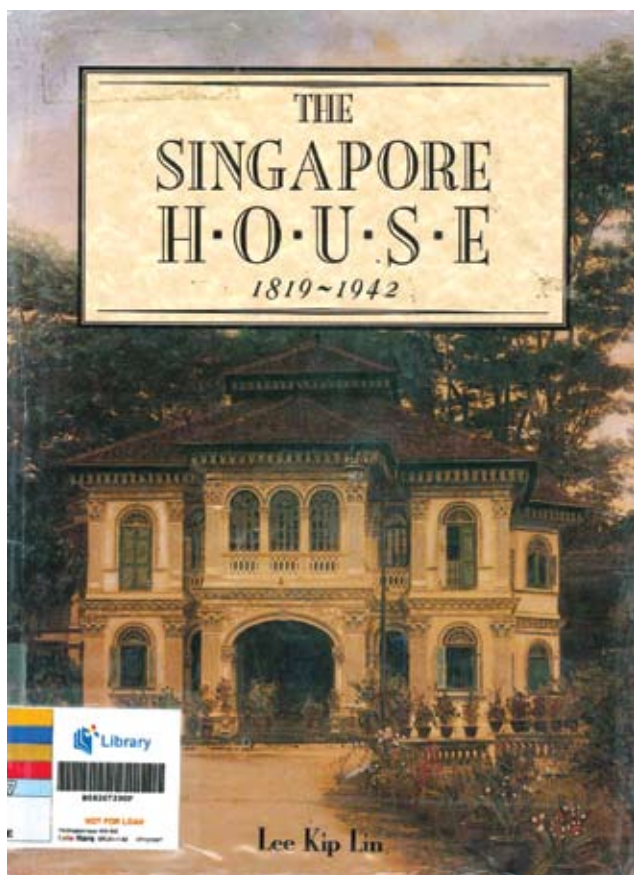
Intricately colourful tiles on the façades of quaint Peranakan houses (photographed by Lee Kip Lin).

THE LEE KIP LIN COLLECTION AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

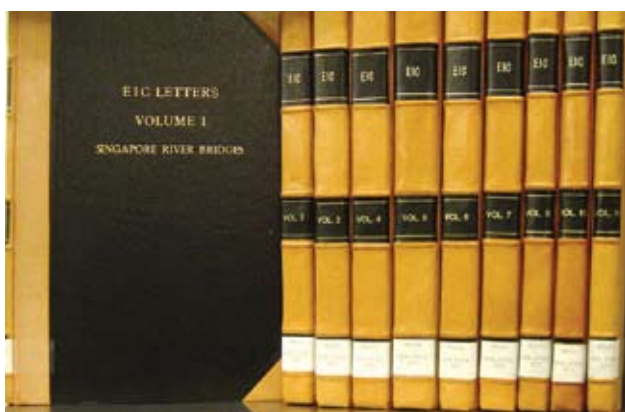
Lai Yeen Pong, consultant at the National Library, delights in Baba Kip Lin's massive collection bequeathed to Singapore.

From the 1960s to 1980s, Mr Lee was a frequent user of the Southeast Asia Collection of the National Library at Stamford Road. He spent hours poring over old books and documents to uncover hidden historical facts and figures and pieced together disparate details of many long forgotten events, people and places.

He was also interested in antiquarian books, old photographs, rare maps and old documents especially of early Singapore and the Straits Settlements, which he acquired in Singapore and overseas. An avid photographer, Mr Lee took



Above: The Singapore House - one of Baba Lee's three iconic books.

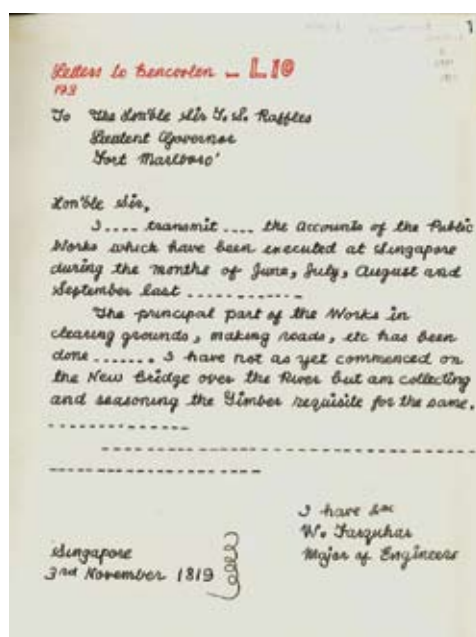


many pictures of Singapore scenes, especially houses, shops and streets before they were demolished due to urban renewal. The collection at his home in Binjai Park was an amazing sight: Meticulously organised and stored in cupboards, shelves and steel filing cabinets in an air-conditioned room, dehumidified.

