the Peranakan 420 414



## yesterwear's men

about [OVV]

FASHION STATEMENTS OF THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

FROM BUDAK
TO BABA

What it's really like growing up as a Peranakan boy

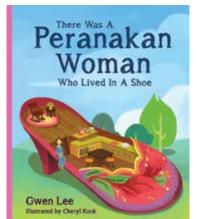
Meeting **Her Majesty in London** 

Saying Mass in Baba Malay





31





## contents 11



\_\_ ISSUE 4 • 201

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PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION

ON THE COVER & PAGE 17 • Portrait of Cheang Hong Lim by an unknown photographer, 1870s.

PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR AND MRS LEE KIP LEE.



#### EDITORIAL

B Changes Ahead

#### **FEATURES**

- 4 Recapturing the Baba Mojo
- 8 Growing Up in My Very Own Joo Chiat
- 11 Baba Dandy
- 18 Regal Moments
  The Peranakans are
  Received in London
- 20 The *Kebaya* Goes to Buckingham Palace
- 21 And Closer to Home Inspecting the Troops

#### CHAKAP CHAKAP

- 22 Growing Up Baba
- 24 A Peranakan New Year Eucharistic Celebration

#### DALAM DAPOR

26 All in the Family

#### THEATRE

- 29 Baba Sedia! (Attention!)
- 30 Of Heartbreak and Healing

#### BOOKS

31 There was a Peranakan Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

#### **EVENTS**

- 32 Ikebana goes Peranakan
- 33 A Trip through Time Who is a *Chetti Melaka*?

#### NOTICEBOARD

34 Peranakan Associations in the Region

#### DIRECTORY

35 The Peranakan Guide, Singapore

#### CHAKAP HABIS

36 The Life Cycle of a Baba

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE *President:* Peter Wee • *First Vice-President:* Alan Koh • *Second Vice-President:* Chan Eng Thai • *Honorary Secretary:* Ee Sin Soo • *Assistant Honorary Secretary:* Gwen Ong • *Treasurer:* Angeline Kong • *Assistant Treasurer:* Edmond Wong • *Committee Members:* Kevin Aeria, Monica Alsagoff, Gavin Chan Linda Chee, Zan Ho, Emeric Lau • For enquiries please contact Peter Wee at +65 63451220

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MCI (P) 138/10/2014





'NONYA'S LOVE FOR INTAN AND BERLIAN'







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#### changes ahead

"Issue 3, 2014 was out. Other nyonyas called Baba Peter Wee, our President, complaining over our audacity in showing the unseen side of Peranakan society. We are delighted. Once in a while the magazine team likes to try something different. We are glad to get responses, positive or otherwise!

From a photo essay on nyonyas who go *au naturel*, in this issue Baba Peter Lee moves on to another visual essay that delves into the world of stylish babas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this point, the team would like to say a million thanks to Peter for his 20 years of service to the magazine - from the time when he and his father, Uncle Kip, printed it as a two-pager, to the glossy product that readers compliment us with today. We will miss him and Uncle Kip as Advisers. But, thankfully, we can still look forward to Peter as the erudite writer.

We also bid farewell, with much reluctance, to our super-efficient Administrative Manager, Low Whee Hoon, who has been with us for nine years, and Art Director John Lee, who literally transformed the look of the magazine over the past two years. Two young babas have come on board - Sean Tan, who takes over from Whee Hoon, and writer, Bryan Tan. Edmond Wong returns to the team as Webmaster after a break of three years.

This will be our last year as a quarterly magazine. In 2015, *The Peranakan* will be produced twice a year. Working on four issues has been intense, though enjoyable, for our team of volunteers. After so many years, we have decided to have more room to work on each issue. We hope you will understand. Do continue to give us feedback.

Best wishes for the New Year.

Linda Chee

Editor

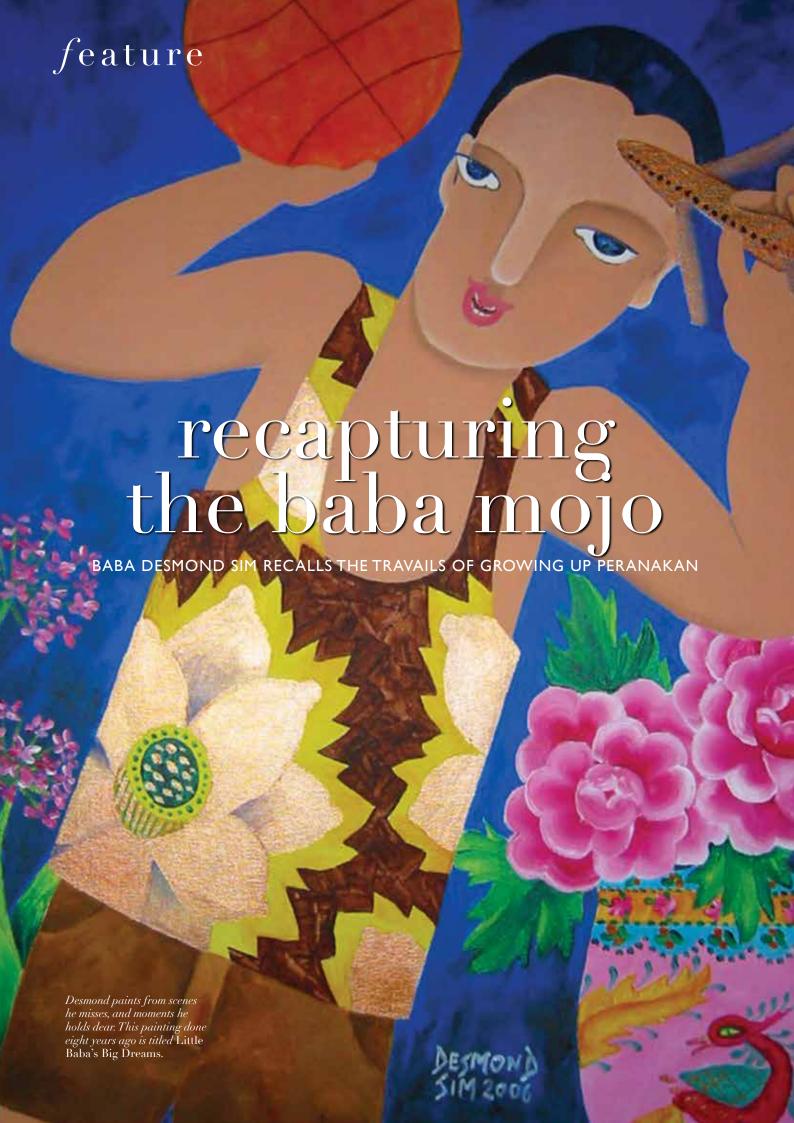
armest congratulations to Baba Alvin Tan, artistic director of The Necessary Stage, upon being conferred the Cultural Medallion. We take pride that this is an accolade to the creativity of the Peranakans. Since it was introduced in 1979, two other babas, Dick Lee and Ivan Heng, have been awarded Singapore's highest cultural honour.



y father Lee Kip Lee, whose \_boyhood dream was to become a newspaper journalist, started the Peranakan newsletter in 1994. He got me to lay it out for him on my newlyacquired Mac Classic computer. We have been at this together for 20 years now. A year ago, when he was 91, he suffered a mild stroke, and so family priorities have changed. He has always believed in the importance of continuity and how a good handover facilitates this. We graduated from editors to advisers, passing the mantle to Linda Chee and her team, and now it is time to take our leave of the committee to make way for new members, and new ideas. We wish the magazine and the association every success, and that it will continue to inspire, amuse, and unite everyone interested in things Peranakans. May the magazine long perpetuate the grand Peranakan spirit. Panjang panjang umor!

- Peter Lee

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eing Baba was never easy, and still remains difficult for me. My father, bless his soul, was a *singkeh* Teochew man who moved in with my nyonya mother's extended Peranakan family home (I suspect) after tasting my Teochew nyonya maternal grandmother's amazing food. So for the first seven years of my life, I assumed that everyone's female relatives swanned around in elegant kebayas and

colourful floral sarongs. I believed that every refrigerator held a handy bottle of crunchy, tangy achar and fiery sambal belachan. And I thought the constant melange of gossip, code-switching from English to Hokkien to Malay to Peranakan patois and Teochew, was a norm in all Singaporean homes.

Boy was I wrong. And I found out soon enough.

As soon as I was old enough for sleepovers at friends' homes, I found that there were local Chinese families who loved their food bland! Bleah. They look puzzled when I asked for sambal belachan and chilli. "If you kill your tastebuds, how can you taste your food?" these *singkehs* asked me with genuine concern written all over their faces. I just smiled lamely and missed granny's ayam buah keluak at the dinner tables of my singkeh Chinese friend's homes.

On the buses, it was not uncommon to be told off by Mandarin-speaking bus drivers and conductors for piping up in English or patois. They scolded me for being Chinese but unable to speak Chinese well. That was

when I was made aware of the orang china, bukan china (OCBC) label that singkeh chauvinists stuck on us. Again I smiled weakly and did my best with my funny-sounding Mandarin.

At that young age, being Baba did not make much sense. It made me feel alienated from all the others who were not like us those people (especially classically-educated Chinese) who thought nothing of making me feel culturally diluted, compromised or inaccurate. I was too busy trying to fit in and overlooked the fact that being Peranakan meant I got to enjoy so many things from the culture - the tea dances, all the wonderful kueh kueh and cuisine dished out by kinfolk and family friends, the affinity for local craft, fabrics, creativity, and being connected meaningfully to so many races and cultures in myriad

ways that some hard core Chinese were not. I was living with so much richness, but not appreciating it at all...I just remembered being made to feel different and left out.

