the Peranakan 185 UE

Lee Luan Yew

Our founding father as told by his brother

50 SHADES OF BABA A Sensory Tour of Things Peranakan

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ON THE COVER • Lee Kuan Yew (detail), 2015, Acrylic on canvas, 45 x 55cm. Photo courtesy of the artist. Specially painted for The Peranakan by Alvin Ong.



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editorial

a brilliant 50!

Te pay tribute to Singapore's foremost Peranakan of our early independence years: our founding Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, who passed away on 23 March. Coincidentally, Mr Lee was a member of the Golden Jubilee Committee of the Straits Chinese British Association (forerunner of our Association) back in 1950 and also served as Honorary Secretary for one term.

Since the founding of Singapore in 1819, Peranakans have made significant contributions in many fields including politics, law, business and the arts. We highlight eight of the 50 pioneers selected by the Peranakan Museum. The Association will also honour these remarkable babas and nyonyas at our Peranakan Ball on 21 August.

Early November promises exciting times. The Association will showcase the inaugural Peranakan Arts Festival and also host the 28th Baba Nyonya Convention.

As you turn the pages, read about the 50 things that we consider most iconic to our culture. And how home cooks managed to expand our repertoire in the past 50 years.

Thank you for your patience in waiting for this issue. In the previous issue, we had announced our intention to take a breather and to produce two issues instead of four in 2015. Our committee comprises volunteers. We hope you understand.

Happily, we welcome two new members to our team: Elisabeth Chan, who joins us as Associate Editor to enhance copy, and Melissa Yeow, who will help manage our administrative tasks. We hope more babas and nyonyas will step forward to help our magazine or to contribute articles of interest.

Enjoy our bumper issue!

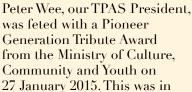
Linda Chee, Editor

awards & accolades

ick Lee has composed a new National Day Parade (NDP) theme song, *Our Singapore*. This adds to the classic *Home* which has become a much-loved song for all Singaporeans. *Our Singapore* looks



into the future and pays tribute to the pioneers of Singapore and founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Dick is also the creative director for this year's NDP.





recognition of his contributions to the Arts & Heritage Sector in Singapore. On 4 November 2014, leading author Josephine Chia was awarded the Singapore Literature Prize for Non-Fiction 2014 for her book, *Kampong Spirit, Gotong Royong: Life in Potong Pasir 1955 to 1965.* This is



the first time that Singapore's most prestigious literary prize has been handed out to works of non-fiction. •





1 Festival • 2 World Premieres • 3 Seminars • 4 Exhibitions • 5 Days



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Tok Panjang Dinner

Celebrity chef Philip Chia spices up the Festival with his culinary expertise. Join us at an exclusive traditional Tok Panjang dinner on 7 November as Philip entices you with his finest dishes.



FESTIVAL MAGAZINE

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Join us in a fun and interactive

inspirations behind these songs.

sing-along and discover the



Workshops

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4 November to Sunday

Wednesday

10am to 9pm



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found in cookbooks. The Bazaar, Exhibitions and Cultural Shows are free to the

public. Please refer to the Festival

website for the show schedule.

The 28th BABA NYONYA CONVENTION 6-8 November, 2015



Join babas and nyonyas from South-east Asia and Australia for a three-day Peranakan-packed convention including theatre, seminars and dinners! For details of the full convention package, please contact the Secretariat of The Peranakan Association Singapore at secretariat@peranakan.org.sg.

THE PERANAKAN SEMINARS Apa lagi? Mana pergi?

(What now? Where to?) Saturday, 7 November

Challenge your minds and engage your hearts at three important Seminars hosted by leading Peranakans.

SEMINAR 1: 9:00am Baba Patois: Today & Tomorrow

What does the future hold for the Baba Malay language? Weave through discussions on the relevance of patois in everyday communications.