On 27 October 2008, his family donated some 18,000 items comprising postcards, slides, negatives, lithographic prints, rare photographs, maps and monographs relating to Singapore from the early 1820s to 1990s. The prized collection is now housed at the National Library. It includes the following:

“Kip Lin’s fascination with Singapore history was infectious. He was meticulous in collecting not only information, but also books, photographs, ephemera – anything that would add to his knowledge of buildings and landscapes of early Singapore. His study was a veritable treasure trove. We collaborated on *The Singapore House* book in the 1980s - Kip Lin as author and myself as editor, and I was grateful that he was open to suggestions as to how to present the material. Years later, when working on *The Pictorial History of Singapore*, Kip Lin was remarkably generous in allowing me to use some of his precious photographs, and they added immeasurably to the richness of the publication. Kip Lin could be a bit unpredictable, but underneath his somewhat gruff exterior was someone who cared deeply. I learned a great deal from him and treasured his friendship.”

- Mrs Gretchen Liu, who worked with Baba Kip Lin on *The Singapore House* book.



Extreme left: A 10-volume transcript of East India Co letters, 1819-1857.

Left: A transcript of an 1819 letter from William Farquhar to Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore.

HERITAGE

Sights that have vanished (photographed by Lee Kip Lin):

Top to bottom:
Seafood restaurant at Punggol Point (1993).

Beauty World market at Chun Tin Road (1982).

St. Gregory's Place (1993).



- 1,322 monographs mainly on Singapore, the Straits Settlements and Malaya;
- 630 rare photographs;
- About 16,000 individual slides and negatives featuring Singapore from the 1960s to 1990s; and
- 291 maps including rare maps by renowned cartographers.

A few volumes are unique compilations with valuable information on early Singapore, such as:

- *EIC LETTERS*, a 10-volume set of transcripts on the East India Company's correspondence related to Singapore from 1819 to 1857, which Mr Lee painstakingly hand-copied and compiled from many local and overseas sources; and

“ He was an unusual man with a mind of his own, and an ‘old world charm’ politeness. Once, on a congested road, an angry motorist stopped his car and rudely shouted at him. He simply smiled and replied politely, ‘How are you today?’ His passion was to document the development of Singapore since colonial times. Once, he discovered two Straits Settlements’ telephone directories used as the backing of a chair seat. I never saw him happier. He generously allowed the archives to make copies of anything in his collection. He would pretend to be a shrewd businessman and would extract an exchange of sorts. But he never really did. He was always modest and shied away from publicity. He did all on his own without asking for neither fame nor wealth.”

- Retired director of the National Archives and long-time friend, Lily Tan.

- Extracts from the Diary of Captain J G F Crawford 1818 – 1819, a typescript of 32 leaves of the diary of Crawford.

Among the 291 maps are important maps of Singapore by renowned cartographers and surveyors including J T Thomson, J F A McNair, G D Coleman, J Moniot and Captain D Ross. The earliest map in the collection depicting Singapore is dated 1603, by Theodore de Bry printed on hand-made paper.

The collection of slides and negatives featuring Singapore is particularly large. Mr Lee was fascinated by beautiful things and was particularly drawn to Peranakan culture, such as the distinctive architectural facades of Peranakan shops and houses with intricately



carved panels, colourful floors and wall tiles.

He had the foresight that many places and scenes in Singapore would change beyond recognition as a result of rapid urban redevelopment. More importantly, he set on a self-imposed mission to capture as much as possible the fast vanishing scenes and trades of Singapore through his camera from the 1960s to the 1990s.



Before the invention of digital cameras, it was obviously much more costly and challenging to capture such a vast number of images.

Numerous slides and negatives cover the nooks and corners, streets and alleys, rivers and canals in the city centre as well as in the *ulu* outlying fringes of Singapore. Many images of grandly designed houses, bungalows and villas including those used in his books, *The Singapore House* and *Emerald Hill*, form an important part of the collection. Many images bring back sweet memories of yesteryear such as the old cinema theatres like Odeon, Queens, Jubilee, Palace, Majestic and Capitol. Even the railway stations and tracks that have created so much interest recently were captured through his lenses three decades ago. These images tell powerful stories.

