



the peranakan

ISSUE 4 • 2013

Sambalicious!!
Cooking up a storm



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DISHES**

Family favourites

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KITCHEN AIDS**

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ALTAR Art

**Make your
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Timeless Treasure



"You harvest what you plant, whether good or bad". *Proverbs 14:14*

"The Harvest is the end of age, and the harvest workers are Angels." *Matthew 13:39*

"The Harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." *Luke 10:2*

"Pray to God, who owns the harvest, that He will send more workers to gather His harvest." *Matthew 9:38*

"Even now the harvest workers are receiving their reward by gathering a harvest that brings eternal life. Then everyone who planted the seed and everyone who harvests the crop will celebrate together." *John 4:36*



Be enthralled with the timeless craftsmanship of beauty in gold, intan and old european cut diamond jewelleries, ceramics and beautifully embroidered antique kebayas which are the Footprints of the Peranakans here at Timeless Treasure! Come & take a piece of memory with you from our range of ageless collectibles.

SAMBALICIOUSLY TRADITIONAL!

Sambal belachan, our humble chilli-and-fermented shrimp concoction laced with *daon lemo perot* (leprous lime leaf) and lime juice, brings a zing to any dish or simply plain rice. To the Peranakans, a meal without *sambal belachan* is like a day without sunshine. It is tradition personified, linking the past to the present of Peranakan cuisine, a happy reminder that some things do not change through time.

Yet modern living has taken a heavy toll on traditional Peranakan cooking. As families shrink, the phenomenon of smaller kitchens, apartment living and working mothers has almost wiped out the tradition of communal home cooking. How many times have your aunties and cousins merrily come together to cook for the extended family during festive occasions over the past 10 years?

It is well known that Peranakan food takes a notoriously long time to prepare. Just think of the work that goes into preparing ingredients for elaborate dishes such as *ayam buah keluak*, *heepioh* soup, *bakwan kepitng* and *popiah* with its time-consuming original egg-crepe skin to make, one at a time. Why bother to cook them yourself? Just make a reservation at a good Peranakan restaurant where you can enjoy these dishes without the hassle of preparation, cooking and washing up. Instant gratification! Longing for *kueh lapis*? Order from your favorite Indonesian cake shop in Alexandra Village or from the many bakers that you can trawl online nowadays. The preparation of *sambal belachan* too has been modernised - grinding with a blender takes just a minute or two compared with the toil of using the heavy mortar-and-pestle to *tumbok* (pound) in the old-fashioned way. And we are not even talking about home-made *belachan* paste that is painstakingly pounded from sun-baked fresh *gerago* caught fresh from the seas off Punggol!

No wonder traditional Peranakan cooking skills, while not going the way of the dodo yet, are increasingly being lost as nyonyas and babas find little time to spend in the kitchen. There is no lack of Peranakan cookbooks in the market. But they can in no way compare with the experience of apprenticeship under the watchful eyes of the older generation. So, if you can, take the opportunity to learn from your mother or grandmother or grandaunt while they are still around and alert.

This issue attempts to recover some of the traditional foods that are rarely found nowadays in Peranakan homes in Singapore. Fortunately, there are still many traditional recipes that we are not aware of which are known up north in Malaysian kitchens. In this context, we hope our Malaysian neighbours will write in with their take on these dishes and

their recipes to share with our community. Many rare recipes await to be uncovered, and we hope to do more in later issues as and when readers generously share them with us. Help us document them! We also have many other highlights on food that you will surely enjoy.

Selamat makan! ❄

Linda Chee
Chief Editor

The Babas and Nyonyas

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Buah Paya Masak Titek Ikan Asin is an unusual combination of sweet and savoury.

FOODS FONDLY REMEMBERED

Nyonya Linda Chee invites two seasoned Peranakan chefs, Baba Ben Teo and Nyonya Rosaline Soon, to contribute recipes for dishes that are seldom seen these days

Since he was a child, Ben has been keen on cooking which he learnt from his nanny. He recalls scraping small snails (*siput*) with translucent shells off the seawalls close to his childhood home at Lucky Heights, before the area was cleared as part of land reclamation. These snails were simply dunked into *chinchalok*, and then consumed. His father used to consume this as a side dish at every single meal. He misses the unique salty taste and wonders if anyone else remembers these snails.

While Ben can churn out elaborate Peranakan dishes his favourite food is absolutely simple: Arnott's Fried Chicken!

BUAH PAYA MASAK TITEK IKAN ASIN (GREEN PAPAYA WITH SALTED FISH)

Ingredients

1 green papaya, approximately 1 kg
100g salted fish (*ikan asin*) bones
250g fresh prawns
100g dried prawns
8pcs dried *asam gelugor*
Seasoning to taste: sugar, white pepper powder, chicken stock powder
Chinese coriander (*wan sui*) for garnishing

Rempah (ground spice paste)

150g shallots
25g *belachan*
20g *buah keras* (candlenut)
25g ginger

Method

Remove seeds from papaya and slice the fruit into thin segments. Boil fresh prawns quickly until cooked. Remove prawns, but keep the prawn stock. Shell and add prawn shells into stock and continue to boil.

Blend the soaked dried prawns together with all the spices. Deep fry the salted fish bones until aromatic. Put all the blended spices, *asam gelugor* and fish bones into the prawn stock. Simmer and reduce stock.

Add in papaya segments and cook until soft. Season to taste. Lastly add prawns. Garnish with Chinese coriander before serving.

SEK BAK (BRAISED PORK SLICES)

Ingredients

1kg belly pork
2 tbsp oil
2 tbsp minced garlic
1 tbsp five spice powder

2 cinnamon sticks
3 tbsp red-dark soya sauce (Tangshan brand)
Seasoning to taste: sugar, sesame oil, chicken stock powder, pepper
2 sticks spring onion
2 sprigs Chinese coriander (*wan sui*)
1 cucumber, sliced thinly for garnishing

Optional:

2 *tau kwa* (firm soyabean cakes)
2 *tau pok* (fried soyabean cakes)
3 hard-boiled eggs
2 potatoes

Method

Boil belly pork in water for 10 minutes. Discard the water. Cut the pork to a few smaller pieces. Heat 2 tbsp of oil

and fry minced garlic until golden brown and set aside.

Arrange belly pork in a deep tray and pour fried garlic together with oil onto the pork, sprinkle five-spice powder, cinnamon sticks, dark soya sauce, seasoning, spring onion and coriander leaves. Arrange the optional ingredients around the pork.

Wrap the tray with aluminium foil and steam for 1.5 hours until the meat is tender.

Remove from tray, cut all items into even-sized slices and arrange nicely on a serving dish. You may set the pork on a bed of fresh cucumber slices as a counterfoil to the richness of the meat. Pour on the gravy. Best served with garlic chilly sauce.

Photography and food styling by Anton Kilayko.



BABA BEN TEO, 55, has been cooking professionally for over 30 years and has a vast storehouse of recipes from memory that include unusual and almost extinct dishes.

Photography by Colin Chee.



Sekbak is simply delicious melt-in-your-mouth pork.



Braised Asam Ikan Terubok.
The fish, while flavorful, has lots of fine bones and is not recommended for children.

Photography and food styling by Anton Kilayko.

Photograph courtesy of Rosaline Soon.



NYONYA ROSALINE SOON, who is in her early 70s had a late start in cooking in 1990. That was when she opened her restaurant-cum-pub called Ming's Pub along Upper Thomson Road in 1990 and which she gave up a few years later. Although her own mother was Peranakan, Rosaline never picked up any cooking from her but acquired recipes mostly from her mother-in-law, a Penang Peranakan, and her own sisters.

Rosaline started serious cooking only in 2006 “when I wanted to write my first book. All through my working life I had been dependent on maids. And although I didn’t cook, I always could give them instructions for the family meal and tell them what was good or not good about a dish and how to improve or correct it.” That started her on cooking classes to teach domestic helpers and other beginner cooks.

Here she shares recipes for *terubok* and *tapeh*. The *terubok* recipe comes from another great cook, her brother. “The fish is not easy to get, although always available at Tekka market. It has a lot of bones, so is not suitable for children.” The *tapeh*, she says, is not difficult to make if some important tips are strictly followed: The container cannot be metal, must be enamel, Corningware or porcelain. And it must be very dry. Choose a sunny day when the air is not damp. Importantly, the glutinous rice must be completely cooled.

“The container must be well covered (wrapped) and kept in a dark spot. I remember my mother used to leave the container under the bed. When it’s ready after three days, there will naturally be some rice wine after the fermentation process, and this is where the sweetness is.” She tried to make *tapeh* in Perth. That

did not work. “I think the weather was too cold as it was winter!”

Rosaline has written two cookbooks, *Grandmothers’ Recipes, Tales from Two Peranakan Kitchens* and *More Grandmothers’ Recipes, Everyday Dishes for Today’s Family*. She is working on a third book.

BRAISED ASAM IKAN TERUBOK (LONGLTAIL SHAD FISH) WITH TAMARIND

Ingredients

1 *terubok* fish about 600gm, cleaned but leave scales on
3 tbsps blended dried chillies
2 stalks *serai* (lemon grass, slightly crushed)
8 pieces dried chillies (soaked)
3 pcs dried *asam gelugor*
3½ tbsps *asam* pulp mixed with 300ml water
2 tbsps cooking oil
2tsp thick soya sauce
2½ tsp sugar

Method

Fry blended dried chillies till fragrant. Add water, bring to boil. Add fish, lemon grass, *asam gelugor* and *asam* water.

Let it boil, add the thick soya sauce, then simmer for 1 hour. Add sugar and simmer for another hour.

TAPEH (FERMENTED RICE)**Ingredients**

2 cups glutinous rice (New Moon
Premium brand preferred)
5 tbsp finely crushed *ragi* (yeast)

Method

Soak glutinous rice for 4 hours.
Drain and cook the rice (either steam
or in rice cooker) then leave it to cool.