SEMINAR 2: 10:15am The Business of Being Peranakan: Authenticity & Sustainability

In today's fast-paced business environment, how does consumerism affect the Peranakan culture? Is the value of our culture being displaced?

SEMINAR 3: 11:45am Adulation, Subjugation or Misplaced Identities?: The essence of being Peranakan, 50 years forward.

How do we continue the Peranakan legacy? Do we reinvent ourselves? Gather your thoughts on the future.

ART Expressions

A showcase of original paintings by 3 celebrated Peranakan artists.



ADELINE YEO "Ardour"

Adeline Yeo's art is an expression of intense thoughts and deep emotions. Come and see Singapore's top finger-painting artist as she plays out her passion for life and love.

DESMOND SIM "Neo-Nyas!"

"Neo-Nyas" is playwright Desmond Sim's long-awaited artworks created specially for the Peranakan Arts Festival. Surprise your senses with his new series of paintings.



CAROLYN LAW "My HERitage"

Carolyn Law's paintings are a connection to her roots and philosophy in life. Observe her remarkable attention to details as she showcases her heritage.

Some paintings exhibited during the Peranakan Arts Festival 2015 are available for private sale and collection. For private viewings or reservations, please email us at info@peranakanfest.com or check www.peranakanfest.com for updates.

Rare Vintage Photo Corner

Relive the glamorous and fashionable lifestyles of our Babas and Nyonyas from the 'Golden Era' of the days gone by.





Browse through a unique range of new and previously loved Peranakan merchandise on sale – from books to baju, jewelry and sarongs. Come early to get the best buys! A limited number of book titles will be available, including Chef Philip Chia's new cookbook and Desmond Sim's compilation of Peranakan plays. We have also allocated areas for antique lovers and collectors to display their selections for sale and exchange – so come participate and enjoy the BaBazaar laojiat!



A kaleidoscope of Peranakan cultural performances will be staged free for everyone! Highlighting our colourful diversity, enjoy performances from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Australia and local Peranakan groups. Enjoy original and traditional songs and music including Keronchong, Dondang Sayang, comedy skits and joget with us. A vintage fashion exhibition will showcase the golden era of Peranakan fashions and the lifestyle of our forefathers. Check our website for an updated schedule of performances.

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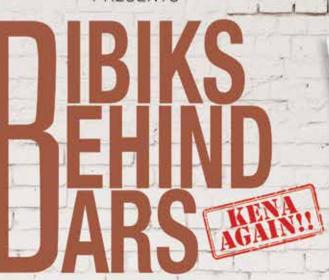




PRESENTS







Jackpot! Pong! Kandang! Huat-Ah!

The die-hard habits that never left this Peranakan family - Gambling! Watch out as these Bibiks of Katong keep up with the times, challenging old traditions of gambling with the new. Will the kaypoh kaywat auntie next door introduce her 'sure win' secret formula? Or will they all wind up behind bars?

A fun-filled musical comedy of laughter for everyone from 'pioneer' to 'pai-mia' generations, make sure you catch these 'Kaki-Judi' gameblers as they indulge in their crazy, 'Bey-Pio', 'Toto', 'Kasi-nos' antics.

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feature LEEKUANYEW DR LEE SUAN YEW FONDLY RECALLS THE PERANAKAN UPBRINGING

AND TRADITIONAL VALUES ESPOUSED BY HIS ELDEST BROTHER, LEE KUAN YEW OR LKY AS HE IS POPULARLY KNOWN TO SINGAPOREANS. DAUGHTER, SHERMAY LEE, JOINS THE INTERVIEW OVER AFTERNOON TEA WITH NYONYA LINDA CHEE

A Peranakan Heritage

Singapore's late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) was born at home at 92, Kampong Java Road, on 16 September 1923. He was the eldest son of Peranakan parents. LKY's father, Lee Chin Koon, came to Singapore at the age of five; he was brought from Semarang by LKY's grandfather, Lee Hoon Leong, who had been appointed by sugar king Oei Tiong Ham to manage his shipping business in Singapore. Lee Hoon Leong was a Hakka Peranakan from Singapore. His wife, Ko Liem Nio, was an Indonesian Peranakan from Semarang. LKY's mother, Chua Jim Neo, was a Hokkien Peranakan born in Singapore. She was the daughter of Chua Kim Teng, a Singapore Peranakan whose family came from Malacca.