As I grew into my teens, I began to seriously explore this Peranakan-ness in me. I was a very methodical scholar in my teens and early 20's.

I was told Peranakans were first Confucian, and Taoist or Buddhist, and then Christian... and so, I proceeded to study all these with a fanatic fervour during and outside of philosophy classes at the National University of Singapore. But those philosophies, though helping to shape the culture, were not unique to it. I needed something more. And so I started collecting the material culture old kebayas, old sarongs and batiks, antique photos, porcelain, some furniture, silver and jewellery to study and learn. Professor Ho Wing Meng's (he taught me philosophy at the university too) essential books on Peranakan material culture were always on my coffee table and always read



At the 2012 Peranakan Convention where, to my surprise, I won one of the best dressed prizes

happily. I knew more after a few years, after reading all the books, and handling enough of the actual bits and pieces of Peranakanalia I had found in antique shops and acquired - but that was still not putting my finger on being a Peranakan.

#### **PAINTING NYONYAS**

Then, whilst on this journey to find my Peranakan self, I started doing something interesting. I had started writing plays and painting in my teens, something to keep myself busy - to cope with my wildly untamed imagination and nervous young energy. I wrote about life in Singapore as I saw it, and won some awards for having tried. Then I experimented with painting in all styles and modes

from still life, to surreal, to abstract. The paintings

## Timeless Treasure

Let Your showers of blessing come upon my life. Ezekiel 34:26

Make all grace abound toward me, that I will have sufficiency in all things and abound to every good work. 2Cor.9:8

You reward me because I diligently seek You. Heb.11:6

Let me lay up gold as dust. Job 22:24

I love wisdom, I inherit substance, and my treasures are filled. Proverbs 8:21



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.

#### TIMELESS TREASURE

#### GREATE FROM WHAT YOU KNOW WELL, THEN YOU WILL FIND THE HEART OF THE MATTER. 99

were pretty and interesting, but nothing seemed to gel for me. It was as if I was doing a lot of these things simply to show off that I could do them. While the results seemed well liked by my audience, I wasn't feeling anything deep or meaningful about my endeavours.

Then one day, at a writing workshop conducted by a renowned foreign playwright, I learnt something important "create from what you know well, then you will find the heart of the matter". And so I tried to do exactly that with my paintings. Instead of painting Chinese courtesans or western surrealist copies, I began to draw nyonyas, Peranakan children and the actual lives that we led in the years past. I painted from scenes I missed, and moments I held dear.

And for the first time when my paintings were put up for a show I felt a tingle of pride.

So I plunged right in. Somehow, even when I was creating, taking artistic licence, reinventing, I was very sure what felt authentic, and what was fake in a colour combination, inflection, curve of a pot, drape of a sarong, posture of a mother and her sleeping child wrapped in an old quilt... all these I had stored in my head as a child, nurtured over the years and kept precious. I had somehow managed to free the Baba in me on canvas. I was at last feeling and expressing as an artist.

Of course, I wasn't quite sure about all this. I thought I was just indulging myself and making people smile with the bright colours and warmhearted content. Those that loved and/or acquired my paintings were locals as well as foreigners. And many of them weren't Peranakan. So I wasn't quite sure if it was the Peranakan they recognised in my works (I had started writing my first English language Peranakan plays as well) or that all this was just exotica to novelty hunters.

After more than a dozen exhibitions, at the opening of one of my solo shows, Mr Peter Wee, our current TPAS President, came by after viewing my pieces and patted me on the shoulder. He said simply and quietly, "All this... is very—Peranakan. I can feel them." I gulped my thank you, but I had a tough time blinking back my tears. I had needed to hear that so badly, and now instead of pushing it back, I was so very proud of the label I wore then—and now. Peranakan.

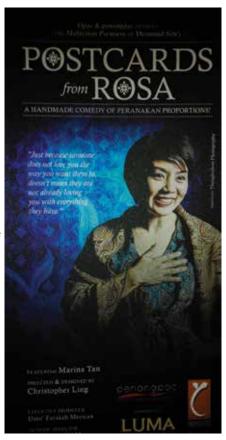
You see, besides all the beautiful objects and

precious things and delicious food, being Peranakan is still unquantifiable. It is so very hard to apply a list of bullet point factors that makes one Peranakan or not: all the practices, *pantangs*, foibles, food and material culture and belief systems, all that is Peranakan. But there is more.

#### **TOUGH AND SPIRITED**

Being a person in a genuine hybridised culture takes courage, strength and thick skin. People will doubt you, and laugh and call you names for being different, for sticking out. People will mock your difference or gossip about our obstinate

loudness and crass fierceness. But you know what? We needed to be tough and spirited in order to be special, in order to stand the sometimes pointed ridicule and sometimes subtle discriminations we had to put up with. We also had to have an immense sense of humour and wit to survive. Despite modernisation, despite language policies, despite the push to simplify cultural definitions, we still persisted and insisted on being leh-cheh, complex, elaborate and ornamented - as is the true nature



Postcards from Rosa, a fictional play inspired by the stories that my maternal grandma Rosa, a Teochew nyonya, told me about her early life.

of our being. Faded and disappearing? I think evolved is more like it. As a culture, we have always been adapting and merging and accommodating in order to survive. And so we persist, with honesty and integrity—even when the going gets tough. Our forefathers endured a lot to get here and make a home on a rock, didn't they? Why should we expect our journey to be any less arduous. Let's just get on with it - laugh, argue, work hard, have a party, pray, hold hands, and enjoy all the beautiful things and vummilicious food life has to offer us!

Today, I no longer have doubts. The Baba has recaptured his mojo. •



## growing up in my

BABA RICHARD TAN GETS NOSTALGIC ABOUT HIS COLOURFUL CHILDHOOD IN JOO CHIAT

was born in the mid-1950s and lived most of my childhood days with my paternal grandmother,

Baby Woon Bee Bee, at 175Å, Joo Chiat Road. It was a colourful vicinity comprising a very long street of shophouses where hawkers pushed their carts while *bechas* (trishaws) trundled past shops making umbrellas, repairing bicycles, selling furniture, provisions and a bustling motley of other trades. At night, *bapoks* (transgenders) and bar brawls were commonplace.

In the early 1960s, when black-and-white television came to Singapore, we would carry our wooden bangku (stools) or crates on our heads and plonk them in front of Rediffusion's TV showroom, just to watch our favourite cartoons like Bugs Bunny, Popeye and classics like Lassie, the Lone Ranger, Tarzan, the Little Rascals and more. You can say this was how our young *kampong* (village) spirit started. Soon after, Grandma Baby, whom we called Mama Biru because of a blue marking on her left temple, decided she could afford to sewa (rent) a TV from Rediffusion. Then our home had our own following of kampong kawan kawan (friends) in grandma's TV corner, clashing with the clatter of mahjong tiles and chatty bibiks main cherki (elderly ladies gambling in a popular card game). Mama Biru was the jovial livewire in the extended family. She drank her samsu (rice wine) on the rocks and was a prolific storyteller who became livelier, the more she drank. I am the product of what she was!

As young children, our magical playground was the grubby and sandy back lanes, a haven for playing hide-and-seek amidst the rows of shophouses with spiral staircases. It was truly an age of innocence, ignited by wild imagination and fueled by the old folks warning us about "nanti kena tangkap" (kidnapped) by hantu tetek (big-breasted spirits)! My siblings and I would imagine flying boobies chasing, knocking us out as we ran for our lives, or being squeezed and suffocated to death between two giant mammary glands! Urgh!

#### **INTO THE SPIRIT WORLD**

It was also a time when my early observation of Chinese festivals became more acute as I wandered into the temple grounds behind grandma's home. That was my first brush with the heart-thumping 'cheng tong cheng' drums to herald the 'turun datok' (spirits descending into the human world through mediums in a trance). The drama of wayang pek-ji (Chinese street opera) with the bold theatrical make-up, distinct facial expressions, larger-than-life mimed movements and stylised singing were so strange and yet, so exciting!

In the next lane, in stark contrast, another kind of spirit world prevailed alcoholics who drank *toddy* (fermented coconut wine) behind the Joo Chiat Post Office. By noon, there would be a few dozen of these *mabok mamaks* (drunk Indians) in high spirits as they *lintang pukang*, *terlentang* (sprawled out) in drunken stupor or dozed off by the road side.

As our *embok embok* (elderly Peranakan ladies) would declare, "*Minom sampay tak sedair diri!*" (drink until senseless!). This was also our first scary encounter with indecent exposure. "*Ternampak pisang rajah! Suay sekali!*" (can see their banana (penis)!



A Tan family reunion at Mama Biru's 75<sup>th</sup> birthďay dinner back in 1985. I am the moustachioed young man in red, with a full crop of hair then, standing behind. My father, Dicky Tan Kim Swee, is seated on the left of Mama Biru while my eldest aunty, or Mak Koh Margaret, is seated on the right, with her husband, Tio Tio Jack, standing on the extreme right. My mother, Lucy Ng Gek Choo, is standing behind my father. Standing in the centre, dressed in red, is my youngest aunty, Kochik Amy, who was match-made to Charlie, standing next to her, when she was 40 years old! The others are my younger siblings, from left: Sisters Diana, Susan, Iryn (deceased), younger brother Simon (partially hidden), Cherry (his wife) and Dolly: Standing in front is my nephew, Don, whose mother Daisy is not in the photograph.