Crush *ragi* into a fine powder. Put
a layer of cooked rice into a porcelain
or Pyrex dish (do not use a metal dish).
Sprinkle *ragi* powder liberally. Repeat
layer by layer until all the rice and the
ragi are used up.

Wrap the dish with two tea towels.
Use another big bath towel to wrap
again. Place the container in a cool,
dark place for 3 days. Unwrap on
the third day. Keep refrigerated and
consume while fresh, over the next
few days. The *tapeh* is refreshing when
served with crushed ice. ✱

Photograph courtesy of Rosaline Soon.

*Tapeh is notorious
for not turning out
successfully but the
resultant sweet fermented
rice wine is worth a try!*

FROM AUNTIE'S KITCHEN

Mother's cooking is always the best, as the saying goes. Besides mother, there's an aunty or two who are great cooks as well. Nyonya Linda Chee persuades two aunts – Rosie and Lucy – to share some favourite recipes with our readers

Nyonya Rosie Seet, 82, is my *Ng Kim* (maternal aunt). Every Lunar New Year, it is open house at Auntie Rosie's who cooks up a storm for family and friends streaming in throughout the day. A teatime favourite is her *popiah goreng* which she serves freshly fried and crispy with a tangy chilli sauce to tease our taste buds. *Ng Kim* takes pleasure in cooking kilos of chilli sauce and keeps



Rosie Seet.

Photography by Colin Chee.

bottles in stock to generously distribute to the lucky visitor to her home or when she visits me. That's a gift I can never refuse!

Here *Ng Kim* also shares her piquant radish pickle that goes down well with any rich Peranakan dish. Fortunately for the family, two of her daughters, Molly and Dolly, have made it a point to master and document many of *Ng Kim*'s traditional recipes.



ROSIE'S 'CHICKEN PIE'

Ingredients

2 chicken breasts (deboned, skinned and cut into bite size cubes)
8 potatoes (cubed)
4 carrots (cubed)
2 big onions (cubed)
1 can button mushroom (cubed)
Half bowl green peas
1 bowl chicken stock (or use chicken cube seasoning)
2 packets *popiah* skin
20 shallots and 15 cloves of garlic (grind finely into a paste)

Seasoning

Salt, pepper to taste
2 tsp Coleman's mustard powder
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp cornflour (dissolve in water)

Method

Parboil the carrots in slightly salted water till al dente. Drain, put aside. Do the same for potatoes.

In a large work, fry the shallot-garlic paste in sufficient cooking oil till fragrant and golden brown. Add the cubed chicken and fry evenly for 5 minutes. Add salt and pepper.

Add cubed onions, mushrooms, carrots, potatoes, green peas, mustard powder and sugar. Mix well. Add chicken stock. Simmer under low fire till the "chicken pie" mixture is tender. Thicken mixture with cornflour. Stir well. Cook for another 5 minutes.

Cool the mixture and wrap in *popiah* skin. Deep fry in batches.

ROSIE'S POPIAH GORENG BANGKWANG (YAM BEAN SPRING ROLLS)

Ingredients

1 kg *bangkwang* (yam bean)
2 pieces square firm *taukwa* (soyabean cakes)
200gm belly pork (or chicken breast)
20 shallots and 15 cloves of garlic - grind to a fine paste
2 tablespoons ground fine *taucheo* (salted soyabeans)
Sugar and dark soya sauce to taste
2 packets *popiah* skin
No salt added as *taucheo* is already salty.

Method

Slice and julienne the *bangkwang* (not too thin). Blanch in slightly salted boiling water. Drain. Put aside.

Slice and julienne the *taukwa* (not too thin). Fry in sufficient cooking oil. Drain, put aside.

Parboil the belly pork in slightly salted boiling water. When cooked, remove to cool. Julienne it (not too thin). Retain the pork stock.

Fry the shallot-garlic paste in

sufficient cooking oil till fragrant and golden brown. Add the *taucheo*. Stir fry over a low fire (careful not to burn). Add belly pork (or chicken) and sieved stock, sugar to taste and a dash of dark soya sauce for a nice colour. Bring to boil again.

Add the blanched *bangkwang*. Simmer 15-20 minutes till tender. Add *taukwa*. Simmer another 5 minutes.

Cool the mixture. Wrap in the *popiah* skin. Deep fry in batches.

The *popiah* is best eaten when freshly fried and crisp, served with Rosie Seet's home-made garlic chilli sauce and fresh cucumber sticks. It also goes well with sweet *ti cheoh* sauce especially for the children.

ROSIE'S GARLIC CHILLI SAUCE

Ingredients

1kg fresh red chillies - can add some bird seed chilli (*chilli padi*) to enhance the spiciness
½ kg garlic
900ml rice vinegar (preferably the 3 Goats brand) sieved to remove sediment
500g to 550g coarse sugar depending on desired sweetness
4 tsp salt

Method

Grind chillies and garlic into a fine paste.

Put the spicy paste into a glass or enamel pot. Add the sieved vinegar, salt and sugar. Stir well, bring to boil until the sugar is melted. Simmer and stir over a low fire for about half an hour.

Remove from the fire and allow to cool completely.

Transfer into glass jars and refrigerate. It can last 2-3 months in the refrigerator. The freshly cooked chilli sauce can be kept for only a day at room temperature.

ROSIE'S RADISH PICKLE

Ingredients

1kg white baby radish or *lobak* (diameter about an inch or less)
1 carrot
1 to 2 pieces red chillies



A feast of 'Chicken pie' samosa-style and *popiah* *bangkwang*, accompanied by Rosie's lip-smacking garlic chili and piquant radish pickle.

Photography and food styling by Anton Kilayko.



Lucy's curry powder.

450ml rice vinegar (preferably the 3 goats brand)
250g white sugar
2tsp salt

Method

Put sugar, 1 tsp salt and sieved vinegar into a glass or enamel cooking pot and bring to boil. Remove and allow to cool completely.

Peel the radish and carrot and slice across into 1mm thin rounds. Rub in thoroughly 1 tsp of salt then give a slight squeeze to remove any excess liquid.

Remove seeds from chillies and julienne. Mix the chillies with the radish.

Pour the cooled vinegar into the radish mixture. Cover and allow to marinate for about an hour. Pour into glass bottles and refrigerate immediately. Best kept for a few days to soak in the flavours before eating.



Lucy Tan.

Nyonya Lucy Tan, 78, is the mother of Baba Alvin Tan, creative director of The Necessary Stage. Baba Alvin loves his mother's curry powder so much that during his university days in England, he used it to cook not only with chicken but experimented with pork and other meats as well! Her *otak otak* is also a firm favourite that is simple to cook and very tasty.

LUCY'S CURRY POWDER

Ingredients

1 kati ketumbar (coriander seeds)
1/2 kati jintan manis (anise seeds)
1/2 kati jintan putih (cumin)
1/2 kati dried chillies
1/4 kati dried turmeric
1 dessert spoon white pepper corns

Use only fresh ingredients and make sure the ingredients are completely dry before grinding finely. Packed and sealed properly, the curry powder can last for a year at least.

Photography by Colin Chee.



LUCY'S FISH OTAK-OTAK

Rempah (finely ground spice paste)
Grind or pound:
4 dried chillies
4 fresh red chillies
4 buah keras (candlenut)
1 thumb kunyit (turmeric)
3 serai (lemon grass)
4 slices lengkuas (blue ginger)
1 thumb belachan

Other ingredients

1/2kg fish fillet – either tenggiri (mackerel), tappan or angkoli (red snapper). Cut into thin slices.

1/2 coconut, with the first thick milk squeezed without water and the second thin milk mixed with a cup of water before squeezing. For a healthier option, use Anlene milk.

1 tbsp oil
One teaspoonful daun kesom (laksa leaves), very finely sliced
Banana leaf for wrapping, optional

Heat oil in a wok till hot. Fry the rempah and stir until fragrant. Then add the thin coconut milk or Anlene milk. Bring to boil then add the fish slices. Simmer for 10 minutes. When done, add the thick milk and the daun kesom. Bring to boil then switch off the fire. Add more daun kesom as desired. It is ready to be served hot with white rice. The mixture can also be wrapped in banana leaf and steamed for 10 minutes. ❀

HOME-MADE BELACHAN, THE BEST!

Baba Louis Chan takes the good old fashioned route to making *belachan* (fermented shrimp paste)



Photography and food styling by Anton Kilayko.

Belachan is not exclusive to nyonya cuisine. Even as it is indispensable in almost all of our spicy *rempahs*, *belachan* is also an important ingredient in other regional cuisines across South-east Asia, taking on names such as *terasi* (Indonesian), *kapi* (Thai), *bagoong* (Filipino) and *har cheong* (in Cantonese).

Making *belachan* can be a messy and pungent nostrils-covered nauseating affair, on top of attracting flies and other insects during the fermentation process. These may be enough to put many off from making it themselves. In the olden days, fastidious nyonys were known to prepare their own *belachan*, but I suspected that they probably instructed their *chong pohs* (Hainanese cooks) or paid labour to pound the *gerago* (tiny shrimp known as acetes shrimp) in those huge *batu lesongs*

(mortar and pestle). The pestle itself, necessary for reducing the shrimp to a pulp, weighs at least five kilos, and it is unlikely that the petite nyonys of old had the muscle to handle the heavy pounding.

I learnt to make *belachan* from my late aunt, Madam Anna Lim, who used to make it at home from time to time in the 1950s and 60s but ceased production when she moved to an HDB flat in the 1970s.

There is no secret to home-made *belachan*. It requires just two ingredients – salt and *gerago*. However, it is a costlier affair now. Where *gerago* once used to be just \$4-\$5 a kilo at the old Siglap Road market in the 1980s, the cost has now quadrupled, commanding a princely price of \$20 a kg at the Bedok and Bukit Batok markets. One kilo of *gerago* yields only about 250 grammes of *belachan*.

The quality of *belachan* has also deteriorated over the years. The scarcity of *gerago* has pushed commercial vendors to adulterate their *belachan* with cheaper ingredients, I suspect *rice flour*, to bulk up the weight.