TAY KHENG SOON REMEMBERS HIS MENTOR

Baba Kip Lin taught many prominent local architects and continues to be a profound influence in their works, particularly in the conservation aspects of Singapore's architectural heritage. He mentored students such as Tay Kheng Soon, who fondly recalls that the lessons he learnt went far beyond the classroom.

Kip Lin was my teacher at the Polytechnic where Singapore's first architecture school started. He has been my teacher ever since.

The lessons he taught were on life, the greatest of which was humility with humour. His kind of humility came from a sense of simplicity, no airs. He liked to say, 'No bull shit'. He also taught me not to exaggerate or complicate things. His great saying was, 'don't dive deep into a shallow pond', with reference to the short history of Singapore.

Kip told me years later that he agreed with trepidation to take charge of the 'horror' year where I was the 'chief horror'. I remember his first day at our class. He came prepared, offering us Du Maurier cigarettes. We were impressed by the square vermillion cigarette pack. That broke the spell and we became good friends. My classmate Wee Chwee Heng was even inspired by the design, modifying it to become the Singapore Polytechnic Architecture Society (SPAS) logo! I don't remember what Kip taught in class but he

The old cinema theatres (photographed by Lee Kip Lin):

Clockwise: Jubilee Theatre at North Bridge Road (1983).

Queen's Cinema at Geylang Road (1982).

Odeon Cinema at North Bridge Road (1983).

HERITAGE

*Photographs of G.R.
Lambert & Co.
1880s - 1913:*

*Top to bottom:
General Post Office and
the Exchange building
(1880s).*

*Junction of North
Canal Road and New
Bridge Road overlooking
Hong Lim Green
(1901). At the centre
of the green is the
clubhouse of the Straits
Chinese Recreation
Club.*

Market Street (1890s).

*Thian Hock Keng
Temple (1913).*



was encouraging, sympathetic and bantered with the students.

Kip had his way of dealing with us. In our third year, we had a very strict tutor who assigned us a gigantic project to design the Singapore Conference Centre at Shenton Way. This was way beyond our capabilities then. We were so distressed that we went on strike, walking out of his studio en-masse. We ended up in Kip's house at Amber Road. He designed the house, which was right on the water's edge. Kip calmly allowed us the use of his 10hp speed boat. The four of us took it out to sea, steering at full speed into huge waves towards Changi. Thoroughly drenched and exhilarated, we returned safe and sound having vented our frustrations totally.

Kip had a talent for names. Tony Tan was 'tango dancer', a Valentino character who parted his

“I recall many visits to his home in Binjai Park in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, when he would graciously show me his book and print collection and we would spend hours talking about antiquarian matters. I was a newcomer in the region, and learnt a lot from him about aspects of Singapore history such as topographical representations of the island and early photography - to name just a few of the many subjects he was knowledgeable in. He had a lovely sense of humour, sometimes bordering on the mischievous, and an old fashioned - dare I say it, colonial - turn of phrase which I particularly enjoyed. At any rate, conversations with him were lively and instructive, and I shall remember him with great fondness.”

- Ms Yu-Chee Chong, a London-based collector and dealer of Southeast Asian fine art, including books, photographs and prints.

HERITAGE



hair right in the centre. Dr Goh Keng Swee, his 'coozin' (cousin), was 'marble eyes'. Liu Thai Ker, the HDB Chief Architect, was 'the landlord'. Lee Kuan Yew was 'chief thunder god'. Ho Pak Toe was 'the chief'. Lim Chong Keat was 'our Penang friend'. I was, of course, 'the horror'. Kip was never one to disparage others though he had a keen eye on their character. I miss him. ❀

The Lee Kip Lin Collection has enriched the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library in relation to the Singapore Memory project, which is to collect published and unpublished works in all formats, on and about Singapore. To-date, the Library has catalogued more than 400 items, restored and preserved 116 rare books and digitized some 16,000 slides and negatives and 630 rare photographs to make them accessible to the public. Users can view the photographic images in the Lee Kip Lin Collection at <http://pictures.nl.sg>. The website offers images about the cultural, geographical, historical and sociological development of Singapore.