## very own joo chiat

bad luck!), lamented our *embok embok*, as they "*sua tentu kala, kalu pi main judi*!" ("would surely lose in gambling").

Come nightfall, a different breed of 'celestial' beings would appear. Right behind our house, an assembly of colourful 'fairies' would prance, sashay their way down the road, and meet up for a fair exchange of grooming and deportment workshops. Comparing their most outrageous lipstick shades and their 'yankiest' outfits, these 'fashion-sista' transgenders were the most notorious, infamous 'Pondan Clan' of Tembeling Road. They gave the bargirls and hookers working in the sleazy bars a run for their money!

As the saying went: "Pua kiri! Pua kanan! Belok kiri, nampak jantan! Belok kanan, jumpa pondan!" ("Turn left, see sex-starved men! Turn right, meet a trannie!)

Joo Chiat was abuzz with delicious street food from push cart hawkers. The Indian mee goreng seller would hit his giant wok loudly with his ladle, "Keng! Keng! Keng!", to notify of his arrival. I can still hear my grand-aunt bibik Touk-Yu (dark black sauce, a nickname), in the middle of her cherki game, lamenting loudly, "Si-jual mee goreng tu, selalu ketok kuali! Lari jerki! Suay sair!" ("That mee goreng seller, he's always knocking his wok! All the luck will run away! How unfortunate!").

#### **BIBIK BUROK**

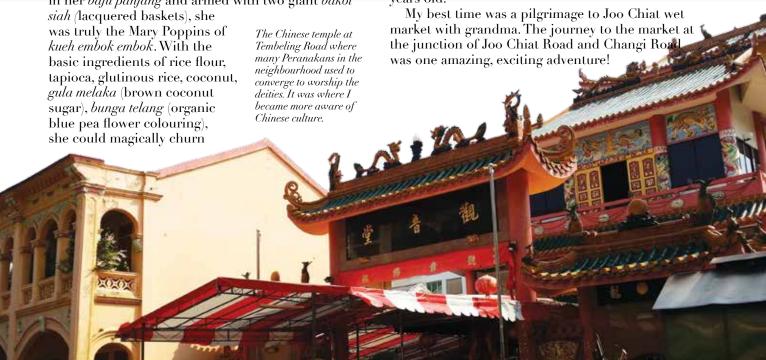
Between grandma's home cooked *makan laok meja* for lunch and dinner was tea time. We knew just when to make our way home and wait in anticipation for the arrival of Bibik Burok (Ugly), the most authentic kueh (dessert) vendor. Dressed in her *baju panjang* and armed with two giant *bakol* 

out delicious *kueh koswee, kueh sarlat, kueh lapis, kueh bengka, ondeh ondeh*, giant *kueh tair* (pineapple tarts) and her legendary seaweed *agar agar* (jelly).

Sometimes, Bibik Burok would even join in a game of cherki or just pegang tangan (stand-in) for a player taking a quick toilet/tea break. Then the joke would be, "Kalu menang, gua punya! Kalu kalah, lu bayar!" (if you win, it's mine. If you lose, it's yours to pay). Who would have imagined that these vivid memories would surface in the hilarious setting and comedy theme for my Wayang Peranakan (theatre) production, 'Bibiks Behind Bars', in 2002!

My favourite late supper vendor was the *kaichok* (chicken porridge) uncle and his pretty daughter, who would appear around 10 pm. They would park their cart in front of the sleazy bar at the corner and go from door to door to take orders. Apparently they also took cubicle to cubicle orders from the bars. Not to miss, my grandma's gambling *kakis* (partners) as well. I can still savour in my mind the aroma of chicken porridge with 'spare parts', gizzards and all.

Come sunrise, our daily routines began. A van would drive up and when the rear door opened, hey presto! a mini-mart appeared. It saved residents from a trip to the Joo Chiat wet market. My fondest memory was drinking chilled fresh milk for breakfast from the bright yellow pyramid-shaped Magnolia tetra-pack. Just snip off the top and push in a straw. Across the road, delivery boys from the provision shop Guan Hoe Soon (before it became a Peranakan restaurant) were all ready with their little 555 notebook to take orders of rice, sugar, canned food and *Tongkat Ah Pek* (Old Man's Walking Stick) *samsu* for grandma. It was her elixir of life and kept her going strong till she was 94 years old.



#### feature

Along the way we would have passed by the open air Lily Cinema. I remember clutching a movie flyer with the 'Akan Datang' (Coming) banner in sepia print. Then with a hop and a skip, I would walk past the brilliantly hued flowers neatly lined along the five-foot-way, below the spiral staircases of shop houses. It was at one of these stairs that my pretty, younger sister Swee Lian was given up for adoption at the tender age of two. Back then, Mum had made us promise never to bring up this subject. But she has mellowed since, wondering how her third child is today. But that is lain cherita (another story for a different time).

#### INTO THE SPIRIT WORLD

Today, this stretch of Joo Chiat Road is so 'dead' in the day time. Back then, it was packed with *mak minahs* (Malay aunties), *bibiks, amahs* (servants) in black-and-white samfoos and street vendors plying local delicacies - an eclectic mix of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Peranakan makan choices! I can still smell the aroma of piping hot, steamed *kueh tutu*; freshly roasted chestnuts and sugary sweet *minchiang kueh*; my favourite *chee cheong fun* with sesame seeds, *chioh-cheng* (soya sauce) and *chilli chuka* (chilli with vinegar); the aroma of the *cheena bak chang* versus the *nyonya kueh chang*; bright orange sugar (*gula pasir*) and freshly grated *kelapa* over the *putu mayam*; ....just endless!

At the wet market, chickens were openly slaughtered and de-feathered. The chicken seller

would give grandma a coin-shaped dog-tag to identify the chicken we picked. Grandma was quite an expert, weaving through the market stalls, in her char-kiak clogs, in a well choreographed journey to buy pork, fish, vegetables, herbs, spices and *rempahs*!

Then it was time to flag down a *becha* (trishaw) to *balek rumah* (return home). Grandma would pass me forty cents to pay the rider. The ride home was going back in reverse, where I could wave goodbye to the vendors and people we saw earlier. I love my childhood days! Maybe it is time for another Peranakan play about "Travels with My Mama".

One of the highlights of my budak days was visiting the Gunong Sayang Association at Ceylon Road. My granduncle, Tay Ang Liang was a regular here. His kaki botol kawan (drinking buddies) would spend the weekend to tohgoh (booze), sing dondang sayang (traditional songs) and joget (local Malay social dance). That was my early exposure to our Peranakan culture in music, song and dance!

I recently took a stroll down memory lane, through the very back lanes and side streets of Joo Chiat that I grew up in. I was completely disoriented and deeply disappointed. Hardly anything from my past had remained. Where we used to live is now a Design Centre. *Dunia sua tak sama!* (the world is no longer the same).

Richard Tan, now 58, remains rooted in the Peranakan culture as a founder-director of The Main Wayang Company:



### BABA DANDY

THE SARONG KEBAYA HAS BEEN GRABBING ALL THE ATTENTION, AND IT IS EASY TO FORGET THAT THE BABAS WERE ALSO LAVISH STYLE-SETTERS. PETER LEE UNEARTHS SOME OLD IMAGES OF DAPPER PERANAKAN MEN, TAKEN IN THE 1860S, AT THE DAWN OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN ASIA.



Tot often could one see in the Dutch East Indies, a Chinese man in a jifu (吉服) or informal dragon robe, of the kind worn by civil officials of the Chinese court. The subject of this 1860s photograph by J.B. Jasper of Semarang is an unknown, but obviously influential local Baba showing off an official robe befitting his rank, which in most likelihood was purchased. It was not uncommon for wealthy merchants in China (especially the south) or the diaspora to pose for a photograph in a jifu without the requisite surcoat or bufu (補服) and rank badge (buzi, 補子), and a bead necklace (chaozhu, 朝珠). His winter court hat (chaoguan, 朝冠) with its feather decoration (lingyu, (劉羽) has a rather tall finial, fashionable in the late Qing dynasty. In the *Indies, wealthy merchants* often flouted sumptuary regulations and had theirs made of gold, and sometimes even set with diamonds, which would have been reserved only for the imperial family. The photograph could easily be mistaken for one taken in China, but hints of the Indies can be seen in the subject's rather Europeanstyle ring worn on the index finger of his left hand, and the crumpled cotton handkerchief in his right hand.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM
THE COLLECTION OF MR AND
MRS LEE KIP LEE.