It is worth your while to note that good quality *belachan* is usually dark in colour and faintly oily to the touch, as opposed to the lighter, adulterated versions. My personal preference for commercially produced *belachan* is the *kapi* from Bangkok, all from the *kampongs* (villages), which is a dark purple, pungent and unadulterated. There are also some people who swear by the very dark Penang versions.

The *gerago* that you see here was caught off Punggol, according to the fishmonger. I went to the market five times before I managed to get this fresh lot.

A QUICK STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO MAKING *BELACHAN*

Ingredients: 1kg fresh *gerago* and 60g salt (makes ten 25g discs)



STEP 1: Clean the *gerago* by scooping small portions onto a white plate to clearly spot and remove all foreign particles. Line a metal or bamboo tray with baking paper. Spread the cleaned *gerago* on the tray and cover with netting material to keep away insects.



STEP 2: Sun the *gerago* for at least 4 hours, turning by the spoonful with a spatula from time to time to ensure even drying. This initial sunning is important to ensure that the *gerago* is dry enough to be pounded.



STEP 3: Mix well the partially dry *gerago* with salt. Pound the mixture in a *batu lesong* (mortar and pestle) till fairly fine. Alternatively, blend in a food processor. Some of my friends prefer it to be a bit coarse for that extra bite of shrimp.



STEP 4: Spread the pounded mixture on a tray and cover with netting. Sun for a day. It must be done under strong sunlight to accelerate the drying process.

When sufficiently dry, mould into balls or patties (see facing page), depending on your preference. Continue drying for 2 to 3 days more until it is slightly moist. If you want to shorten the process, you may dry-roast it in the oven overnight at 80 degrees Celsius, but the whole house will smell of *belachan*! The smell is also not the same as sun-dried *belachan*.

Store the fresh *belachan* in a clean container. It keeps well indefinitely in the refrigerator. ❄



Photography by Colin Chee.

A HEAVENLY OFFERING

Baba Lee Yuen Thien from Malacca demonstrates the dying art form of creating *chanap* motifs for the altar

The *chanap* offering is part of the elaborate prayers in major celebrations during the year in a typical Peranakan household that practices ancestral worship. While the Peranakans of Malacca and Singapore refer to it as the *chanap*, Peranakans from Penang, Phuket and even Indonesia call it the *bit chien* or *cenap* in their tradition of worship. It symbolises beauty, harmony and all good things to the family.

The Peranakans of old Malacca probably derived the term *chanap* from the original Hokkien word *chien harp*; *chien* means candy preserve and *harp* literally refers to a box. As the candy box for the gods or ancestors, the *chanap* is an elaborate six-sided wooden offering box richly lacquered in black and gold. Mounted on top is a display of pickled papaya woven and carved into various shapes such as crabs, flowers and birds, and pierced on skewers.

In the old days, the offerings comprised sweet preserved fruit from China such as dried red dates, candied winter melon, dried white fungus, dried longans and dried persimmons. The Peranakans went beyond and created an art form in fashioning beautifully carved motifs out of papaya that was grown in their own gardens or easily available from the wet markets.

The *chanap* is normally used for prayers to usher in the Lunar New Year, the birthday of *Ti Kong* (the Jade Emperor) on the eighth day of the New Year (*Pai Ti Kong*) and at weddings. It may appear even at funerals, with the red flowers on the tip of each skewer omitted as a sign of mourning.

The preparation of the *chanap* is a dying art. In Malacca, only a handful of Peranakans have the skill.

Realising this, I took the initiative to learn from my grandaunt (*chim poh*) Koh Kim Lian who was taught by her mother

and aunts. In recent years, I have expanded my scope to weaving and cutting the *bunga chanap* (*chanap* 'flowers') in the form of birds (*burong*) such as the phoenix, which I learnt from Nyonya Dolly Lee and Nyonya Lim of Rembia in Malacca, who were generous enough to share their skills with me.



All photography by Lee Yuen Thien.





Yuen Thien at work on this dying art.

ESSENTIALS FOR CARVING THE CHANAP MOTIFS

Half-ripe papaya
Salt
Lime solution (*ayer kapor*)
Sugar
Fruit peeler
Fruit knife
Chopping board
Penknife
Carving tool (mine was customised
but you can try carving with a pen
knife)

SYRUP FOR PRESERVING THE PAPAYA

Boil one part of sugar in two parts of water and bottle the syrup.

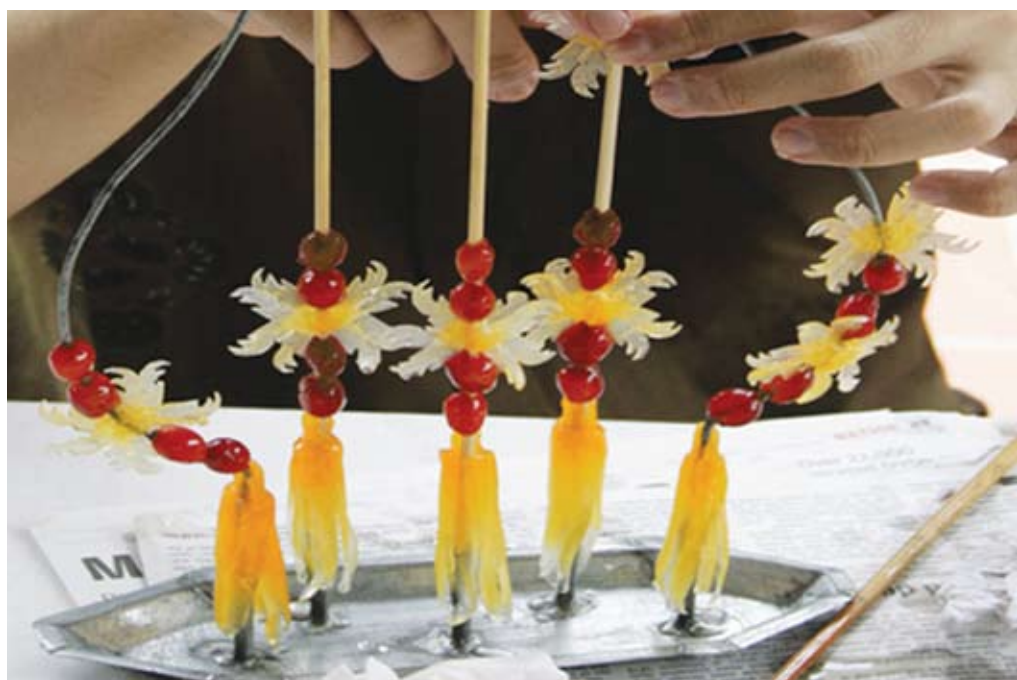
CREATING THE BUNGA CHANAP

Slice the papaya vertically into half and peel off the skin. Peel the flesh into long, thin strips and cut them into sleeves of the same size, about 4.5 inches long (11cm) and 0.8 inches (2cm) in width. Each *bunga chanap* requires three strips. Use a penknife to slit three lines, each 1.5 inches (3.5cm) long, in the middle of each papaya sleeve.

Soak the sleeves in salt water (1 tablespoon of salt to 1 bowl of water) for about 5-10 minutes to soften the texture of the papaya. The papaya sleeves are now ready for weaving.

After weaving the motifs, soak them in limestone water (one teaspoon to 1 bowl of water) to harden. This would normally take about 10 minutes.

Cut each end of the hardened papaya sleeves into claw-like petals,



using a penknife or a custom made cutter. Immerse the flowers in syrup and refrigerate.

BUNGA CHEMAKA

Traditionally, the base of the chanap would be lined with *Chempaka* flowers. To carve the papaya into these flowers, cut the fruit into a finger-length rectangle. Shave the piece into the cylindrical shape of a chilli. Slit from the tip to form the long petals. Slit two rounds to achieve two layers of petals. Soak in the limestone solution for about 10 minutes then preserve the flowers in the syrup.

LEMO KEKYA

The alternating bright red fruits on the *chanap* are the *lemo kekya* or *Triphasia trifolia*, from a wild tropical citrus plant that grows freely in Malacca in gardens or open spaces. The fruit is edible and said to be a good remedy for sore throats and cough if one can withstand its rather bitter (*kelat*) taste. Slit the fruit with the tip of a knife to remove the seeds. Again, soak the fruit in limestone water and strain off the water after about 10 minutes. When dry, preserve the *lemo* in the syrup. ❄



The chanap on a household altar.



1. Essential tools for creating the bunga chanap include sharp knives and cutters.



2. Cut the half-ripe papaya into half.



3. Peel thin long strips evenly.



4. Cut the strip into sleeves of the same size.



5. Make three slits in the middle of each sleeve.



6. Soak the sleeves in salt water for about 10 minutes to soften them.



7. Weave the sleeves and interlock them in various ways depending on the desired motif.



8. Immerse in lime solution for about 10 minutes until the woven sleeves harden. Strain off the liquid.



9. Shape the flower petals with a carving tool.



10. Dry the completed bunga chanap on a kitchen towel. Featured here are motifs of three-legged crabs (kepiting).



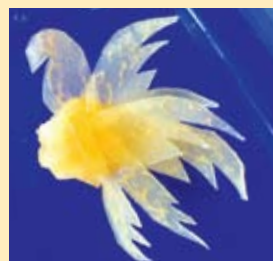
11. Immerse the chanap motif in syrup to preserve before refrigerating.



12. Carving the chempaka flower from a rectangular piece of papaya.



A very intricate eight-legged crab (kepiting).



A bird in flight.



The lemo kekya fruit.



The lemo kekya preserved in syrup.



The chanap as an offering at the ancestral altar.



An elaborate offering during the semayang Ti Kong (prayers to the Emperor of Heaven).