Growing Up in Colonial Times

Both of LKY's grandfathers, Lee Hoon Leong and Chua Kim Teng, were fashionably dapper in the colonial style. They favoured dressing in threepiece suits and hats despite the tropical climate. Lee Hoon Leong was especially westernized and spoke English fluently. He went to school to Raffles Institution and worked as a purser on British ships. Not surprisingly, he gave LKY an English name, Harry, when he was born.

"Lee Hoon Leong never went to England. But through his business dealings with the British in colonial Singapore, he realised the British respected you if you spoke their language and followed their customs. They would look down on you if you were too *chinchai* (easygoing) or spoke patois (Baba Malay), " says Dr Lee Suan Yew, the youngest of three brothers and a sister. "The nyonyas and babas then spoke proper English and adopted an anglicized lifestyle, although they were very Chinese in their values."

LKY's father, Lee Chin Koon, was brought up in a well-heeled upper middle-class environment. As a young boy, he wore short pants with a jacket and handkerchief. He spoke with a crisp English accent. His genteel European manners were carefully nurtured.

The fortunes of both families were adversely affected during the Great Depression. Fortunately, Lee Chin Koon had a secure job as a storekeeper at Shell Oil Company. He was well regarded by his employers and worked his way up to eventually become a depot manager. Dr Lee relates, "My father

APOREAN (1923 – 2015)

was given a car, a chauffeur and a house, where we sometimes stayed during weekends."

In 1945, Mr and Mrs Lee Chin Koon set up home in a rambling bungalow at 38, Oxley Road. The house was to become LKY's residence for the rest of his life.

As a teenager, LKY spoke only proper English to his family. He was 10 years older than Dr Lee and was regarded with brotherly respect. "He was not a *chinchai*

66 He was always *kuai*... precise, prim and proper. **??** Dr Lee Suan Yew

(easygoing) person," Dr Lee says, adding that, "He was always *kuai* (well behaved). The rest of us were more playful. We played *chatek*, *chongkak* and marbles. LKY, on the other hand, was already serious. He was studious, precise, prim and proper."

Eventually, the other Lee siblings Freddy, Dennis, Suan Yew and sister Monica also spoke less and less patois. They realised that speaking good English in school, during those years when students sang *God Save The King* at morning assembly, was "important".

The elders, however, continued to communicate

in patois. When it came to reprimanding the children, "my paternal grandmother Liem Nio scolded us in very flowery terms, like *kurang ajar* and *sial*," smiles Dr Lee.

Filial Piety

"We were raised as Peranakans when we were young. During Chinese New Year, we would *soja* (kneel down) to wish our father and mother. Then we got our *ang pows* (red packets). My father would wear the silk *baju* with Chinese cloth shoes. When we grew older, however, we shook hands," Dr Lee recalls.

The first cousins from the maternal side at the wedding of Dr Lee Suan Yew's son, Lee Kern Tzen to Adelaine Manzano in 2009 at the Shangri-la Hotel. Seated from left: Jimmy Seet, Vivien Seet (Mrs Lian). Irene Seet (Mrs Ooi), the late Freddy Lee, the late Lee Kuan Yew, Monica Lee (Mrs Chan), Dr Lee Suan Yew, Chia Hian Neo (Ah Qui), Chia Cheng Neo and Chua Gek Choo. Standing from left: Arthur Seet and the late Chua Choo Lim.