#### feature

By at least the second half of the nineteenth century the chang pao (長袍), known to the Babas by the Hokkien term tng sah (長衫, long gown), was worn as an expression of leisurely and understated elegance. However it is uncertain if this was a common habit, as there are no known photographs of a Baba snapped outdoors dressed in this manner. This form of dressing is only known through formal painted and photographed portraits, as in this example by

August Sachtler, and the robe, usually made of silk damask, tends to have a simple round collar rather than the mandarin collar, which is a standard feature of the twentieth-century version. Perhaps what is even more engaging in this image, though, is the fretful expression of the girl in the baju panjang, who, hand resting on her head, has clearly been forced to keep still. The dazed-looking child is wearing standard attire for boys of all communities in the nineteenth century: an o-to (襖兜

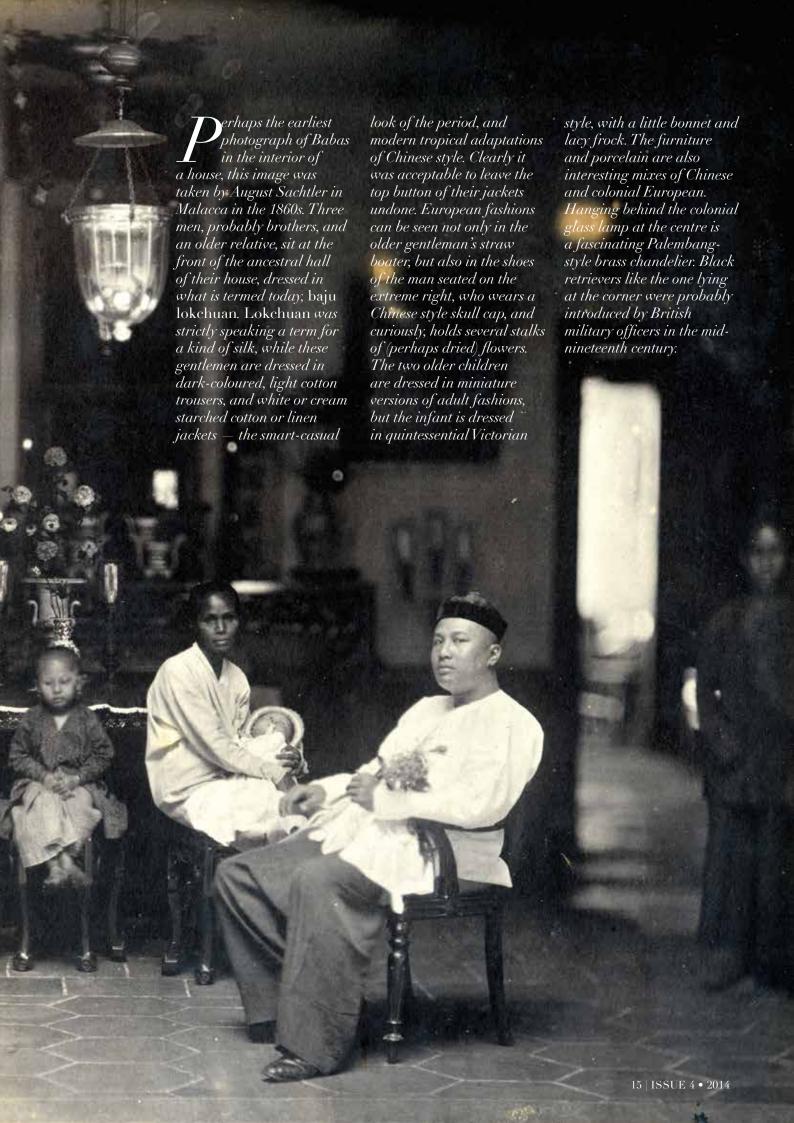
, bib) and nothing else! The o-to was often made of patchwork. This style has an ancient history— even Dutch boys in eighteenth century Batavia dressed in this manner, and it is a word that has crept into the Malay, Indonesian and Javanese language. The combination of the o-to with a pair of Victorian button-up ankle strap leather shoes is a perfect expression of the changing times. The rattan furniture and parasol also announce the modernity of 1860s Singapore.

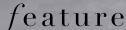


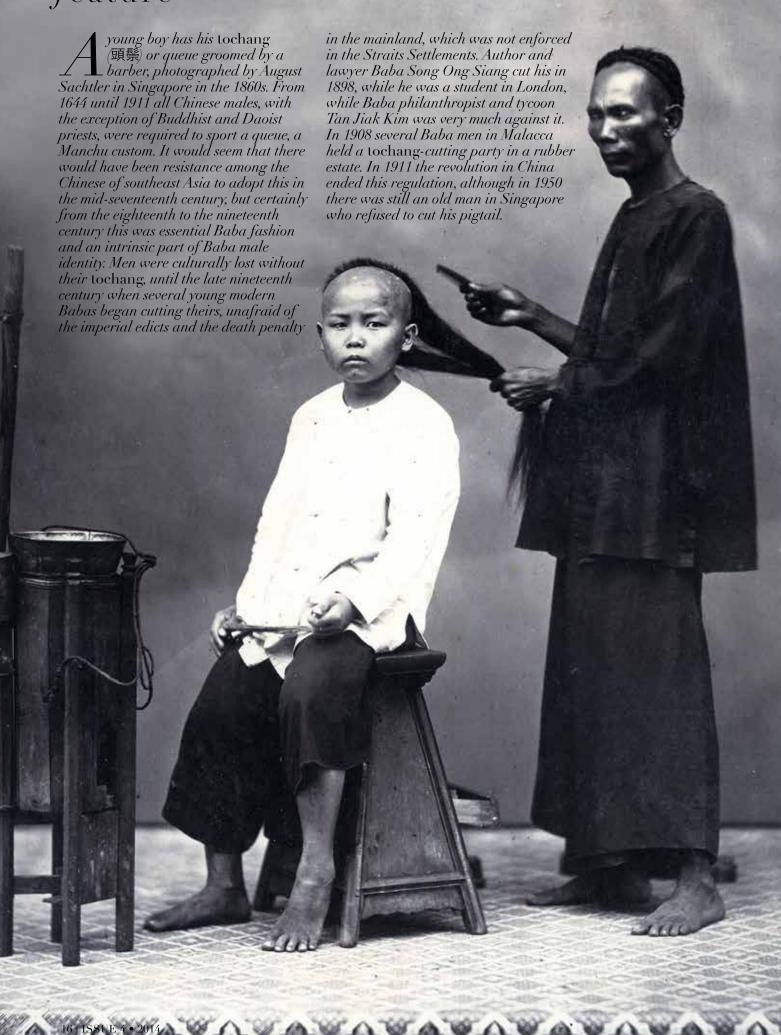
Tineteenth-century Babas loved to layer their tops. This gentleman, photographed by August Sachtler in the 1860s wears three: a dark coloured cotton jacket, a white or light-coloured version under that, and peeking from under the white jacket is a checked top of some sort. It was the fashion at that time to fasten only the topmost button of the outermost jacket, and push aside the opening of the garment to show off the second jacket. Voluminous trousers complete the look. His hair at the back of his head seems intentionally puffed-up for effect, and his tochang (also spelt towchang) or queue is visible down the back of his neck. The real fashion statement, however, is the hat on the table. King Edward VII is credited for starting the fashion for Homburgs, and Katz Brothers only began advertising them for sale in the 1890s. This Baba was clearly ahead of his time!















## the peranakans are received in london

ingapore's *Baba* President Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam and his wife, *Nyonya* Mary Tan were hosted by Queen Elizabeth and The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, while in London on a state visit in October. Dr Tan highlighted the historical links between Singapore and the UK as a strong foundation for the friendship and bilateral cooperation both nations share today. The Queen remarked that she cherished the continued deepening of ties between the United Kingdom and Singapore.

Britain's premier science institution, the Royal Society, conferred the King Charles II medal on Dr Tan for his role in furthering scientific research, while the Queen, in her turn, wore the Order of Temasek sash and star which she received during her 1972 visit to Singapore at the state banquet that evening. Above: Prince Philip, Nyonya Mary Tan, Queen Elizabeth II and Baba President Tony Tan Keng Yam.

Next page, left: The state banquet given in honour of President and Mrs Tony Tan.

Next page, right: President and Mrs Tony Tan are welcomed by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

Next page, bottom right: President Tony Tan and Queen Elizabeth II at the state banquet.





Courtesy of Ivan Heng

# the *kebaya*goes to buckingham palace

arlier in October, the new High Commissioner for Singapore, Her Excellency Foo Chi Hsia, did Peranakan culture proud when she presented her credentials to Queen Elizabeth II dressed elegantly in a *sarong kebaya* complete with *manek* heels.

This photograph issued by the Palace made it to the Royals page of an online fashion/humour magazine, registering some 10,000 hits!

(http://www.gofugyourself.com/royals-round-up-october-10th-2014-10-2014/credentials-presented-to-queen-elizabeth-ii-at-buckingham-palace-4). The sarong kebaya was specially designed by our own Main Committee member, Baba Raymond Wong. •

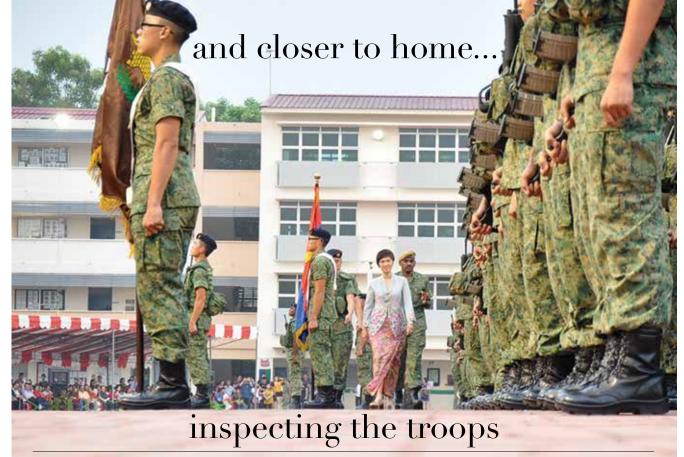




Above: A regal moment with Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace on 10 October 2014.

Left: High Commissioner Foo Chi Hsia feeds a horse enroute to meet the Queen.

Courtesy of the British Monarchy



his contrasting shot of the *kebaya* amidst a parade of fatigues, although taken two years ago, recently went its rounds on facebook to favourable reviews. The captivating moment took place on 21 September, 2012, when Mrs Josephine Teo, Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport, presented a picture of femininity in her *sarong kebaya* as she inspected a Combined Arms Specialist Cadet Graduation Parade at Pasir Laba Camp.