*A selection of ladles
likely to have originated
from Palembang,
Indonesia.
Photography by Colin Chee.*

IMPLEMENTS FROM GRANDMA'S KITCHEN

A special feature on culinary collectibles owned
by three Babas

Baba Louis Chan showcases his treasure trove

I started collecting kitchen implements about 20 years ago. Because of my interest in the preparation of traditional Peranakan food, it was a natural progression to collect old kitchen implements for this purpose. I started collecting these items from relatives and friends who shared with me their expertise and who had given up preparing these traditional goodies. I used some of them, such as the *kueh koya* (mung bean biscuit) moulds during Chinese New Year. I am still on the lookout but these treasures are hard to come by now. My favourite implements are the round and oval *kueh koya* moulds that an aunt said were similar to those used by the Sian Teck Tng, a nunnery at Cuppage Road which serves vegetarian food.

Kueh Koya Moulds

These are very old Chinese *kueh koya* moulds that belonged to my grandmother. They were used every year during the Chinese New Year period when she made the cookies that were sunned to a melt-in-your-mouth texture, unlike the rock-like versions sold today. The moulds contain very intricate Taoist symbols, birds and insects. They are made of very good quality hard wood. I suppose this is necessary to withstand the constant knocking of the moulds to dislodge the cookies during preparation!



Wooden *kueh koya* moulds made of hard wood to withstand the constant knocking to dislodge the cookies.



Agar Agar (Jelly) Moulds

These are wooden *agar agar* moulds that I received as gifts from two friends. I have never used them.

The moulds consist of two symmetrical rows of patterns of birds, animals and fruits. They are tied together and liquid *agar agar* made from seaweed would be poured into them. When cooled, you will get dainty three-dimensional *agar agar* desserts.

Sendok (Kitchen Ladles)

These are kitchen ladles made of coconut shell and wood. I believe that they originate from Palembang because of the characteristic red lacquer. I collected them over a period of 20 years. The smallest ladle was part of my mother's "*masak masak*" (toy kitchen) collection in the 1930s.

Batu Lesong and Batu Giling (Mortar & Pestle and Grinder)

I have two small round *batu lesong* that were used for by toothless bibiks who still wanted to chew betel leaves despite having no teeth. Another two items are miniature versions of a *batu*



giling (stone grinder) and a flour pounder. I don't think that they are at all functional and were probably made for the young *nyonya* girl who wanted to play "*masak masak*"! These items were all bought from flea markets and antique shops in the 1990s. ❖

(Top) Agar agar moulds for making three-dimensional jelly desserts.

(Bottom) Two small *batu lesong* and miniature *batu giling* and flour pounder.

These are some of Norman's grandmother's implements which are precious to him as they recall happy memories of his childhood in her kitchen.



Photograph courtesy of Norman Cho.

Baba Norman Cho fondly recalls his grandmother's transition from clueless cook to accomplished chef

As the youngest child, my grandmother, Yeo Koon Neo, was saved from kitchen chores. Cooking and baking were done by her mother and her elder sisters. She only started cooking after her marriage, much to the dismay of her mother-in-law. She felt silly when she could not understand cooking terms. What did “*pi torah rempah ini*” mean? Stir fry the condiments. She had to do a lot of asking.

Grandmother had to learn how to use the *batu giling* (stone grinder) and the proper way to pound *rempah* (spice paste) with the *lesong*. There should be a sharp rhythmic ring when the *rempah* is pounded correctly. She recalled with a laugh how every pound rang with a thud when she started. Soon she was producing sumptuous meals which included grandfather's favourite *bakwan kepiting* (crabmeat ball soup). After her mother-in-law passed away two years later, she persuaded grandfather to

resettle from Malacca to Singapore. Her mother moved in with them and brought along all her kitchen implements.

When great-grandmother passed away some 20 years later in 1957, grandmother had become an accomplished cook. Her kitchen was always the hub of household activity and it is little wonder that the kitchen is known as the *perot rumah* (belly of the house). She relocated to different parts of the island over the years. Each time she moved house, she would discard some items which were deemed too bulky, too worn out or if they had not been in use for a long time. The *batu giling* was the first to go as it was too heavy.

One of my earliest recollections of grandmother was of her sitting by the kitchen window to *kosek beras* (sort out rice grains). I would marvel at the way she tossed the grains of rice onto an enamelled tray as she

deftly panned to remove grit and *padi* (unprocessed rice). The photograph above shows the same enamelled tray from Europe that her mother had used since

the 1920s. The *lesong* is just as old and has faithfully served us for four generations!

Both my mother and I hardly use the *lesong* to prepare *rempah* as it is time-consuming and tiring. We use the blender. However, we still break the *buah keluak* nut using the *lesong*, as grandmother did. The soup tureen dates back to the 1910s when great-grandmother used it to store *achar* (pickles). Grandmother used it to serve piping-hot *bakwan kepiting* during Chinese New Year. It is in my loving care now and used occasionally during family dinners.

I also have other less significant items including the bamboo-woven trays which grandmother used for sun-drying finely julienned papayas for her *achar* (pickle), and brass ladles for scooping drinking water from the *tempayan* (urn). My memories of grandmother and her kitchen live on through all these mementoes. ❀

Baba Ong Jin Teong rummages through his large collection of practical implements

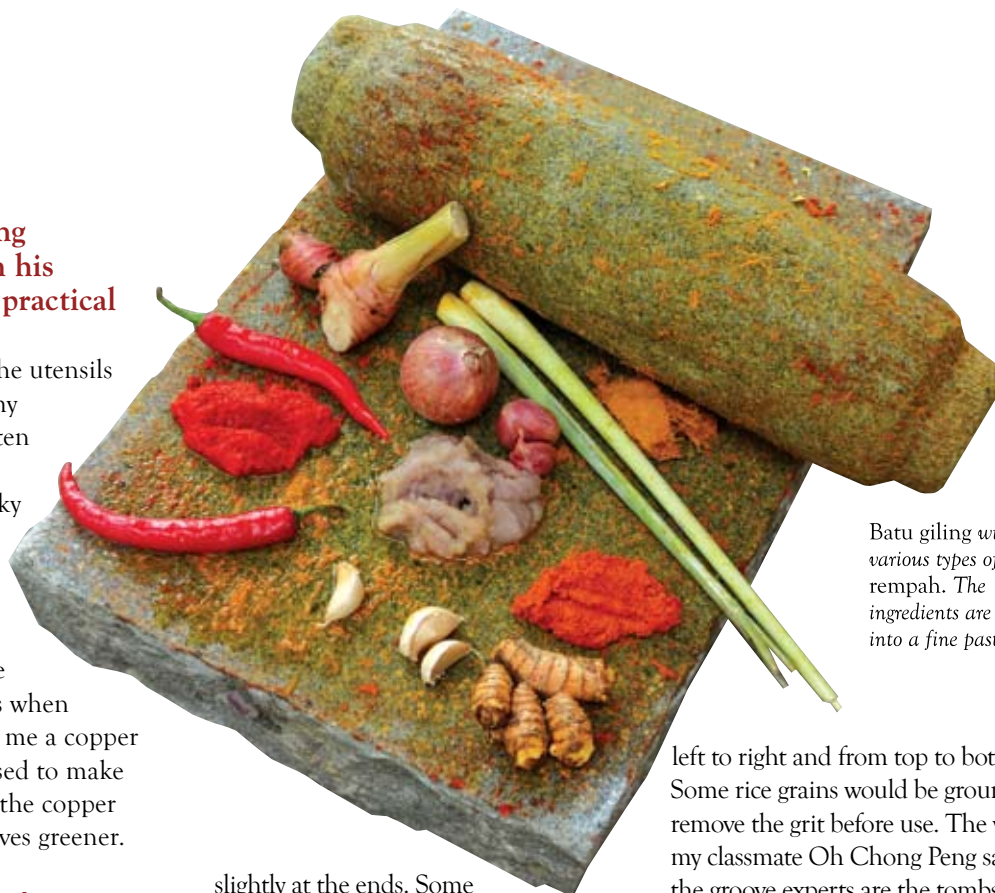
I still have many of the utensils that were used by my grandmothers. I often visit flea markets in Penang hoping for lucky finds or I ask friends and relatives if they know of people willing to give away their implements. One fortunate moment was when my sister-in-law passed me a copper pan, all hand-made, used to make *kee chang*. Apparently, the copper makes the bamboo leaves greener.

Batu Giling (stone grinder)

My cousin, Sandy still uses the *batu giling* to grind her *rempah* to a fine paste. The *lesong* (mortar and pestle) is commonly used to pound *rempah* (spice paste) but the result is not as fine as using the *batu giling*. Although it has a Malay name, it most probably originated in the Indian sub-continent going back several centuries. A similar implement called the metate is used to grind corn in Mexico and other parts of South America.

The *batu giling* has two items – a thick flat slab of granite and a cylindrical rolling pin. A standard slab is about 12 inches (30cm) wide, 18 inches (45cm) long and 4 inches (10cm) thick. The rolling pin, or the *anak*, is about 16 inches (40cm), wider than the slab and with a diameter of about 4 inches (10cm), tapering

(Left) *Laksa bor* hand press.
(Right) The fresh *laksa bor*.



Batu giling with various types of *rempah*. The ingredients are ground into a fine paste.

slightly at the ends. Some rolling pins are narrower to fit the hands of the user.

With constant use the surfaces of the slab and rolling pin become too smooth and have to be roughened or reconditioned from time to time. It is rare today to find someone who can do this. My Facebook friend, Cheryl Ng from Penang reminded me of the tradesman who carries around a stove with burning charcoal to repair leaking pots and pans. He also sharpens knives and scissors, and reconditions the *batu giling*, *lesong* and *cheok bo* (rice grinder).

Cheryl remembers the *tajam batu* (sharp stone) man who works with a hammer and a chisel to make small grooves of just about a millimetre in the *batu giling*, in rows from right to left,

left to right and from top to bottom. Some rice grains would be ground to remove the grit before use. The wife of my classmate Oh Chong Peng says that the groove experts are the tombstone makers!