"My father kept up the ritual of ancestral worship. He stopped this tradition after the Japanese Occupation when we moved out of 28, Norfolk Road. A number of us became Christians later so we would not touch joss sticks. My father respected our religious preference."

While Baba Lee Chin Koon was the stern

disciplinarian, his nyonya wife Chua Jim Neo was the loving, nurturing mother. LKY was "very close to her."

LKY's 1998 memoirs, *The Singapore Story*, give a glimpse of his quiet admiration for his mother during his growing up years and how, perhaps, he took after her in many ways: "A strong character with great energy and resourcefulness... Had she been born one generation later and continued her education

beyond secondary school, she could easily have become an effective business executive.

Throughout the interview, father and daughter would uphold etiquette (adat) in relation to older members of the family. Dr Lee refers to LKY as Kor (elder brother) while Shermay uses Tai Pak (eldest uncle). She refers to her grandmother as Mak, grandfather as Yeye and aunty as Ku Ma. For ease of reading, this article uses English terms as far as possible.

"She devoted her life to raising her children to be welleducated and independent professionals, and she stood up to my father to safeguard their future. My brothers, my sister and I were very conscious of her sacrifices; we felt we could not let her down and did our best to be worthy of her and to live up to her expectations.

"As I grew older, she began consulting me as the eldest son on all important family matters, so that while still in my teens, I became de facto head of the family. This taught me how to take decisions."

Dr Lee's daughter, Shermay, recalls her grandmother as a person who was "very capable, loving, wonderful, unbeatable, exceptional - she's part of the reason why our family is what it is today, and he is who he is," referring to LKY.



"Mak (grandmother) loved unconditionally. She helped many people from all walks of life."

Shermay says proudly "Mak's IQ and EQ were very high. My grandfather's mother was a good cook, so Mak had to learn to cook to prove her self-worth and capability. She did very well in whatever she decided to do."

Shermay points out that LKY and her grandmother "had similar values and mindsets as problem solvers. They were both very family-oriented".

Above, Lee Kuan

visiting his brother

Yew in London

Dr Lee remembers his mother going to the wet market, and young boys carrying her bags to the taxi. She would say, "Why do you do this? You must study hard." And she would help them get jobs.

He adds that LKY was *uhau* (filial) to his parents. Chua Jim Neo died in 1980 and Lee Chin Koon passed away 17 years later in 1997.

Senior Lee was well looked after at the Oxley residence until his august years. When he was in his late 80s, he moved in with Dr Lee's family. Being in private practice, it was also easier for Dr Lee to take care of their father.

After the move, LKY and Mrs Lee would visit his



Dr Lee Suan Yew. 10 | ISSUE 1 • 2015

A Fine Peranakan Palate

Our interview with Dr Lee was held over a large dining table where his daughter, Shermay had organised a delectable afternoon tea on nyonyaware. Shermay is herself a well-known Peranakan chef and food consultant.

"Come, let us eat. We can work later. *Makan first*," invites Dr Lee. Babas and nyonyas are known to never let their guests go hungry.

I decide to try all three types of finger sandwiches on the platter egg, *bakwa* (sweetmeat) and *sambal lengkong* (spicy fish floss). Dr Lee urges me to try the sandwiches with the chilli *chuka* (vinegar). I spoon out chilli sauce from a bottle of *Shermay's Cilicuka* into a little dish. "Squeeze the lime first, it gives the extra kick," he advises. The combination is delicious. "The lime *(lemo kasturi)* is from my garden." Just like a Peranakan home, to have lime, *pandan* and *belimbing* growing in the garden.

Dr Lee brings over a large plastic bottle from a side table laden with bottles and tins of nyonya cookies. "Have some *keropok*," with a broad smile on his face.

The most Peranakan trait about the family, says Dr Lee, is eating. He remembers the lively family gatherings when nyonya aunties father at least once every month on Sundays, always at teatime about 5 pm, to "chitchat" and ask after his father's health. Our father was very pleased that his eldest son came to visit him regularly."