#### **Gavin Gareth Chan**

Gavin is passionate about everything to do with community and culture. He is active in grassroots work and began helping out at our association for the Peranakan Festival in 2009 where he also wrote a report covering the Festival for this magazine. Gavin has graciously agreed to play a key role as a liaison between the association and various community organisations. We are fortunate to have him on the Main

The Peranakan Magazine (TPM): I think many of us first felt that we were different when we interacted with our peers at school. Do you have any memories to share?

**Bryan:** I knew I was different from a very young age. My maternal grandmother who still lives in Malacca was a huge influence she speaks patois and in true matriarchal style, "imposed" her presence everywhere she went. I've lived in Katong for over 20 years, and studied at Maris Stella Primary School, which has Catholic roots. So I've had the benefit of some elements of "Peranakan-ness", but also tempered with the more "Chinese" roots from my father, who is Hainanese.

Raymond: I first studied at Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Primary School and the medium of instruction was English, but then transferred to

The young babas. From left: Raymond, Bryan, Emeric (for TPM), Zan and Gavin.

## baba

#### YOUNGER BABAS REFLECT ON THEIR PERANAKAN IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY SINGAPORE

#### Raymond Wong

Raymond is no stranger to our members. He majored in Accounting and Finance and is a Director of Rumah Kim Choo. His love for art, however, has propelled him to become renowned for his skills at embroidery and creating customised kebayas. Raymond is passionate about respectfully interpreting Peranakan culture for a contemporary audience. He joins us as a new Main Committee member.

> They'll say, "This is the food I ate at home growing up..."

Zan lives and breathes food.

formative years were spent in

the kitchen where he picked

up a love of cooking from his

mother. This third-generation

Baba has since launched his

own eatery, O'nya Sayang, at

Tampines. Zan is a new Main

Committee member. Check

out his recipes for a great

Peranakan-inspired meal in

this issue's Dalam Dapor.

His family run Dulukala, a

Peranakan restaurant. His

**Gavin:** But do they complain that it's still different from their mom's cooking?

**Zan:** Oh, always!

**Gavin:** That's the thing about Peranakan food every family's recipes are different.

**Zan:** Actually, this is a problem that's facing our culture. None of the family recipes were written down.

**Bryan:** My family totally lost the skill of cooking for a bit. My grandmother didn't "impose" any recipes upon my mother; instead, she encouraged my mom to study and called her a bookworm. So my mom didn't bother learning to cook. When our maid left, my mom started cooking some Chinese dishes that my dad preferred simpler to prepare than Peranakan dishes, I'm sure!

**Gavin:** I think many of our families face the same problem. Our parents' generation were

so focussed on education, productivity and being "modern" that they didn't pick up many skills from their parents, and now the younger generation is becoming aware of this generation gap that we have to cross in order to access our roots.

**Raymond:** We can take a twopronged approach. First, at home, families have to start consciously transmitting culture to their children, and then at school, programmes can be implemented to make students more culturally aware.

**TPM:** Peranakan culture is in fact a good entry-point since it contains elements of Singapore's different cultures. In fact, another one of our new Main Committee members is Kevin Aeria, and he is both Peranakan and Eurasian and will be our coordinator for any events that involve both TPAS and the Eurasian Association, of which he is also a member.

Gavin: It wasn't a conscious thing back in the old days all the ladies, irrespective of race, would don kebayas without thinking, "This is or isn't my culture..."

**TPM:** So it is our responsibility now to document the culture one way is to write down what we can, such as recipes.

Raymond: We can also take a leaf from other countries. Besides museums, culture can actually be a profitable resource. The Koreans, for example, have interpreted the silhouette of a hanbok into a tight bandeau that flares out with a bubble skirt! It is new, but recognisably Korean in terms of shape. Why can't younger Peranakans do the same with our rich material culture?

**Gavin:** Definitely. It is our job to evolve and forge a way forward. •

Kong Hwa (founded by Tan Lark Sye), which is a Hokkien Huay Kuan-managed school where the emphasis on Mandarin was strong. Language problems aside, I was able to relate well as the value system in a Peranakan family and those of Chinese culture align quite well. All my brothers also entered Kong Hua, so we have a great appreciation of the more Chinese elements in Peranakan culture. Nonetheless, we often failed at Mandarin!

**Gavin:** Yes, all of us relied on tuition! (Nods all round.)

**TPM:** Let's turn to another area that we all love food! Zan, maybe you can tell us how you started since this is your passion...

**Zan:** I like to go marketing and then experiment in the kitchen. I've had about five years' worth of experimenting...fine-tuning all the Peranakan recipes for myself, before I started O'nya Sayang. At the restaurant, it is also heartening to see more young people nowadays who proclaim their Peranakan identity, and they in turn bring their friends along for a hearty meal.

## a peranakan new year euchari

CELEBRATING PERANAKAN MASS AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY FAMILY IN KATONG



#### TPM: Fr Damian, how many Roman Catholic churches in Singapore celebrate Peranakan Mass?

FD: Holy Family is today the only Roman Catholic church in Singapore which conducts the Mass Sambot Kepala Taon Baru (Peranakan Mass), always on the Eve of the Lunar New Year. This tradition was started here about 32 years ago by the late Father Alfred Chan, a Baba, who was then the parish priest at Holy Family. Before Father Chan was called to the Lord in June 2013, Blessed Sacrament Church at Commonwealth Drive in Queenstown also celebrated Peranakan Mass only at Easter. After he passed on, it stopped. At Holy Family, however, by default, I took over the Chinese New Year Eve Mass from Fr Chan. I was assisting him at the time as I could speak Baba Malay. Now I hope to get another Peranakan priest to celebrate the Mass with me. There are a few Peranakan priests Fr Ignatius Yeo, Fr Adrian Yeo, Fr Valerian Cheong and Fr Jacob Ong, to name a few. There is also Fr Bernard Wee. But he is now studying in Rome.

TPM: How many people in total attend this very special New Year Eve's Peranakan Mass every year? Has there Reverend Fr Damian De Wind felt from a very young age that God had a purpose for him. He wrote in the Roman Catholic publication of the Serra Club of Singapore, 'Called & Chosen': "... when I was in secondary school (St Patrick's)...I knew deep down in my heart God had a mission plan for me." Father Damian was raised by prayerful and devout Catholic parents. His maternal grandmother was a nyonya and grandfather was from England. As a young boy born and raised in the Telok Kurau neighbourhood, he learnt to speak patois from his mother, aunties and uncles. He also learnt to cook dishes like buah keluak, kueh paiti and other Peranakan food. Father Damian does not have time nowadays to cook his favourite Peranakan dishes. He is one of three priests in the Church of The Holy Family at Chapel Road, off East Coast Road, ministering to a parish of over 8,500 parishioners. Baba Colin Chee and Nyonya Linda Chee met up with Father Damian (FD) recently to talk about the Peranakan Mass, in an interview with the Peranakan Magazine (TPM).



#### been a decline in the number of worshippers?

FD: We start the Peranakan Mass at 11 pm on New Year's Eve so that by midnight we all get to sing Auld Lang Syne and conclude with the blessing and distribution of oranges. We have not changed this format, which is also closely tied in to our Liturgy. Every year, we have consistently had between 500 to 600 people. Always a mix of Peranakans and even Eurasians. Holy Family is made up of predominantly Eurasians and Peranakans. They understand or even speak *bahasa* and Baba Malay. So, there has been no observed

decline in numbers. In fact, it may be growing along with the rest of the church. Holy Family's catechism classes alone has about 850 children and youth. There is also catechism classes taught by Baba Andrew Goh in *bahasa*, Baba Malay and dialects to the elderly.

#### TPM: How is the Mass celebrated?

FD: We have a Peranakan group called the *Kompolan Peranakan Gereja Holy Family* that organises the Mass. The group provides a choir, the organist, the choir master and plans the celebration right down to setting up the traditional

stic celebration

Peranakan prayer altar. This altar has two tall red candles supported on two Chinese brass candle stands, a *chanap* (used in important ceremonies such as weddings and Chinese New Year prayers) as the centre piece, fruits like the banana which symbolizes abundance and pomelos which, pronounced in Chinese sounds like "again". At the end of the mass, we sing popular songs which have been revised to give a flavour of the occasion. For example, Rasa Sayang Eh! was adapted to become Rasa Sayang Selamat Taon Baru, and many more.

#### TPM: What would be the typical age and gender profiles of Holy Family's congregation?

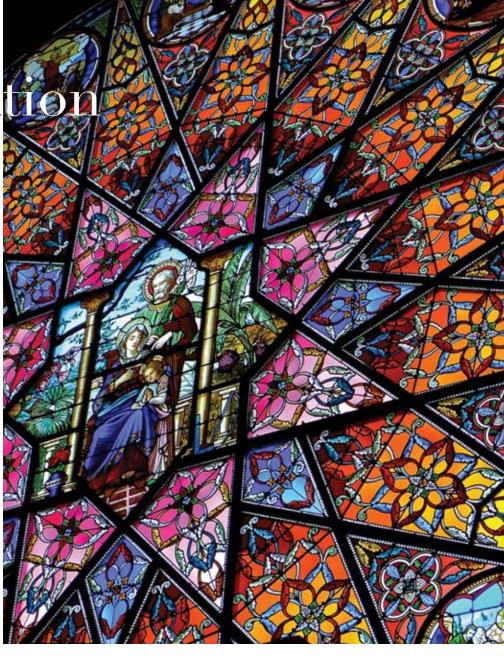
FD: There is a balanced age and gender profile. Culturally, this has not changed much from the predominantly Eurasian and Peranakan parishioners to ethnic Chinese and Indians and many others. I have served for about three years and our daily morning 6.15 am congregation has always been about 90 to 100 people. Evenings are more crowded. While we have the once-a-year Peranakan Mass on Chinese New Year's Eve, we have weekly Masses in other languages like Indonesian, Tagalog, Korean, French and German, to name a few in our other churches.