Beehoon/Laksa Bor Hand Press

My grandmother and aunt used to make the *laksa beehoon* using a wooden *laksa bor* hand press. A smaller press is used to prepare *muruku* and *putu mayam*. This is interesting, considering that the *beehoon* is essentially Chinese and the *muruku* and *putu mayam* are Indian. The Indian *muruku* presses are also made from other materials like brass and have interchangeable base plates for different cross-sectional shapes of the *muruku*.

Penang *asam laksa* uses coarse *bee hoon* (rice noodles). The noodles used today are made commercially or reconstituted from dried *bee hoon*. In Penang in the old days, the home-



Asam laksa dish with fresh noodles.

Photographs courtesy of Ong Jin Teong.

made *bee hoon* is assembled into an elongated shaped cluster called *laksa bor*. The amount of *laksa* eaten (or ordered by each individual) is measured by the number of *laksa bor*. The *bee hoon* then was made from scratch - from uncooked rice grains. The rice was first ground in a granite grinder called *cheok bo*. Water was added in the grinding process and the ground rice was collected in a cotton/muslin bag and hung up to allow the water to drain away. Part of the drained ground rice was mixed with water and cooked to obtain the *ibu* or 'mother' in Malay and Penang Hokkien. The rest was mixed with *lek thau hoon* (ground mung beans) and kneaded with the *ibu* into a dough. The mung beans made the *laksa bor* have a *khiew* or *al dente* texture.



Kueh koswee with freshly grated coconut.

The dough was put in the hand press and the top and bottom handles pressed together to squeeze out long threads of *bee hoon*. They went straight into a pot of boiling water and were then plunged in cold water to stop the cooking process. The noodles were then drained on a large, woven bamboo tray or *nyiru*,



Coconut grater and shredder.

covered with muslin cloth. In Thailand, *laksa bor* is called *jaɓ*, which means 'to catch'. It describes how you have to dip your hand into the cold water to catch a portion of the *bee hoon* and then twirl them into shape. I can still remember how it was done at my grandmother's house in Tanjong Tokong.

Kukur (Coconut grater)

My cousins and I still use the traditional coconut grater at home. It looks like a miniature wooden horse or more appropriately a dog because of its size. You sit on this contraption called *kukur* or *ea khow* in Penang Hokkien.

The head has a curved serrated metal blade to scrape the inside of the coconut. A lot of practice is needed to evenly scrape out all the white flesh of the coconut while leaving the dark skin of the hard shell intact.

Parut (Coconut shredder)

Unlike the *kukur* which produces irregular bits, the *parut* achieves finely grated coconut for coating desserts such as *kueh koswee* and *ondeh ondeh*. They come in two types: A simple one with rows of short brass wires implanted on a wooden board, and a galvanized steel plate with rows of protruding barbs. I have a grater that is at least 60 years old, handed down to me by my cousin; the other is from my maternal grandmother. After slicing off the dark brown coconut skin, which by itself is a very laborious process, the white flesh (about 1 - 1.5 cm thick) is shredded using the *parut*. Great care should be taken to ensure that the fingers do not get shredded as well!

Roti Jala "Cup"

Lacy pancake is a good description for *roti jala*, a traditional Malay dish adopted by the Peranakans.

In Malay, *roti* is bread but here it is loosely termed as a crepe. *Jala* means net. It is also known as *roti renjis*, *roti kirai* or *roti renda*, *renda* means lace in Malay. Penang nyonyas made very fine *roti*



(Left) *Roti jala* trailed into hot oil and folded into quarters when cooked.

(Above) *Roti jala* cups of various sizes and makes. Nowadays cheap plastic *jala* cups are also available and produce just as good results.



(Left) The well-pressed pulot tatai.

The open box is placed over the base section and lined with banana

leaves. The blue and white steamed rice is spread all over the box and covered with the banana leaves. The top cover is carefully placed to compress the rice.

Usually, weights such as the *lesong* or *batu giling* are used to press the *pulot* for about eight hours to achieve the correct texture. Otherwise the slab of *pulot tekan* will break up when sliced. It is not uncommon for a man to stand on the cover. I have heard stories of a child being carried by his or her father to increase the pressure!

An old world kitchen in a typical Peranakan terrace house.



Kachip for Betel Nut

A special scissors called *kachip* in Malay is used to remove the husk and to cut the betel nut into very thin slices for chewing with *sireh*. I have two intricately decorated *kacip* that were used by my grandmother. The name 'betel nut' is not strictly correct as the 'betel' refers to the leaf of the betel vine (*sireh*). However the misnomer highlights the complementary nature of *sireh* and areca nut which is also known as *pinang*. The chewing of betel nut and *sireh* is an old custom that goes back more than two thousand years. It was a way of life or pastime that the nyonyas likely adopted from the Malays.

The chewing of betel nut and *sireh* is bound up with Malay, Peranakan and Indian rituals relating to courtship, marriage and sexual relationships between men and women. In Malay culture, the word *sireh* is used to describe a young girl who is eligible for marriage. *Pinang* forms several root words associated with marriage and courtship, like *pinang*, which means betrothal, and *meminang*, which means to ask in marriage. It is a traditional practice among Peranakan parents to personally visit their relatives and friends to invite them for their son's or daughter's wedding. This practice is called *pung thiap* (drop invitation) in Penang Hokkien or *pung lau heok* (drop *sireh* leaf). It shows how closely the Peranakan and Malay cultures are intertwined.

To prepare betel nut and *sireh* for chewing, small amounts of *kapor* (calcium hydroxide or slaked lime) is spread over the *sireh*. Then, thinly sliced betel nuts and a bit of gambier are added on the leaf which is folded into a triangle. I remember two types of *kapor* during my grandmother's time, the white one and a brown one mixed with gambier. The wrapped leaf, called the betel quid, is put in the mouth and chewed slowly. After some time the red residue is spat out. This explained why spittoons were strategically placed in houses in the past. They were also very common in coffee shops and even in the cinemas, provided in the interest of hygiene and for the convenience of the customers. ❀

Note: Some of the material and photos used in this article are from Ong Teong Jin's book called Penang Heritage Food. He is currently working on a book on traditional kitchen implements.

A TREASURE TROVE OF VINTAGE COLLECTIBLES



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

THE HERITAGE SHOP

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

Tel/Fax: 62237982 HP: 96861071

Email: theheritageshop@gmail.com

MY MOTHER THE HOMEOPATHIC HEALER

Nyonya Josephine Chia recalls some of her mother's unusual home remedies

The Peranakan cook is renowned for her meticulous choice of ingredients and spices to create the myriad flavours in delicious nyonya dishes. Die-hard traditionalist cooks have also been reputed to shriek and throw tantrums if certain methods of cutting, slicing or pounding are not properly adhered to, or if a dish is not served appropriately with the right ware, be it a plate (*pingan*) or bowl (*mangkok*). Apprentices in the kitchen, mainly daughters and daughters-in-law or worse, the hapless servant, suffered under these legendary prima donnas of the *dapor* (kitchen); their experiences are retold in stories like heirlooms.

Yet little is spoken of the nyonya's wisdom in using a plethora of fresh ingredients to allay illness and nourish health. For example, ginger to expel wind from the stomach, pig's liver to boost the red corpuscle count or sesame oil to cleanse the blood. It was believed that the juice of a raw onion was a cure for earache! What appeared to be superstition or folklore were often remedies and cures that were later scientifically proven.

When I was a child growing up in Kampong Potong Pasir in the 1950s, I never once visited either a dentist or a doctor. One, because our family could not afford such visits unless our illness was life-threatening and two, my mother was a natural homeopathic healer. As a child, I would protest vehemently if I had earache. *Mak* (mother) would plug a slice of raw onion into my ear. Absolutely third-world superstition, one might say. My vanity was also compromised - onion sticking out of one's ear was hardly elegant. I felt sorely stupid. But the remedy actually worked!

My mother was unschooled. She would not have known about the scientific properties of an onion. Somehow she had that special intuition about herbs and foods that possess healing properties. In later years, through my own research, I discovered that the onion is a member of the allium family, which includes garlic, shallots and chives. Modern science proclaims the onion as high in flavonoids and a powerful

antioxidant to prevent or cure many diseases. An onion is particularly high in the flavonoid quercetin, which is said to prevent cholesterol from adhering to our arterial walls. The onion has a remarkable record in the ancient world of the Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and Asians for fighting infections. So the truth is that the juice of a cut onion can help cure an earache indeed.

How would my mother have known that?

It was tradition in those days for very young girls to have pierced ears. In rural communities such as ours, the piercing was done with a hot needle and garlic juice. This coming-of-age ritual was borne with gritted teeth and loud howls and disgracefully, peeing in the pants - no analgesic was used!

After the trauma, my mother cut sections of garlic stem and poked them in the newly-pierced ears to keep the holes open and heal before we could start using ear studs or rings. Now, how would an illiterate woman from Malacca know that the humble garlic was a powerful antibiotic? My mother, like many of her Peranakan and Malay counterparts in the kitchen, had innate homeopathic sensibilities. She intuitively knew herbs and foods that could aid healing.

Garlic and onion are almost always used in our Peranakan dishes. Together with ginger, a cousin to another frequently used ingredient, the galangal, they are versatile herbs that help our body to cope with all sorts of conditions. Cut, sliced or ground, they are the Peranakan cook's basic ingredients and the basis of many of our traditional dishes like *ayam buah*



Photograph courtesy of Josephine Chia.



The **dokong anak** (*Phyllanthus niruri*) weed, used as a traditional herbal cure. The name is apparently derived from the appearance of the thin vine-like branch of the herb that looks as if it is cradling (*dokong*) children (*anak*) on the underside, small round fruits that grow beneath the green elliptical leaves. It is reputed to have anti-inflammatory properties and can close wounds rapidly.

Photography by Lee Yuen Thien.

keluak and *babi pongteh*. Of course, their healing strength is more powerful in their raw state. Chillies are wonderful anti-oxidants which help control the free radicals that damage our cells; cloves have anti-viral and internal cleansing properties; cinnamon bark helps to reduce blood sugar and prevents diabetes; turmeric protects the liver and coats the stomach walls with mucous to prevent ulceration.