*Photographs of
Sachtler & Co.
1863:*

*Top to bottom:
Horse carriage in
front of the Town
Hall, which is
now known as the
Victoria Concert
Hall.*

*Panoramic view
of the seafront
probably from Fort
Canning.*

*A view of the
Singapore River.*

*New Harbour,
which was
renamed Keppel
Harbour in 1900.*

THE COLLECTION OF KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

Nyonya lady dressed in baju panjang and pekalongan batik sarong



208 East Coast Road Singapore 428907
Tel: 63458544 Fax: 63451220

EVENTS

A BREAK WITH CONVENTION

Baba Chan Eng Thai reports on the 24th Baba Convention in Penang

The Penang Peranakans had stated that the 24th Baba Convention was to be a Convention with a Difference, and it certainly was!

The convention saw the first-time participation of the Association of Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia from Jakarta, the Association of Peranakan Chinese from Kelantan and the Peranakan Association of Sydney, Australia!

Held on 26 and 27 November 2011, together with the Peranakans of Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Phuket, Melbourne, Penang and Singapore, 450 delegates convened in Georgetown, Penang. The Peranakan Association Singapore delegation was headed by Baba Peter Wee and Baba Alan Koh, our President and 1st Vice-President, respectively.

The convention started with a dinner at the Tanjung Bungah Beach where the Penang delegates enacted a *Sang Jit* ceremony, a prelude to the traditional Peranakan wedding. The ceremony showcased the uniqueness of their tradition.

It was also the first time that the new Chief Minister of Penang, Mr Lim Guan Eng, graced and

opened the convention.

The opening was reported in the *Guang Ming* Chinese newspaper of Penang and the convention was given wide coverage by the leading English daily, *The Star*. Two academic speakers spoke on the philanthropy of the Penang Peranakans who were instrumental in contributing to the development of education and the social welfare services of Penang.

At the gala dinner held at the palatial Khoo Kongsi, our Peranakan Voices sang an evergreen hit, *Nyonya Manis* and also gave a rendition of a Hokkien number that won the hearts of all the delegates. The convention ended with a street party at Upper Penang

Road, with songs, *joget* and a buffet lunch at the historic E & O Hotel.

The next convention, to be held in Malacca, will also mark the 25th Anniversary of the Baba Convention. Each of the fraternal associations will be tasked to organize a section of the convention. Details of the 25th Baba Convention dates will follow soon, and the Malaccans say it will be a Convention with a Big Bang! ❀

1. Guest-of-honour, Mr Lim Guan Eng, the Chief Minister of Penang (fourth from left) joining the presidents and representatives of the federation of Peranakan associations from Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Indonesia.

2. The entrance of the palatial Khoo Kongsi, specially lit up for the occasion.

The convention saw the first-time participation of the Association of Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia from Jakarta, the Association of Peranakan Chinese from Kelantan and the Peranakan Association of Sydney, Australia!





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3. Reenacting the Sang Jit ceremony at a wedding.
4. A gala evening at the beach.
5. Convention founding member Dato Sri Khoo Keat Siew and Datin Khoo (second and third from left) made a memorable presence at the event.
6. Baba Chan Eng Thai and nyonya Annie Lim hamming it up, much to the glee of the crowd.
7. The Peranakan Voices performing in the grandeur of the Khoo Kongsi.
8. A little nyonya in the traditional Penang Peranakan costume.
9. Elegant Penang nyongas who stole the show.



Kim Choo

The peranakan style

*Congratulations to The Peranakan Association Singapore
as they've celebrated their 111th anniversary!*

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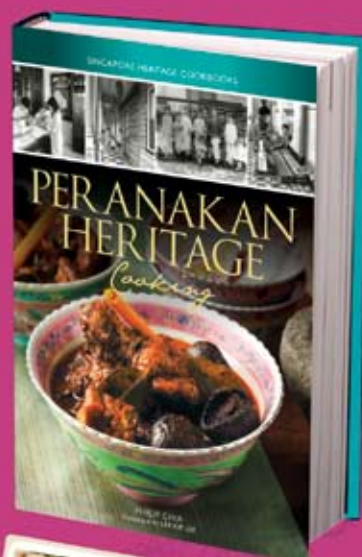


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EVENTS

A PERANAKAN HIGH NOON

High jinks in a colourful afternoon of merriment



Left: The Peranakan Voices captivate with mellifluous melodies.

Below: The noontime train – all in!