#### TPM: Why have a Peranakan Mass at all?

FD: The Catholic Church has always been inclusive. Embracing the local culture is part of our inculturalisation process. We learn the customs of the local people and try to Christianise them. The language of worship may be different but always, always, the Liturgy is the same.

## TPM: How different is the Peranakan patois Mass from the normal English language Mass?

FD: No difference really. They both



follow the same Liturgy except the language and the liturgical environment, for example, the traditional prayer altar.

## TPM: Are the Peranakan congregation more pantang than the others that the church has to be more sensitive to?

FD: No lah. But other non-Peranakans seem more *pantang*. Like not having the funeral on the even days, for example, the 4th day and not having weddings during the 7th or ghost month. Catholics, Peranakans or Chinese, we can also burn joss sticks when showing respect to their ancestors. We make a distinction between showing respect versus worshipping. Some of our Catholic churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Vietnam

all use joss sticks and candles in their premises. In Singapore it is more difficult because we are a very multi-racial congregation.

#### TPM: Do you see a future for Holy Family's Peranakan Mass?

FD: Yes, as long as we see parents or grandparents bringing their children or grandchildren to the Mass. Many of them proudly wear their sarong kebayas and batik shirts. I do feel therefore that the Mass will carry on and it won't be so *jelak*(surfeit) because we do not have it every week. And with Baba Peter Wee's (who is President of The Peranakan Association Singapore) beautiful Peranakan treasures used for Mass as part of our worship to our Lord, it lends the Peranakan Mass a more authentic and real Peranakan atmosphere.

dalam dapor

## all in the family baba zan ho is a young peranakan cook with a mission



started cooking because my grandmother and mother opened Dulukala restaurant at Beauty World Centre in 1999, when I was 17 years old. I was helping around the restaurant and became very interested in learning more. The ingredients, methods, taste and all the skills required to get a good dish on the table fascinated me.

Learning the basics of good cooking is very important. I was taught everything I needed to know in great detail and it has allowed me to create my own variations of Peranakan-inspired dishes. I think Peranakan food and cooking are amazing because we have the influence of so many different cultures. Peranakan cooking bundles a wide range of ingredients and techniques into one cuisine. The art is very tough to learn, but the returns make it all worthwhile. I freely admit I still have a long, long way to go before getting anywhere near as good as my mother and grandmother! I am still persevering.

Since taking over the restaurant business in 2008, after graduating from university, I have been fully committed to running our restaurants. While Dulukala serves traditional cuisine, O'nya Sayang at Tampines Mall has more fusion Peranakan fare. We are opening another O'nya Sayang at Paya Lebar Square in November. Work is seven days a week, 12 hours a day! There is little time for anything else. My mornings are spent in the office on business administration while evenings require all hands on deck to man the outlets.



Zan Ho, 31, likes to create dishes with a Peranakan twist.

I make it a point to be very involved in the kitchen. My priority is to maintain food quality and also invest some time in culinary experimentation. I am inspired by many different kinds of food including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Burmese and Thai. I try to listen and understand the palates of the younger generation. Knowing what they like means I can create dishes with a Peranakan twist to match.

It will always be my goal to spread Peranakan culture to the young. The easiest way to do that is to first attract them through food. In this mission, we have to succeed or the culture will fade away.

Here are some contemporary Peranakan-inspired recipes that I hope readers would enjoy trying out at home. Except for Chendol ice cream, none of the others are in our menus!

#### **KELUAK FRIED RICE**

1 tbsp *keluak* paste (see below)

1 tbsp sambal belachan (see below)

3 tbsp oil

1 egg, beaten

1 handful fresh prawns

1 tsp minced garlic

2 cupfuls cooked rice

1 chicken breast, boiled and shredded

½ handful cubed onions

1 red and 1 green chilli, sliced

½ tsp salt

1 tbsp soya sauce

Spring onions and parsley, for garnish

#### Keluak paste

1 kg *buah keluak* 50g sugar 50g fresh prawns

#### Sambal belachan

80g sun-dried fresh red chillies

35g belachan 10g sugar 1 chilling di Aind's suga

1 chilli padi (bird's eye chilli)

#### Method

Soak the *buah keluak* for at least 3 days to soften the flesh inside. Break open the *keluak* nut and scoop out the flesh. Grind the flesh with the sugar and prawns.

Grind the *sambal belachan* ingredients into a paste.

Mix the *keluak* paste with the *sambal belachan* and set aside. Heat the oil in a wok and stir fry the egg quickly. Add the prawns, garlic, rice, shredded chicken and *keluak* paste and mix well. Stir in the onions and sliced chillies. Add the salt and soya sauce. Garnish with chopped spring onions and Chinese parsley and serve.

#### ASAM PEDAS (SOUR AND SPICY) WITH CRAB TANG HOON (VERMICELLI)

300g rempah (see below)

6 tbsp cooking oil

20g *asam* (tamarind) paste, mixed with 1 litre of water

5 pieces asam skin

2 -3 *lemo perot* (leprous lime) leaves, sliced finely

1 tbsp sliced *bunga kantan* (torch ginger flower)

5 tbsp sugar

1 tbsp salt

6 ladies fingers, sliced broadly

1 brinjal, sliced into segments

1 Sri Lankan crab, steamed for 7-8 minutes

1 handful *tang hoon* (vermicelli) soaked till soft in cold water

Rempah (ground spice paste) 1 kg shallots 100g garlic

#### dalam dapor

75g belachan 500g lengkuas (blue ginger) 75g serai (lemon grass) 80g buah keras (candlenut) 45g ginger 150g dried chilli powder

#### Method

Grind the *rempah* ingredients, except for the dried chilli powder, finely into a paste. Heat the oil in a wok and cook the *rempah* over low heat for 1 hour. Add the chilli powder, mix well and continue cooking over low heat for another half an hour. Set aside.

To prepare the asam pedas sauce, remove the asam seeds from the water. Add 100g of cooked rempah and mix well. Add the asam skin and the lemo perot leaves. Bring the mixture to boil and add the bunga kantan, sugar and salt to taste. Add the ladies fingers and brinjal. Boil the mixture for about 10 minutes till fragrant.

Transfer the crab from the steamer to a plate and spread the softened tang hoon over the crab. Pour the asam sauce over the crab. Serve immediately.



syrup Rich coconut ice cream Chendol (green rice flour jelly noodles) Boiled kidney beans

#### Method

Melt the gula Melaka in a little water over a slow fire. Leave to cool completely or chill in the refrigerator. This can be prepared in advance. You can buy the fresh chendol from the wet market.

In a glass bowl, put one scoop of coconut ice tbsp of gula Melaka. Serve immediately.

#### **BANDUNG ICE CREAM SODA**

Rose syrup Ice cream soda Vanilla ice cream

#### Method

Mix one part rose syrup with six parts soda in a tall glass. Add ice and top off with one scoop of vanilla ice cream. Add more ice cream to make it a float. Serve immediately.



#### baba sedia! (attention!)

BABA BRYAN TAN SPENDS AN EVENING WITH THE PERANAKAN SIBLINGS



The chorus and the cast of Anak Mak Satu.

nak Mak Satu is a quaint, tongue-in-cheek production. It touches on the perennial issues of single-child families and their particularly Singaporean struggle when the boy has to enlist into National Service (NS).

The story centres on a fiery matriarch, Nya Nellie (Irene Ong), her only son Jason (Ivan Choong) and

their relatives. There is much worry during Chinese New Year, which falls just before Jason's enlistment. Nellie's relatives wonder if Jason will survive the harsh army training and continue the family legacy. They debate all manner of ways to 'pull strings' or come up with excuses to prevent Jason from enlisting, in the process displaying the typical ignorance of older folk who know nothing about NS.

Desperate to ensure the future of the eldest sister's family, the younger relatives of Nya Nellie seek out a quack fortune teller, curiously named International (Sharon Frese) and her partner-in-crime Francis (Joe Moereira) to divine Jason's fate in the army and if he would be able to survive it. The show culminates in the scene where Jason is visited by his grandmother's ghost, who assures him that she is confident of his ability to come

out a stronger man, both physically and mentally.

Performed mainly in English, the scenes showcased a smattering of patois dialogue and featured musical numbers performed by the *Peranakan Siblings Chorus*. Irene Ong is resplendent as the matriarch with her commanding demeanour and is well flanked by her younger sisters, supporting

actresses Ko Besair (Eldest Aunty, played by Irene Ooi) and Ko Kechik (Youngest Aunty, played by Jasmine Koh). Apart from the Chorus, actor Ivan Choong also showed off his classical training and singing chops.

However, it was *Bibik Lemak* (Francis Hogan) who stole the show as a befuddled *bibik* selling *nasi lemak* with her *gelek buntot (sashaying)* and bimbotic one-liners, along with Yati (Reggie), Nya Nellie's

esair. gregarious maid, who took every opportunity to punctuate dialogues with satirical jibes. Chris Lim, who plays Susan, Jason's rather large and immature younger cousin, also added much comedic punch to the cast.

Anak Mak Satu is a convivial show which is sure to pique the interest of non-Peranakan viewers as well as remind the current generation of Peranakans of their rich and colourful heritage.