Although modern science is discovering more about these spices and herbs for health, this body of knowledge is from ancient times. In the jungles, tribesmen who are close to the earth and the natural elements still have the ability to listen with their inner ear and pick up the benefits of plants and herbs.

Villagers in our kampong often consulted my mother to sort out their ailments - a fever or cold, a toothache or a stomachache. *Mak*, who had fallen from the heights of a wealthy life in Malacca to the deprivations of our shanty attap-thatched village, was a gentle angel who offered the kampong people her smile, wisdom and her healing skills. Women who were giving birth trusted her enough to call upon her to deliver their babies. She took

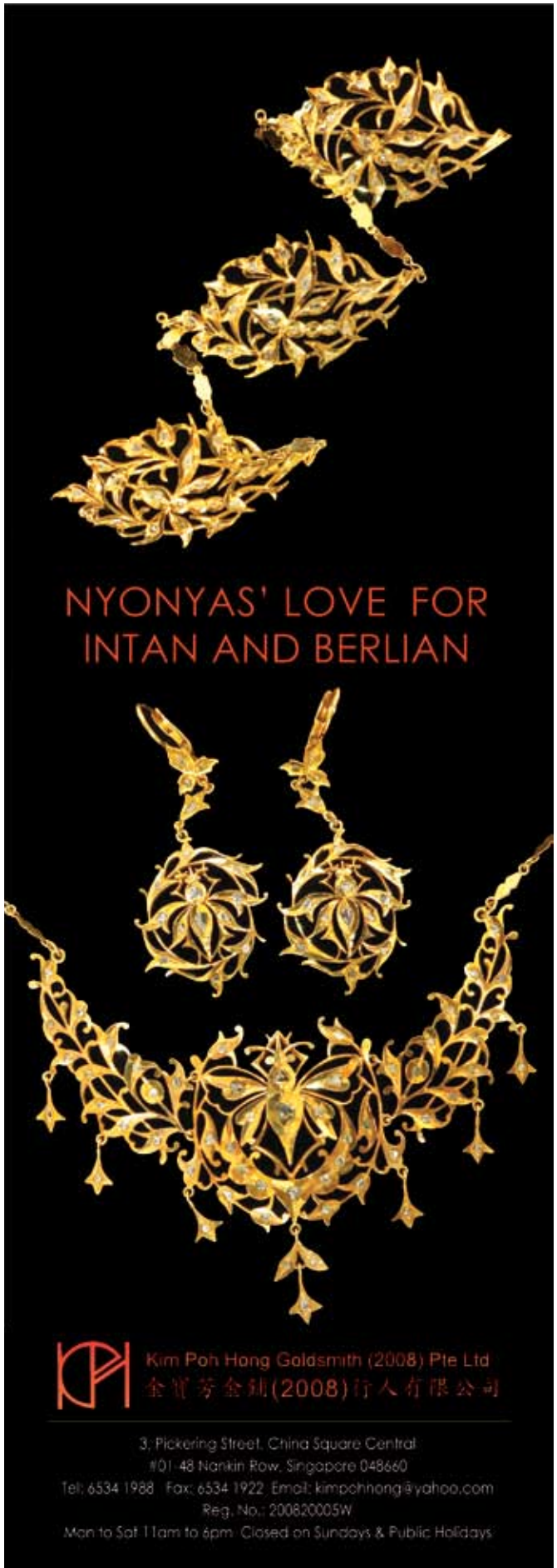
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me along to many of these deliveries. As witness to her skills, I was awed. Her aftercare was legendary, binding the women's abdomen with a poultice of herbs that included ginger to expel wind and help regain their prenatal shape.

At the age of six, trying to cart fresh water in a steel bucket from our standpipe half a mile away, the heavily loaded bucket accidentally landed on my foot. I did not even see a doctor. A neighbour carried me home wailing, my right foot bloody and almost dangling from the ankle. *Mak* rushed to the fields to collect the *dokong anak* herb. The name is apparently derived from the appearance of the thin vine-like branch of the herb that looks as if it is cradling (*dokong*) children (*anak*) on the underside, small round fruits that grow beneath the green elliptical leaves. It is reputed to have anti-inflammatory properties and close wounds rapidly.

Mak pounded the leaves with certain fruits in her *batu lesong* and bound my foot with the poultice. Amazingly, my ankle did not even require any surgical stitching. Today a scar marks that near-severing of my foot but the wound had completely healed because of her ministrations.

Sadly I have not inherited her healing propensities. But I am always proud of my mother the natural homeopathic healer. ❀



NYONYAS' LOVE FOR
INTAN AND BERLIAN

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THE FOODIES' GUIDE TO EATING WELL

Baba Desmond Sim's personal meter to sussing out good restaurants

Every Peranakan lives not only to eat well, but to eat like kings and queens. In a land where meals are discussed like intense religious experiences, and the one with the best restaurant recommendations becomes an instant social trend leader, it becomes a survival tactic for any self-respecting baba or nyonya to be able to suss out good restaurants from the multitude of pretenders on our greedy isle.

The Peranakan diner is all about standards. Sure, the *atas* (high class) ambience, attentive service and pristine table linen will get a nod from a fussy, well-coiffured nyonya, but ultimately, the true test is always about the food. Having had the good fortune to land myself on a review panel of one of the leading restaurant guides in Singapore, and having reviewed more than 50 restaurants in two years, I have come up with a mediocrity meter which we can use to spot the restaurants that we should not waste our time on.

The luxury food pusher

Restaurants that push out their most profitable seafood when you ask for a recommendation deserve to be boycotted. They do not care about your dining satisfaction, they just want to make a one-time killing. Some Chinese seafood restaurants are the guiltiest, whipping out their abalones, sharks fins (boo!) and imported lobsters. Staff at good restaurants find out, first, what kind of food you prefer before recommending anything at all. The best restaurants I have dined at actually pay such fine attention to detail that their complimentary appetisers and snacks are just as delicious as the paid dishes. They know that if the food is great (whether paid for or complimentary), you will be back for more in no time. They do not need to use underhanded means to make you spend more. And truly... which glutton ever forgets a free gift of food?

The copy-written feast

I am always suspicious when menus have descriptions that do verbal somersaults. Restaurants that sell words do not often sell good food. You cannot eat fancy words. Suspect the worst when 'gourmet' and 'specialities' are used too often! Conceptual meals sound better in concept than on your palate – and all for a hefty price tag which you would choke on after the meal. Some so-called 'molecular gastronomy' restaurants are guilty of fancy descriptions; sometimes all you get is a bubble of flavoured liquid and a puff of aromatic smoke. A really good restaurant will say it plainly - and let their delicious food do the talking.



Solid good food, with no frills and fancy copywriting, from Prima Tower Restaurant.

The tourist trap

How do you recognise the tourist trap establishments? If the restaurant ad headline mentions the panoramic view before it talks about the food, you might as well skip it. You cannot eat the view. And chances are that they are hoping you would be so mesmerised by the view, you would not notice the food. We once dined at an overpriced restaurant in the sky at Singapore's prime shopping belt - and ended up arguing with the staff over the definition of burnt toast. And this was a restaurant boasting a famous chef's name to boot. They seemed to think that charred carbon was delicious.

If there are no locals at all in the restaurant, they are likely over-priced, expense account black holes, and not worth your time and money. Conversely, if you see a long queue of locals clustered outside the restaurant, chances are the food is yummilicious – unless they are selling some

unloveable local specialty like *balut* (Filipino duck embryo) or snake gall bladders. So, do check first!

Ushers and uppity waiters

I will always judge a restaurant by the quality of the training they give their staff and how they detail their staff. Stationing an usher out front to herd you in is a sure sign of desperation. Singaporeans are greedy. If there is good food, they will fight to get in. Avoid also restaurants who hire uppity, patronising staff. It is hard to have a joyful meal when you are eating from the bitter bowl of condescension from a rude waiter. Once we were served a dish of severely undercooked risotto at a posh restaurant on the edge of Chinatown. When told that the rice was raw and chalky, the waiter sniffed haughtily, replying that Italians liked it that way. Of course he blanched a strange shade of green when I revealed at the end of the meal that I was reviewing his restaurant. Restaurants that have excellent staff are unforgettable – like the waiter from that restaurant



Appetisers at Phoenix Hotel, Yogyakarta.



The thoughtful staff at Flutes made the dinner even more special!



The unpretentious Vis A Vis, now relocated to Jalan Kembangan in the east, is packed with locals who love their hearty and rustic French cuisine.

on a hill who heard that I had returned to the restaurant after a long hiatus, and surprised me with “Welcome back!” written in chocolate on my dessert plate. A simple act, but never forgotten.

Eating with your brains...

As specialty restaurants swell in Singapore, and as fine dining food prices arc their way into the astronomical, we simply have to become smarter, more demanding eaters. A great foodie does not mind spending a fair bit on a worthwhile meal. But the unthinking eater wastes his daily calorie allotment, not to mention limited financial resources on food that is not worth our time or effort. To put it in another way, if I am going to get fat – it *bladdy* well be worth it!

Being a more discerning glutton assures that you are maximising the return on your hard-earned dollar. It is also ample proof that you are practising the hallmark of being a true blue Singaporean baba or nyonya – living your voracious existence as a much admired and envied *kiasu* (afraid to lose), food expert extraordinaire! ❄



Level 33 has great spirits and beers - plus amazing Marina Bay views and delicious food!

Photographs courtesy of Desmond Sim.



NYONYA NOSH@Rumah Bebe is the in-house bake-cook shop, a tribute to Peranakan cuisine that reflects the way a nyonya cooks, eats and entertains today. Serving food cooked according to hard-to-find traditional recipes, is not just instantly gratifying but truly memorable.

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WHITHER TRADITION OR MODERNITY?