Our association's 111th anniversary celebration culminated in a somewhat more casual, but nonetheless enjoyable Lunch & Dance held at the Grand Park Hotel City Hall from noon on 4 December.

About 250 members and guests gathered in the hotel's ballroom for a generous buffet lunch coordinated by Chef Nelson Lee, with 'live' entertainment from the Locomotions and our very own choir, The Peranakan Voices. Thanks go to Nyonya Irene Ooi and her committee for putting the event together. Baba Chan Eng Thai gracefully hosted and recited a specially-composed *panton*, and lunch commenced after a simple speech from our President, Baba Peter Wee.

As always, once the music started, no one needed an invitation to start the dancing – nyonyas and babas alike took to the floor like swans to water, pairing up or line-dancing to the evergreen hits as the fancy took them.

All in, it was a most lively afternoon, and as one member observed, "Our members are young at heart, but a little older in body, so this day-

time event is perfect for those who prefer a more restful time in the evenings."

A big thanks to everyone who made this event a success! ❄



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A NEWSTALGIC SENSATION

Baba Emeric Lau applauds Main Wayang's latest collaboration with Republic Polytechnic

The Main Wayang Company has scored yet another hit with *Malam Newstalgia*, its annual musical production for 2011. The show's straightforward storyline is about three adorable, music-mad Baba lads who launch a series of musical evening events in their humble 1960s *kampung*. It was clear from the start that the focus was really on allowing the audience to savour the songs from Main Wayang's new album, *Baba Nyonya Newstalgia*. All the numbers were very ably performed by the veteran cast, including real life husband and wife Baba Frederick Soh and Nyonya Christina Soh, who played the leading roles of courting lovebirds. Other highlights include Jackie Pereira as the feisty Kueh Lopez, an avid confectioner and best friends with the lads, and Catherine Sng as Hong Soh, who played a protective Cantonese mother to perfection.

The upbeat performance ended with the audience literally on its feet and dancing alongside the cast during the final number and curtain call. It was a most entertaining 100 minutes of light-hearted fun.

Yet, putting the whole show together was a mammoth undertaking. Creative Director Kelvin Tan cites a keyword in ensuring the success: collaboration. *Malam Newstalgia* is an exemplary model of heritage and cultural promotion via active collaboration.

Here's the how-to-collaborate guide:

1. **Engage the youth!** This is Main Wayang's second successful collaboration with Republic Polytechnic. Our youth are our future: What better investment could there be than to



engage them with Peranakan culture and fire their interest and enthusiasm? No less than 50 students either danced in the choreographed numbers or gallantly supported the musical from behind the scenes.

Above: KT, Yong Ming and Frederick do the Cowboy Burok.

2. **Be a nexus for Peranakan talent!** With the Peranakan theatre circle being small and tightly-knit, precious talent has to be shared as much as possible. Main Wayang benefit from having the trio of Frederick Soh, Lee Yong Ming and KT, well-known for appearing in Gunong Sayang Association productions. It was refreshing to see Yong Ming and KT in non-gender bending roles for once.

Below: Christina, Frederick and cast perform My Sayang Next To Me.

3. **Enlist from Singapore's pool of seasoned arts practitioners!** Main Wayang secured the

services of Babes Conde, who did double-duty as vocal coach and stage musician.

4. **Ensure that a strong, reliable committee pulls it all together!** Alvin Oon, Peggy Ferroa, Kelvin Tan and Richard Tan formed the core team of experienced directors with the know-how to organise, coordinate, write and rehearse.

Not only has Main Wayang imbued Peranakan Theatre with a more contemporary production style, it is also a model for companies that wish to make it their business and passion to champion heritage and cultural capital. ✱



EVENTS

WHEN NYONYAS AND BABAS ROAMED BUKIT BROWN

Baba Victor Yue and Nyonya Rosalind Tan comb the threatened ancient hills in search of our Peranakan pioneers

On the sunny Sunday morning of 16 October, an almost festive air pervaded Singapore's Bukit Brown Cemetery. It was not Qing Ming, save the night time when some adventurous teens were planning to celebrate Halloween! It was *Remember our Ancestors Day*, an idea mooted by Raymond Goh, a passionate and expert tomb explorer.

Egged on by an email blast from *The Peranakan Association Singapore* and publicity from a *Straits Times* newspaper report the day before (15 October, 2011), about the impending exhumation of tombs in Bukit Brown, over a hundred people turned up at the cemetery square that morning.