Nya Nellie (middle), with her sisters Ko Kechik (left) and Ko Besair.

#### of heartbreak and healing

BABA BRYAN TAN EXPERIENCES AN EVENING OF EMOTIONS AT BIJI MATA MAK

It is a real treat to have granny over from Malacca. So I decided to spend quality time with her. And what better way to foster bonding than to attend a Peranakan play, just bibik and her chuchu?

Mama has a rather awkward tendency of falling asleep in odd places, and I desperately hoped she would not start snoring





loudly in the middle of a scene in *Biji Mata Mak*, produced by the Gunong Sayang Association. It was written by Baba Henry Tan 25 years ago and adapted by Baba Frederick Soh for this latest GSA play.

I spent much of the time craning my neck trying to read the subtitles while the scenes played out. Granny however, enjoyed the show immensely while watching the cast deliver their lines in fluent patois.

Centered on Bibik Bong Neo (Kelvin Tan), the play explores the struggles of a beleaguered Peranakan stepmother and her ingrate son, set in post-war Singapore. Bibik Bong Neo's beloved stepson Freddy is getting married, and she secretively gets her ditzy household helper, Ah Foon (Lee Yong Meng), to go to the pawnshop to exchange her jewelry for money in order to fund the wedding. The pawning of jewelry then was frowned upon as 'losing face', especially by wealthier relatives, and was only done as a last resort.

However, Freddy (Eugene Tay) proceeds with his wedding without Bong Neo's involvement and abruptly moves from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur with his wife Swee Neo (Ameline Goh), angered that his mother was unable to cough up the sum of \$10,000 which he requested.

Bong Neo finds herself in a desperate situation: Abandoned, she sells the house and departs to search The 25-year-old family drama, written by Baba Henry Tan, makes a return to the stage in an adaptation by Baba Frederick Soh (standing, third from left). The play was directed by Tony Quek (fourth from left).

Left: The drama follows the plight of the beleaguered Bibik Bong Neo (in picture, left), played with much pathos by Kelvin Tan. for her son in Kuala Lumpur on the pretext of finding a job. The action reaches a climax when Bong Neo is hired as a cook and maid in the house of her son's in-laws, who are immensely wealthy. Freddy eventually discovers her presence and throws a massive fit, casting her out of the house.

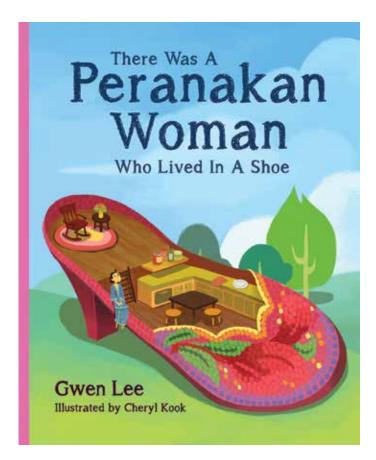
Distraught and overwhelmed, Bong Neo returns to Singapore to live with her former help, Ah Foon. Bong Neo's sisters-in-law (Cynthia

Lee, Audrey Tan and Christina Wee) discover her plight, and chastise Freddy when he comes to visit for Chinese New Year. They manage to guilt him into reconciling with his long-suffering stepmother, who by then has become blind from grief, resulting in a tearful union for the entire family.

With much pathos, *Biji Mata Mak* captures the idiosyncrasies and foibles of a Peranakan household - right down to the lingo and mannerisms, giving the play an intimate and authentic feel. The sets accurately depicted the post-war period, sliding in and out seamlessly between scenes.

Kelvin shines in his role as matriarch Bibik Bong Neo, alongside cast members Yong Meng as Ah Foon and Matthew Chen as Ah Mui, who provided superb comedic relief. Nya Besair, Nya Bong Soo and Nya Tengah (Cynthia, Audrey and Christina) executed the roles of assertive and *kaypoh* matriarchs perfectly, and Agnes (Adriana Tanubrata) was a delightful breath of fresh air with her vibrant acting chops.

Exiting the Drama Centre, I asked Mama if she enjoyed the play, relieved she had stayed awake. She bobbed her head slightly, which I took to be a yes, before whispering in my ear, "You are Mama's *biji mata*, know or not?" •



#### there was a peranakan woman who lived in a shoe

BABA COLIN CHEE TAKES DELIGHT IN THIS BOOK OF RHYMES BY GWEN LEE

This is a colourful book of 14 well-illustrated and localised nursery rhymes. They may all sound strangely familiar to you. But that is because author Gwen Lee has cleverly adapted into Singapore's cultural vernacular, traditional English rhymes that I learnt to recite as a primary school boy when children in Singapore sang *God Save the Queen* at assembly!

The most obviously Peranakan adaptation is her interpretation of the *Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe....* 

"She made so many nyonya kueh,

She didn't know what to do..."

Amusing rhymes indeed, with stunning and interestingly detailed illustrations by Cheryl Kook, to keep your kids, and even you, glued to the pages from cover to cover.

Published by Epigram. Available at good bookstores.

## A Peranakan Heritage Boutique ~ where many a nyonya's craft, cuisine & fashion flourishes

CLASSES FOR 2014 - 2015

. Beading on Velvet . 3-D beading . Threaded beadwork . Canvas-Stitching

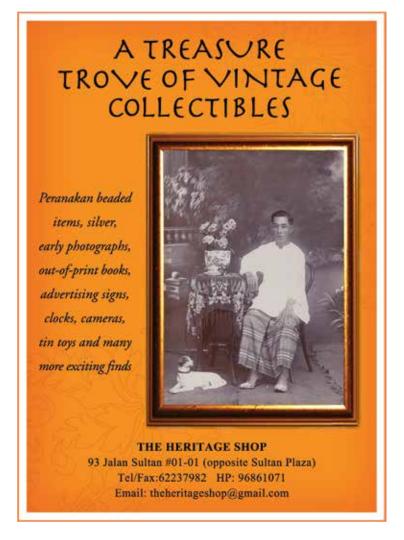


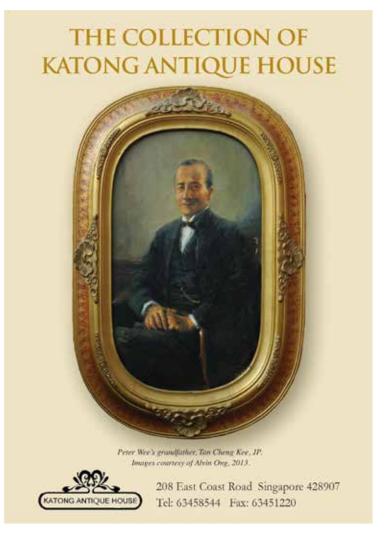
## ikebana goes peranakan baba emeric lau gets some floral flair

The black-and-white bungalow that houses the Japan Creative Centre was recently transformed into a small Peranakan gallery complete with antique lacquer-ware, pottery, costumes, beautiful sarongs, beaded shoes, belts, batik and furniture. These items created a special ambience for the 5-day Ikebana exhibition organised by Japan Creative Centre (a wing of the Embassy of Japan) in collaboration with Ikebana International Singapore Chapter 135 (IISC135).

Ikebana is the Japanese art of flower arranging and IISC135 is one of over 200 chapters of Ikebana International, Tokyo that promotes the art of Ikebana through its motto "friendship through flowers".

Different schools teach different styles of Ikebana. In Singapore, the members and teachers are largely from the Sogetsu, Ohara, Ikenobo, Ryusei-Ha and Ichiyo schools.





#### a trip through time

BABA KEVIN AERIA FINDS HIS PERANAKAN AND EURASIAN ROOTS IN MALACCA

🐧 ome 40 Peranakans and Eurasians came together for the first time to embark on a journey to find our common roots in Malacca from 15 to 17 August, 2014, organized by our respective associations.

**Visiting the Portuguese Settlement on the second** day was exciting. The Malacca Portuguese Eurasian Association (MPEA) President, Michael Singho, brought us around the settlement to give an insight into the lifestyle of the residents there. He explained the phases the houses went through from time the Portuguese arrived in the 15th century to the present day. From wood to brick, living standards improved through time.

During the trip, we realised the Eurasians and the Peranakans share many similar traits. For example,

the word *kebaya* originated from *cabaya*, a Portuguese garment for women. More than a century ago, they were mostly deep blue and decorated with lace and embroidery. The Peranakans adapted and made their kebayas very colourful, which has become iconic of the culture.

The dishes at lunch at the settlement revealed more commonalities. These included the chicken dish the Eurasians call curry debal (devil); the braised pork delicacy called sebak; sambal binagri, which is fried cincaru fish, another Peranakan favourite; and kangkong lemak with sweet potatoes.

We were fortunate to have good weather while walking through the village, meeting and greeting the friendly locals living there. Our group had a very comfortable stay at the new King's Green Hotel

> where we attended the Melodians' Charity Outreach Dinner & Dance.

This joint trip organized by the Eurasian Association and The Peranakan Association Singapore is only the first. We plan for more joint events in the future.



The group in Malacca. Front row: To the right of TPAS President Peter Wee is the Malacca Portuguese Eurasian Association (MPEA) President, Michael Singho.

#### who is a chetti melaka?

BABA DAVID BOK REPORTS ON THE FIRST CHETTI MELAKA SYMPOSIUM

The event

crowd of local culture lovers

Heritage Board

Malacca, Kuala

Lumpur and

Perth.

as well as overseas participants from

The Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indian) Singapore held its first symposium at the Ngee Ann Auditorium, Asia Civilizations Museum on Saturday 4 October.