Stage doyen G T Lye is well known for his stellar performances as the archetypal Peranakan matriarch. Unknown to many of his fans, he is also an excellent cook who has done catering, cooking demonstrations and been interviewed on cooking on Malay radio. Nyonya Linda Chee taps G T's views and knowledge of traditional foods

When did you learn how to cook and what was your first dish?

My sister and I were fostered to a poor Peranakan family when we were born. Fostering was a common practice in those days. There I observed how cooking could be done economically. The beautiful part was that all the ingredients were garden grown. *Serai*, *lengkuas*, chillies, all of them fresh. When I was 10 years old, I returned to my own family, which was very rich, and spent my childhood in the kitchen. *Petek towgay*, *pesiang sayor* (pluck beansprouts, peel vegetables), I did all these.

My first kitchen chore was to *tumbok* (pound) *sambal belachan*. It cannot be too finely pounded. *Bakar* (roast) the *belachan* over a charcoal fire and throw away the bitter burnt parts. Everyday I made *sambal belachan*. The chilli *masuk mata, pedi* (my eyes smarted from pounding the chilli). I learnt to cook from my second mother who came from the Seah Eu Chin family, whose descendants such as Seah Peck Seah and Seah Liang Seah had Singapore streets named after them. She was a very nice lady who taught me everything.

In your view, what is considered to be traditional Peranakan cooking?

Traditional cooking is different. You don't rely too much on recipe books. Cooking is all about 'guestimation'. *Agak la*. In the olden days the cooks may not have been highly educated but they used the appropriate ingredients. If you were a good cook, you would never use processed crystal sugar. In those days you use the juice of the thin sugar cane to coax the flavour and sweetness out of dishes like *babi pong teh*. Now people cannot be bothered to *ketok*, *chuchi*, *kerek* (crush, clean and scrape) the sugar cane, so they use rock sugar. Malacca people use *gula Melaka* (palm sugar) in the *pong teh*. But to me the juice from the sugar cane is still the best. This is traditional cooking.

Has traditional Peranakan cooking been compromised these days? What do you think of fusion cooking?

To be a good cook you must have a passion and interest. You have to innovate. Each family will adapt to their own style and taste. For example, some people like to use *daon kenchur* (*Kaempferia galanga*) but others don't like the strong smell, *pahit* (bitter). Nobody has the perfect or the best dish. It all depends on your taste. You are the one who's going to eat it and enjoy it. Don't bother about people. As long as it suits you. And different hands cook in different ways. *Sepuluh orang, sepuluh macham* (10 people, 10 ways).

I use *daon lemo perot* (kaffir lime leaves) in my *sambal*

belachan. Some people use fresh tomato and sugar. I went to a Peranakan restaurant which served *kuah lada* (peppery gravy) cooked with pepper and different spices and tomato. In all my 70 years I never used tomato! But they said their grandmother used tomato. So from there I learnt you cannot say it is wrong. It is all about adaptation. This is why I am not against fusion cooking. It is all about cooking to your taste preference and the taste you have grown up with.

Sometimes I innovate with my own dishes mixing Thai, Malay and Peranakan touches. My *rendang* doesn't taste like Malay *rendang*. I use herbs because I like it that way. When I serve to people I tell them it is not original, it is my style.

In the 1950s many *Hailam* (Hainanese) cooks working with Peranakan families reproduced the dishes to perfection. We are very lucky now that people are willing to cook Peranakan food. So you have to be flexible. Nowadays the only way out for young people are cookbooks. It is good if parents teach the young so the legacy will not diminish. If you have your grandmother's recipes, you are very lucky.

What is your favourite traditional dish?

Clearly it is *nyonya popiah*. No peanuts. The filling is only bamboo shoots and *bangkwang* (yam bean). These must be sliced, not shredded. The *kain kulit* (*popiah* skin), you must make the egg version yourself. Duck eggs are better for *popiah* skin. And there is a certain way of cooking the filling in the wok. *Tumis bawang putih* (sauté the garlic) and a little *taucheo* (soyabean paste), put in the vegetables and create a hole in the middle of the wok like a doughnut. Ladle the gravy onto the filling every now and then. *Besok makan, ini malam mesti bikin baru serap*. (Keep the filling overnight and eat the next day when the flavour has fully steeped in). These little tips, you must share with other cooks.

What are some of the traditional dishes rarely found in Singapore nowadays?

Mengkabo is a *nyonya* dish from Malacca which nobody cooks in Singapore. It is a pork dish with spices, like a *rendang* but tastes completely different. Another dish is *udang chow* which is still cooked in many homes in Malacca but not in Singapore. It is soupy with fresh prawns and uses a kind of ingredient similar to *tohei*. It is also cooked in Indonesia. One



Photography by Colin Chee.

G T Lye the stage doyen-cum-chef.

dish used for prayers that you cannot get now is *tee hee char rebong* (fried pork lungs with bamboo shoots) because you don't get to buy pork lungs in the market any more.

Another Malacca ceremonial dish is *nasi kembuli*, a brownish spicy rice adapted from the Malays who adapted it from the Arabs. Some Peranakans brought this dish to Singapore but you rarely see it here now. The Peranakans use *tulang babi* (pork bones) in the stock to prepare the rice which is cooked with a bag of spices that include *kayu manis* (cinnamon), *bunga chingkeh* (star anise) and *buah pelaga* (cardamom). It is eaten with dishes such as *terong pacheli* (brinjal curry), *kormak* (chicken curry) and *sekbak* (braised pork). This is what was normally served at the closing of the 12-day wedding celebration in Malacca. In Singapore we serve *nasi lemak*.

What's completely gone is *biji delima* (pomegranate seeds) made wholly with sago. The Thais use the actual fruit. This is a Peranakan dessert which is sago flour made into a thick batter and spread on muslin. It is coloured red and dried in the hot sun. When hardened, you cut small bits like pomegranate seeds and boil in water until they float. The water is scented with pandan leaves. The seeds are then served in syrup water.

What are the iconic Peranakan dishes that are served at home?

Everyday you must have a spicy soupy dish using *rempah* like *kuah lada*, *masak singgang* (fish gravy), *udang masak nanas* (prawn and pineapple curry). Or the semi-ripe papaya *masak titek* with dried *ikan kurau*. For vegetables, there can be *jantong pisang* (banana flower salad) using *belimbing* (carambola) and the high cholesterol *santan* (coconut milk). Or *kangkung*, fried with *rempah titek*. You must also have *sambal belachan*. Peranakan dishes use ingredients like *halia* (ginger), *lengkuas* (blue ginger) and *buah keras* (candlenut) which are actually very good for health.

"Sometimes I innovate my own dishes mixing Thai, Malay and Peranakan touches. My rendang doesn't taste like Malay rendang. I use herbs because I like it that way. When I serve to people I tell them it is not original, it is my style."

How about the ceremonial dishes?

Babi pongteh is one dish for ancestral worship, maybe because the colour is blackish, darkish, similar to *kueh koswee*. *Pongteh* is never served at celebrations or weddings or birthdays. *Chap chye* is another *laok semayang* (prayer food). *Itek tim* is served during the Lunar New Year for ancestral worship. Similarly, *Nyonya mee* is a preferred dish during ancestral worship and at funeral wakes. For birthdays, *meesua* is served.

What kind of foods are served at weddings and birthdays?

Nyonya food is never served at wedding dinners, only during lunch at the *tok panjang*. The dishes include *bakwan kepiting* (crab meatballs), *hee ploh* soup (fish stomach soup) and *ayam* (chicken) in many styles – *sambal*, roast or curry. The feast also includes *otak otak*, *jantong pisang* and *sambal timun* (cucumber salad) of which the original version has sliced *samchien bak* (belly pork) and even chicken spare parts.

Buah keluak is actually a *laok semayang* (ceremonial prayer dish) but so many people like it so *naik tingkat* (upgraded) to be served at weddings and birthdays. During these happy occasions you also serve *sekbak* and *babi masak asam*. Some

families serve *nasi lemak* with *udang goreng asam*, *ikan goreng asam* and *sambal petai*.

Nasi ulam is actually nothing special. Some people do not like it because it is like cat's food. Some people use too many herbs while others don't like the smell of fish and herbs.

The dessert is usually *chendol*. Another ceremonial dessert is *taibak*, a simple sweet dessert of syrup and rice noodles that are colored red and white. *Taibak* is served during birthdays and weddings. When I was a young boy, the *taibak* was shaped like *chendol*, tapered at the ends. When I went to Malacca it was served looking like *meesua*. Then when I went to Bangkok, a very close friend said he would serve me something that was a palace secret; his family worked in the palace. Aiye, it was *taibak*! He didn't believe me when I told him that it was served everywhere in homes in Malacca as a ceremonial dessert.

Are you in favour of using modern appliances such as blenders?

These make for fast work and convenience. I dry fry the *belachan* and instead of pounding I just blend it and keep in the fridge, ready for use. But *sambal belachan* using the blender doesn't taste the same. When you *tumbok* (pound) the chillies, the juice comes out naturally but when you blend, the juice doesn't come out and the smell is also different. Even with *rempah*; when you pound or blend then fry the mixture, the fragrance is not the same. ❀



G T's first kitchen chore was to *tumbok* (pound) *sambal belachan*.

Photography and food styling by Anton Kilioko.



Contact us for more information!

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RECIPE FOR LOVE

Baba Emeric Lau learns a way of keeping love alive from this short film

Now screening at film festivals across the globe, Paperbear Productions' *Rempah Sayang* is a Singapore-made short film about discovering the recipe for enduring love.

Written and directed by Mabel Gan, the plot centres around 15-year-old Jade who loves her grandmother and the latter's wonderful cooking. Jade ignores her older sister's warnings about the consequences of her grandmother's food on her waistline, until the day she has her first crush on the new boy next door. She stops visiting her grandmother in an effort to lose weight, but a series of unfortunate incidents causes her much embarrassment in front of her crush. Jade seeks out her grandmother for comfort. Upon learning about her distress, her grandmother teaches her the recipe to a special *rempah* that is guaranteed to help in her quest for love.