The band of babas, nyonyas and friends came armed with umbrellas, ready to venture on a new **Peranakan Trail** specially mapped out by Raymond. Some were looking for their ancestors. Some were just curious. Others were heritage enthusiasts concerned that a part of Singapore's history could be wiped out without a trace if nothing was done. Many early Peranakans were buried in these ancient hills, among them famous pioneers who laid the foundations of modern Singapore. Many more lay unknown, undiscovered.

In the 19th century the land was owned by shipowner George Henry Brown, who arrived in 1840 and lived at Mount Pleasant (originally called

Brown's Hill). It was believed that coffee was grown on the land in the late 1800s, so it was popularly known as *Kopi Sua*.

Raymond led us to the tombs of prominent Peranakans. The first to be visited was that of **Tan Yong Thian**, who came from Chaoyang, Swatow, and built up a business empire that included plantations and processing plants for commodities such as gambier, pepper, citronella, coconut and rubber. In the 1920s, his company, Chua Seng Heng & Co became one of the largest producers of

essential oils in the world, with markets in Europe, America and Japan. His fifth son married a nyonya from Melaka. Tan's tomb was only recently restored by grand-daughter, Rosalind, who persevered and found its location after lost time of 60 years.

Another highlight of the trail was finding the tomb of

Koh Hoon Teck, the Baba who asked for a song to be sung when his remains were laid to rest. Koh was one of the founders of the Dondang Sayang Association. A *panton* expert, he died on 14 February 1956, in the midst of Chinese New Year festivities. According to Baba G T Lye, a close friend of Koh called Che' Minah did the honour of singing *dondang sayang* dressed in a black *sarong kebaya*. She sang his favourite song as the coffin was lowered into the grave. As it was the Chinese New Year, it was then quite a challenge, and still is, to have any Chinese relatives and friends attend the funeral, let alone a Peranakan!

Atop the hills of Bukit Brown that Sunday, Baba Chan Eng Thai recited a *panton* in honour of Baba Koh, in repartee with Baba GT Lye, much to the delight of the group.

At the tomb of **Chia Ah Tia**, Anne Chia shared with us a thick stack of clippings, one of which was an article that she wrote for *The Peranakan* magazine titled *My Grandma, the Nyonya*. Reading it in front of grandma's tomb was quite a surreal experience.

As we traipsed up and down the hills on that beautiful Sunday, more stories unfolded of other Peranakan luminaries such as **Chia Hood Theam**,



Centre: An old issue of *The Peranakan* was taken along by association member Ann Chia, who read passages from an article she wrote about her grandfather Chia Ah Tia.

The recently-restored tomb of Mr & Mrs Tan Yong Thian, grandparents of Rosalind Tan.





Ang Seah Im, Lee Choo Neo, Cheong Koon Seng, Tan Kheam Hock, Tay Geok Teat, Majoor Wee and Lim Teck Kim, many with roads in Singapore named after them.

The biggest surprise and *manis sekali* (truly sweet) treat of the day must be the visit to the magnificent tombs of Mr and Mrs **Ong Sam Leong** and their sons, **Ong Peng Hock** and **Ong Boon Tat**. Built in 1918, this is reputed to be the largest tomb site in Bukit Brown, easily covering three basketball courts with a 15-metre long frontage. Located on a hill and surrounded by a moat, this site was built according to *fengshui* in the belief that it would bring great wealth, fortune and prosperity to their descendants. Tomb keeper Mr Lim said that during the old days, the moat was filled to the brim with beautiful fish. Skirting the tombs are stone carvings depicting the 24 paragons of filial piety. Sikh guards and lions were sculpted in stone to protect the tombs. Sam Leong Road in Singapore is named after him. Ong built up a business empire in timber, oil, rubber, rubber treating, rubber estate supplies and was once the President of the Bun Chye Ho Club, probably the oldest Chinese club in Singapore. He was also the general contractor to the Christmas Island Phosphate Company.

Countless stories to be told

As we arrived at each *kubor*, different chapters opened with the descendants sharing tales of what they knew about their ancestors. Enthralled, we lapped up every snippet. Their generosity in sharing gave us an insight into little known details and anecdotes not found in history books. Such is the richness of the oral tradition.