The symposum's theme "The Lost Tribe of Chetti Melaka - Who Are We?" was introduced with a short Chetti Melaka history by Ryna Mahindapala, a young teacher. It was followed by a discussion on challenges faced by other diaspora communities, led by Lee Su



Kim representing the Chinese Peranakans, Farish Noor of the Jawi Peranakans, VP Nair from GOPIO (Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin), and K Narayanasamy from Malaysia, author of the first sociological study of the community done in 1967.

Gerald Pillay, the keynote presenter, proposed that a person is a Chetti Melaka because he is born or adopted into the Chetti Melaka community. He also added that while all Chetti Melaka are Peranakan Indians, not all Peranakan Indians are Chetti Melaka. The core features of the community are its Tamil ancestry, mixed Indian-Malay-Chinese ancestry,

and its origin in Malacca. Three other variable features are its social  $attracted\ a\ full$ customs, Hindu religion and Malay mother tongue. including officials from the National

There are about 50 Chetti Melaka families in Malacca, another 50 in the rest of West Malaysia, mainly in Kuala Lumpur, and 50 in Singapore. A few more live in Australia, the US and Canada.

#### PERANAKAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE REGION

#### SINGAPORE

#### The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS)

Raffles City PO Box 1640, Singapore 911755 Contact: Peter Wee, President Email: peterwee@peranakan.org.sg Tel: 65 6345 8544 Website: peranakan.org.sg

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Email: gunongsayang@hotmail.com Fax: 65 6441 1569 Website: gunongsayang.com

#### Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indians) Singapore 5001 Beach Road #08-09

5001 Beach Road #08-09 Golden Mile Complex Singapore 199588 Contact: Mr Pono Kalastree Office: 6297 1229 Mobile: 9678 1767

#### MALAYSIA MALACCA Persatuan Peranakan Cina Malaysia

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2.) Lee Yuen Thien, Hon.Secretary
(yuenthien@gmail.com)
Facebook: Persatuan Peranakan Cina
Malaysia

#### Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka

149, Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (Heeren Street), 75200 Melaka Contact: Ms Chin Siok Hoon, PJK (Hon Secretary) Email: admin@ppcm-melaka.org

Website: www.ppcm-melaka.org Tel: 012 6218 909 Fax: 06 2837 215 To contact the President Datuk Phus

To contact the President, Datuk Phua Jin Hock, please email phuajh@gmail. com.

#### PENANG

#### State Chinese (Penang) Association / Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang

Pinang 13, Perak Road President: Datuk Tan Gin Soon Contact: 604-2269560 Email: ginsoon@hotmail.com

#### KUALA LUMPUR & SELANGOR Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor (PPBNKLS)

63 Jalan Telawi, Bangsar Baru, 59100, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Contact: Cedric Tan, Hon Secretary Email: peranakan\_kl@yahoo.com.my Tel: +6012-3151451 Website: peranakan-kl.org To contact the President, Dr Lee Su Kim, please email sukim25@ vahoo.com.

#### KELANTAN Association of Peranakan Chinese,

Lot 2344 Kampong Wakaf Stan, Kubang Kopian

Kerian, 16150 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia Contact: Law Awang Tel: 609-7652261 Mobile: 012-9815688

Email: law\_awang@yahoo.com

#### Thai Peranakan Association

61 Satul Road, Muang District, Phuket 83000, Thailand Contacts: Dr Kosol Taenguthai at

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#### Association of Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia

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#### AUSTRALIA MELBOURNE

#### Peranakan Association Australia Inc

P.O. Box 1278, Hawksburn, Victoria, Australia 3142 Contacts: Joseph Then, Secretary, at email j.then@bigpond.com or Ivy Lee Gek Kim, newsletter editor, at email gekkiml@yahoo.co.uk. Website: www.peranakan.org.au.

#### SYDNEY Peranakan Association Australia (PAA) New Lea

NSW Inc P O Box 3810, Marsfield, NSW 2122 Australia Contact: Evelyn Tan, President Website: peranakanaustralia.org Email: evelyn.peranakan@gmail.com

#### WELCOME

#### A warm welcome to our new members!

- 1. Mrs Jenny ChewWong Ying
- 2. Ms Choy Sui-Lan
- 3. Ms Hee Yoke Chee
- 4. Ms Jennifer Hoe
- 5. Mdm Angela Kek
- 6. Mdm Catherine Khoo

DETAILS

- 7. Mdm Leow Chin Lee
- 8. Mr Loo Kiang Hong
- 9. Mdm Elena Ng
- 10. Mrs Yvonne Gladys Oliveiro
- 11. Mr Eugene LA Tan
- 12. Ms Joanne Zhang

#### UPDATING MEMBERS'

TPAS is updating all members' mailing addresses and contact details to enable efficient delivery of the magazine and to keep members informed of coming events. Do expect a call from an association representative for the update. Better still, we would greatly appreciate if you could kindly send an email to the Secretariat at secretariat@peranakan.org.sg. Please indicate your name as per membership/gender/current address/telephone contact and email address. Thank You!

# JAN TAN & CHAN ADVOCATES & SOLICITORS COMMISSIONER FOR OATHS NOTARY PUBLIC SOCR Jan Tan & Chan Provides advice and representation in the law of Contracts, Estates, Trust, Wills, Family & Commercial Litigation. We offer corporate secretarial and oath services.

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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.

#### Auspicious Designs: Batik for Peranakan Altars

A special exhibition featuring highlights of a collection of batik tokwis, or altar cloths, from a recent donation by Matthew and Alice Yapp. From 10 April 2014 to 25



January 2015. The 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 sireh sets, as well as the magnificent carved wood hearse of Tan Jiak Kim, which is considered one of the 11 Treasures of the National Museum. National Museum of Singapore, 93 Stamford Road, Tel: 63323659, Opening Hours: 10am to 6pm Daily (Singapore History Gallery), 10am to 9pm Daily (Singapore Living Galleries), Admission \$10 (adults), \$5 (senior citizens above 60), \$5 (students, Nsmen), Free admission to the Singapore Living Galleries from 6pm to 9pm. http://nationalmuseum.sg.



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 to end-January 2015.

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.

## 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.

#### Amov Street and Telok Aver 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.

## the life cycle of a baba

BABA BRYAN TAN PEEKS IN ON THE YEOWS...

A tight years of age, Willie Yeow was quite a normal Baba, perhaps in the most traditional sense. He was faithful to his wife, unlike his friends, who were usually never satisfied with just one. Maybe he could have had, but being the chief clerk in Telekom did not afford him much leisure or money to pursue much else other than the occasional game of gin rummy.

He went to church assiduously; twice a week on weekends and during weekday lunch hours for afternoon mass when his work load permitted it. He would often chant his trademark refrain to his wife: God is good, but only as long as you attended mass!

He often thought fondly of his younger days, when his father was also a civil servant of impeccable standing, and the times when he had to hide the family jewels and heirlooms from his mother, a most prolific *cherki* gambler, to prevent her from pawning them off to satisfy her most uncatholic-like urges.

Just the thought of it made him reach for his rosary, may her soul rest in eternal peace. The only reason why the valuable antiques, including *kamchengs* and *chupus* remain proudly on display was because of his sheer instinct for survival, being the eldest of fifteen children.

His blissful reminiscences were abruptly cut off. "WILLIE! Grand Auntie is coming in ten minutes, you know! Put on something to wear!" His wife Molly bustled past like an interminable wind of harried gestures.

Like most household leaders, the Peranakan wives held absolute sway over the governing of the family's operations and expenditure. Willie himself was no exception to this paradigm. "You forgot to put down the toilet seat again! What did I tell you about clipping nails inside the house? Go



Illustration by Peter Lee; Inking by John Lee.

outside and make yourself useful, feed the fish! *Mampus* (die) *lah*, he's still half naked..."

Molly clucked her tongue as she doled out snack boxes on the living room table, adjusted the lace doilies and flapped off to the kitchen to fetch a pot of sayor lodeh (vegetables in coconut gravy) to set on the dining table.

Perhaps it was only him, but babas tend to slow down when their wives open their mouths. His favourite chair was like the banana leaf to an *ang ku kueh*; the moment he left it he would remain stuck to another surface until pried off with oil. So with great reluctance he trundled off into their shared bedroom and rifled through the chest of drawers for something to wear.

Returning to the kitchen, he reached for some *ondeh ondeh* so enticingly laid out, but not before being promptly slapped on the hand. "Don't ruin your appetite before dinner! And what is that you are wearing?" shrilled Molly. "Go and wear that nice black and gold *baju lokchuan* you wore for

Ah Kor Hock's wedding *lah*, you look so much nicer in that."

In the time Willie had gone to change, the table was laid. Chap chai, ayam buah keluak, sambal timun, babi pongteh and a veritable host of other Peranakan dishes sat on the groaning teakwood table top. Willie stared at himself in a side mirror and started applying handfuls of his default Code 10 hair cream with a comb.

Molly critically eyed his slicked back hair and billowy pants in between ladling out spoonfuls of *itek tim.* 'You look like an *orang minyak* (oily man) on top and a *hantu raya* (great ghost) below. Does my husband need to be such a vainpot? But must say *lah*, the *baju lokchuan* does suit you well.' Willie opened his mouth to retort but Molly let out a gasp. The doorbell had rung.

"She's here! Come, come let's go greet her!" Saved by the bell. He let out a loud sigh and grimaced inwardly. This dinner was going to be a long and tedious one...

In our next issue: Read about Grand Aunty herself!



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