Desiree Koh plays Jade with a delightful air of naiveté, while Jessie Cheang is endearing as her grandmother. The film is shot inside and around a number of beautiful Peranakan row-houses, which should make for engaging visual interest when screened outside Southeast Asia.

This is a great short-film to catch with the whole family. Hopefully, it will be broadcast on TV at some point. ✱





PIECES OF PERANAKAN HERITAGE

If you appreciate the beauty of Peranakan art, here's a way to help preserve it. They can help you adorn your walls or furniture with these tiles, many of which feature the exquisite motifs of birds and flowers commonly found in old Peranakan homes.

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LAOK LAO-JIAT!

A night of food and merriment

Friday 26 July saw over 400 guests descend on the Concorde Hotel at Orchard Road for The Peranakan Association's 113th anniversary and fundraiser, The Peranakan Ball. The theme of food, or *Laok Embok-Embok*, saw every table sporting a tray of ingredients and spices typically found in nyonya cuisine.

Hosted by Baba Chan Eng Thai with 'live' music supplied by the Evergreens and a guest spot featuring Singapore's Elvis Presley, Romito Mendoza, many guests stayed till long after the last morsels were consumed, happy to chit-chat and dance the night away.

The unplanned highlight of the evening came when The Peranakan Voices successfully cajoled Anastasia Liew to join them onstage for a rendition of her wildly successful confectionery's namesake - Bengawan Solo! ❀



OH SINGAPURA!

Baba Christopher Lee jogets for National Day



The Peranakan Voices rouse up the crowd.



National Day was celebrated on 9 August 2013 in a *Parti Peranakan Stylo Mylo* at the Raffles Country Club. The evening's entertainment commenced with the club members browsing through stalls stocked with Peranakan tidbits, collectibles and traditional jewellery.

The party kicked off with Baba Chan Eng Thai enthralling guests with an adept presentation on the Peranakan community and culture. He also recited one of his exceptional *pantons* just for the occasion. The Peranakan Voices kicked off their performance with a delightful delivery of the ever-popular *Nyonya Manis*. In between the exquisite *laok embok-embok*, Peranakan Theatre doyen GT Lye had the crowd in stitches with his depiction of the marriage experience of a young nyonya. In his inimitable style, GT portrayed how a sheltered maiden unwittingly captured the attention of a matchmaker impressed by her rhythmic mastery of a *lesong* (mortar and pestle), only to escape the advances of the man who had become her husband. It was a rare glimpse of GT in mischief when he employed some uncensored humour.

The Peranakan Voices wrapped up the evening with a sing-along session that included one of the earliest national songs, *Singapura Oh Singapura*. As *Burong Kakak Tua* rang out, the appreciative crowd broke out in spontaneous *joget* to the live music amidst much merriment. ❖

We thank the following sponsors for the Peranakan Ball 2013

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Raymond Wong

IS ASIA PERANAKAN?

An exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum showcases cross-cultural art, including a horde of Peranakan treasures.



PORTRAIT OF MADAM WELLINGTON KOO

Oei Hui-lan (1899–1992) was the daughter of Oei Tiong Ham, an enormously wealthy businessman with sugar and shipping interests in Java. She married the Chinese diplomat, Wellington Koo, in 1920; he became ambassador to France, Britain, the United States, and the United Nations. This 1921 oil portrait by British artist Charles Tharp was painted in London around the time the Koo family were presented to the king and queen of Belgium. Gift of Lim and Tan Securities Pte Ltd in memory of Johnny and Nancy Lim.

PINK KAMCHENG

This late 19th or early 20th century pink ground kamcheng, is larger than usual (height 36 cm) and is of fine quality, and may have been used for storing drinking water, soup, dessert, or pickles for festive occasions. Gift of Professor Cheah Jin Seng.



Devotion and Desire, which opened on 29 May 2013 at the Asian Civilisations Museum, presents 170 recent acquisitions and donations. These objects point to the many connections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the wider world. The museum is focused on emphasising and creating understanding about such interconnections. The objects show the widespread taste for similar kinds of luxury goods, religious objects, the arts of the royal courts, and the impact of colonial networks, throughout Asia.

Cross-cultural highlights include a fine 16th century carved ivory of a Madonna and Child from Sri Lanka, a Chinese blue-and-white porcelain brush rest with Arabic inscriptions, and also several Peranakan treasures. The donors of Peranakan-related objects are Sunny Chan Hean Kee, Professor Cheah Jin Seng, Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee, Lim & Tan Securities, Agnes Tan Kim Lwi, Robert Wowor (the Tan Tjien Sien family), and Matthew and Alice Yapp. Dr Alan Chong, Director of ACM, expressed his appreciation in a press statement: “Local collectors and donors have been exceptionally generous in supporting the collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum. Together with strong government support, we have been able to collect distinctive objects, which

show the historical connections between Asian cultures.

These contacts between religions and peoples, brought about by trade and migration, reflect Singapore’s special position as a cross-roads and a melting pot.” ❖



MIRROR

Western in form, the mirror (with its back shown in the photograph) is decorated with intricate filigree and coloured enamel. It was probably part of a toilette set that included various boxes and bottles. The aristocracy of Europe and Russia purchased silver toilette sets from China from the 17th century, and they continued to be popular into the early 20th century. Later examples like this one incorporated Chinese decoration, such as the prunus flowers and fish feet seen here. The mark at the top includes the name of a Canton silver firm, which also had a manufacturing centre in Singapore: 大興, “Da Xing”. The firm also made sirih or betel nut sets for the Peranakan market. Gift of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee.

Devotion and Desire: Cross-Cultural Art in Asia will run from 30 May 2013 to 8 December 2013 at the Special Exhibitions Gallery. In conjunction with the free entry to museums that started on 18 May 2013, all Singapore citizens and permanent residents will enjoy free admission to the exhibition.

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THE PERANAKAN GUIDE • SINGAPORE

MUSEUMS

Peranakan Museum. See the world's first national Peranakan Museum with the most



comprehensive and finest collection of Peranakan artefacts. The boutique museum examines the centres of Peranakan culture in

Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and traces its links to as far as Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

Peranakan Museum, 39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941.

website: www.peranakanmuseum.sg

Email: nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg

Tel: 6332 7591.

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 sreh 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>.



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>

Kebon Indah. This exhibition presents the *Malam Di Jari Kita* series of artworks arising from the collaboration of two contemporary artists, Samantha Tio (Mintio) and Budi Agung Kuswara (Kabul), and batik makers of the Sido Luhur group from the central Javanese



village of Kebon Indah. From 27 September 2013 to 30 September 2014

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, *sreh* boxes and other paraphernalia, some encrusted with diamonds, and fine batik textiles from the north coast of Java, all made for the Peranakan market.

Devotion and Desire. Cross Cultural Art in Asia. New acquisitions of the ACM.

An exhibition through to 8 Dec 2013. Includes

Peranakan artifacts on display.

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.

PEROT SAKIT (STOMACH UPSET)

Lawyer Burok advises to sue or not to sue all the way from England

Makan nasi sama laok (eating rice with various dishes) is something that all Peranakan families hold very dear to their hearts because Peranakan cuisine is renowned for being very appetizing and delicious. In the days gone by, our Mama or Mak would be the best cooks in our families. Our Ee-ees (maternal aunties) or Koh-kohs (paternal aunties) added to the clan of cooks who fed and nourished us in our growing years.

However, in this time and age the *laok* Peranakan that we crave for are mostly available in restaurants that advertise themselves as serving allegedly “Peranakan” food. Whether they are *betol* (genuine) Peranakan food or not is up to each individual to judge as some may consider them to be *sepeka* (up to standard) and others as *tak* (not) *sepeka*. However, *sepeka* or *tak sepeka tolong jangan sakit perot sudah!* (don’t get a stomach upset!)

There was a case in England of a Miss Donoghue who drank ginger beer from an opaque bottle that contained a dead snail at the bottom. She saw the dead snail



Illustration by Peter Lee, inking by John Lee.

flopping out from the bottle only when her friend poured out the rest of the ginger beer.

She *pengsan* (fainted) and was later hospitalised for gastric pains. Subsequently she sued Mr Stevenson, the manufacturer of the ginger beer who denied that he was negligent and maintained that he did not owe her a duty of care.

Miss Donoghue took her case to the highest court of law in England which then ruled that Mr Stevenson owed Miss Donoghue, a consumer, a duty of care and was therefore negligent. Thus the law of manufacturers owing a duty of care to the end user was established by this case of Donoghue v Stevenson (1932) AC.

However, babas and nyonyas, I would not advise you to *sikit sikit sajah mau sue* (sue over trivial matters) the person or company that cooked or manufactured the food that was tainted.

If you were to *makan* (eat) at a hawker centre and found a *rambot* (hair) in your *kuah* (soup), then make it a point not to eat at that place in future. You may also register a complaint against that stall with the National Environment Agency (NEA).

Please don’t confront the stall holder about the *rambut* in the *kuah*, he would most likely retort “*ini bukan five star hotel, enche. Kalau mau makan berseh atau chantek chantek nya makan, hotel pergi lah!*” (this is not a five-star hotel, mister. If you want your food clean and nice, go eat at a hotel!)

But if you happen to have a meal in a five-star hotel and there was a dead *chichak* (lizard) in your food, *ambek gambar, panggil itu* (take a photo, call the) hotel *nya* manager and then register a formal complaint.

If after that you *jatoh sakit* (fall ill), get a medical report from a doctor and he must attribute your *sakit* (sickness) to the food with the *chichak*. Then consult a lawyer with a valid practising certificate to advise you whether to commence an action against the five-star hotel.

But seriously, the *laok* (food) that my Mama and Mak cooked for all of us was prepared by mixing *garam* (salt) with their bare hands in the *laok*.

They tasted the *rempah* (spice mixture) or *kuah mee siam* with a ladle and the same unwashed ladle was then used to stir the *kuah* AND we *tak jatoh sakit!* (never got sick!) In fact, we all say, Mama and Mak’s *laok* are the BEST! ❄

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