As more resting places and names of our pioneers are “rediscovered” in Bukit Brown, more descendants are coming forward to get acquainted with their forefathers. Social networking sites such as facebook, newspapers, contacts and various interests groups certainly keep us informed and connected to our past. It is always a touching moment when a person gets to see the final resting place of his or her great-great-grandfather or other ancestors for the first time. This is but the beginning of a journey of rediscovery as more seek to know of their ancestors who were buried in Bukit Brown.

The future of Bukit Brown

Bukit Brown faces an uncertain future. Last May, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) gazetted Bukit Brown Cemetery as a site for redevelopment (*‘Bukit Brown to make way for housing’*, The Straits Times, Monday, 30 May, 2011).

What of the fate of the 100,000 *residents* there? Would the priceless human values they upheld and carved on their stone epitaphs erode into nothing if all were cleared? What meaning can we derive as a community if we stay indifferent to housing development taking priority over the precious heritage and rich biodiversity at Bukit Brown?

Hopefully, as a community, we can collectively shape the answers. ❀

Photographs contributed by Victor Yue and Rosalind Tan.

The group at the massive tomb of Ong Sam Leong. Among them were our Association members such as GT Lye (fourth from right), Chan Eng Thai (centre in white T-shirt) and descendants of famous Peranakan pioneers buried at Bukit Brown. Intrepid tomb explorer Raymond Goh is second from right.

For those with smart phones and barcode reader, click on the link http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD4_TKa_U2k to watch Baba Chan Eng Thye in panton action and G T Lye relating the story of Koh Hoon Teck.



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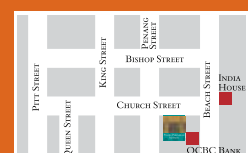
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LOCATION MAP

A WOMAN'S AFFAIR

Baba Tan See Senth witnesses thanksgiving to the Moon Goddess on Malam Guek Neo



Left: Women representatives praying to the Moon Goddess.



Right: Feminine items such as a mirror and perfume at the altar.

It was a ladies' affair at the 115-year-old Chan She Shu Yuen Ancestral Temple on 16 September, 2011 when women gave thanks at the altar of the Moon Goddess on *Malam Guek Neo*.

The Mid-Autumn Festival celebration on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month was traditionally celebrated to give thanks for good weather and a successful harvest in ancient China. Emperors used to offer sacrifices to the sun in spring and to the moon in autumn. Later, the common folk adopted the ceremony, which continues today enjoying and worshipping the bright full moon on that day, expressing their thoughts and feelings while sipping tea and savouring mooncakes. Ladies would worship the moon while the men gave thanks to the sun.

The *Malam Guek Neo* in Kuala Lumpur was co-organised by the Youth Council of Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Association Kuala Lumpur & Selangor and the Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor (PPBNKLS).

The unique rituals included the ancestral worship of the

Tan/Chan/Ting/Chin/Chen clans at Dexing Hall, and the worship of the God of Wealth and God of Wisdom. Two women representatives from the two associations lit candles and prayed to the Moon Goddess, offering incense, tea, a basin of water with scented *bunga rampai* (potpourri) and burning gold joss paper.

The merrymaking included a lantern parade, dragon and lion dances in the bright moonlit night along Jalan Petaling and Jalan Sultan, a show of kebayas on the catwalk, a performance by the Ti-Ratana Welfare Society Malaysia, songs by the PPBNKLS, and of course, *joget* time for the rest of the evening.

The event was a valued opportunity to promote cultural rapport between the mainstream Chinese community and the Peranakans. This is in the hope of preserving and keeping relevant the increasingly rare traditions and rituals for future generations. ❖

Below left: A charming children's ethnic costume parade.

Right: Young nyonias in their element - joget!



ASSOCIATION'S NEW CD

Melodious Peranakan vibes in a brand new anniversary CD. Get it now!

“No music, no life” – so goes one famous adage. True to form, just as we love living it up, Peranakans are known to *joget* spontaneously whenever a catchy melody plays. And now, you can take the party wherever you go...

The idea of cutting a music CD was first mooted by The Peranakan Voices, who were often asked, post-performance, if recordings of their songs were available for purchase. Gradually, the selection grew to include the efforts of some prominent talents. Babas Dick and John Lee, William Gwee, musical powerhouse Babes Conde and renowned group Vocaluptuous have all contributed to this worthwhile project. The notion

of ‘Peranakan music’ may be rather nebulous. However, we are confident that Peranakans will find the chosen songs familiar, comforting, heartwarming and evocative.

The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) is proud to release our new CD in celebration of our 111th anniversary, hence the title, *Peranakan 111*. Sing along to evergreen favourites and groove to harmonious tunes infused with an unmistakable Peranakan vibe! ❀

To purchase or reserve your copies, please contact Mrs Lim Geok Huay at 62550704 or email geok@peranakan.org.sg.



WELCOME

A big welcome to our new members:

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Capt Christopher Joseph
Bek Woon Chye | 12. Dr Lim Guek Nee | 23. Mdm Maggie Yeo Giok Kiau |
| 2. Ms Chong Lee Chen | 13. Mdm Lim Guek Poh | 24. Mrs Grace Yeo-Wong
Yuet Leng |
| 3. Mr Charles Chong You Fook | 14. Mr Ignatius Lok | |
| 4. Dr Gan Su-lin | 15. Mr Kelvin Low Eng Teck | |
| 5. Mrs Mary Goh-Yoong Soo Ngoh | 16. Dr Ong Jin Teong | |
| 6. Miss Khong Swee Lin | 17. Mr Edmund Tan | |
| 7. Mrs Constance Kirker | 18. Mr Galen Tan Kok Kheng | |
| 8. Mdm Rita Koh Geok Hwee | 19. Mr Joseph Then | |
| 9. Ms Peggy Lee Kim Choon | 20. Mr Wimala Timonthy Jude
Fu-Tien | |
| 10. Mr Larry Lee Wah Hong | 21. Ms Rosie Lee | |
| 11. Mdm Lim Guek Eng | 22. Mdm Stephanie Yeo Bee Kin | |

OBITUARY

Our deepest sympathies to the families of our esteemed members who have passed on:

1. Mrs Lucy Bau
2. Mr Tan Eng Joo
3. Mr Tan Hock Choon

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THE PERANAKAN GUIDE • SINGAPORE

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National Museum of Singapore.

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Baba House. This heritage house goes back in time to 1928. Experience what a grand Peranakan terraced house would have been like. Formerly owned by the Wee family (whose ancestor Wee Bin was a mid-19th century shipping magnate) since 1910. 157

Neil Road, Singapore.
Tel: 62275731. Visits are by guided tours. Please call the house for details. <http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba/index.html>

Capturing the Straits: Painting and Postcard Views from the 19th

and Early 20th Centuries. The exhibition brings together the work of Charles Dyce,



who lived in Singapore in the 1840s and made fine sketches of the island, and postcard views of Malacca from the early 20th century. From 9 February - 31 July 2012. Please call to arrange visits.

Asian Civilisations Museum. The first museum in the region to display a wide range of artefacts from across Asia, the ACM not surprisingly has some important Peranakan treasures. The Mary and Philbert Chin Gallery has some lavish examples of gold jewellery, sireh boxes and other paraphernalia, some encrusted with diamonds, and fine batik textiles from the north coast of Java, all made for the Peranakan market. 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555, Tel: 6332 2982, Opening Hours: 9am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 1pm to 7pm (Mondays), Admission \$8 (adults), \$4 (senior citizens and students). <http://www.acm.org.sg>

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

The old Sun Yat Sen Villa reopened in October 2011 after extensive renovations with a new name. Fitting tribute is given to the former owners of the house, especially Teo Eng Hock, a son of Teo Lee, one of the pioneer Teochew merchants in Singapore, together with his nephew Lim Nee Soon, were among the loyal supporters of Sun Yat Sen's bid to overthrow the Qing government. The exhibition shows how Singapore, and the Chinese community here played an important part in this pivotal moment of world history. Intimate photos of family life, and of Teo Eng Hock's nyonya mother, Mrs Teo Lee née Tan Poh Neo (granddaughter of the kapitan of Muntok), add charm and a Peranakan



angle to the experience. 12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874, Tel: 6256 7377, Opening Hours: 10am-5pm daily. Website: wanqingyuan.org.sg.

LANDMARKS

Blair Plain. A typical Peranakan residential area around Spottiswoode Park, Blair Road and Neil Road which 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 residential architecture, just off Orchard Road.

Katong and Joo Chiat. Once the nerve centre of Peranakan life in Singapore. In its heyday it was the site of nearby grand seaside villas and elaborate Peranakan terraced houses. The latter can still be seen in a walk along 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 in the neighbourhood. http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html. Also <http://www.myjoochiat.com>.

Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street.

One of the first Peranakan enclaves, now occupied by restaurants and offices. 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: 6423 4616.

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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