When their mother was alive, LKY would, "busy as he was, send one red packet to her every month." "He never forgot. My mother wouldn't tell us how much it contained. It was *uhau*."

Education and Charity

As a young boy, LKY lived with his paternal grandfather Lee Hoon Leong, whom he much admired, in Katong. He pleaded with his mother to transfer him out of a Chinese school to Telok Kurau English School in primary one. "Mandarin was totally alien to me, and unconnected with my life," LKY had said in his memoirs.

Consistently a top student, he entered Raffles Institution where he continued to excel. His brothers went to Anglo-Chinese School (ACS). Dr Lee explains, "My mother had consulted Yap Pheng Gek, who was a teacher at ACS before he became a banker. He advised her to send her other sons to ACS because of its Christian values."

"My mother was very perceptive. Besides patois and English, she spoke Hokkien, but not Mandarin. Way before my brother realized the importance of learning Mandarin, she had said to me, 'you are Chinese so you had better learn some Mandarin to keep your Chinese culture'." Before he turned 16, Dr Lee attended Mandarin classes at Prinsep Street three times a week for a few years.

LKY was compelled to learn Mandarin at 32, when he was in politics. It was a tough call as an adult but he persevered. Dr Lee says with admiration: "My brother was such a brilliant linguist English, Japanese to interpret during the war, proper Malay and Hokkien. Later he told us that 'to unite Chinese Singaporeans we must speak Below left, Mrs Lee Chin Koon (Chua Jim Neo) with three of her grandchildren. From left: Sherlyn Lee, Lee Wei Ling and Lena Lee.

Below right, Mr Lee Chin Koon at his birthday celebration at the home of his son, Dennis. From left: Mrs Gloria Lee, Monica Lee, Lee Kuan Yew and Sherlyn Lee.





would present their best dishes for everyone to enjoy.

LKY's Peranakan favourites were his mother's *mee siam*, *gado gado* and *achar*, all of which his sister Monica is able to replicate.

For many years LKY went light on Peranakan foods because he was careful of the rich fat content in the *santan* (coconut milk). "At one time he steered clear of *mee siam* because it has a lot of starch." Disciplined to a fault, LKY adhered to a more restricted diet of 'western' fare such as roast chicken and steaks. And *sashimi*, noticing that the Japanese lived longer, healthier lives.

"When he grew much older, however, his palate remembered Peranakan food," adds Dr Lee. "The memory of my mother's food, the flavours, came back.

"He would ask my sister Monica, 'what have you got?" She would send across nyonya food. Until he said, 'It's troublesome, I don't want to call you all the time.' He sent his maid over to her, to learn to cook Peranakan dishes."

Disciplined as he was about what he ate, LKY was known to have a sweet tooth. He could resist *kueh lapis* (layer cake), which he considered too sweet and rich. However, he made an exception with *sugee* cake "because he loved almonds," reveals Dr Lee. It was an indulgence at every Lunar New Year celebration.

That was when the extended family

would gather on the first day to savour his mother's Peranakan food, and catch up over her freshly-baked *sugee* cake, *sugee* cookies, *kueh belanda* (Dutch cake or love letters) and *lidah kuching* (cat's tongue). In later years, Shermay would send over *sugee* cake to LKY's house. His appreciation was expressed in a simple "thank you."

Shermay regarded LKY as a food connoisseur. "My aunt Monica said he had an 'astute tongue'. He had a fine palate just like any good Peranakan. A lot of people aren't aware of that. For health reasons as his priority was nation building, he followed an austere diet. Later on in life when he was relaxed, he was more nostalgic for the flavours of his mother's dishes."

in a common language, Mandarin. All races must master their own language. English would be the common language in Singapore'."

"My brother had foresight. He also asserted that Mandarin was essential to do business in China - this was his thinking many years before China opened its doors to the world."

The Mandarin language was to become LKY's lifelong passion. Up till his last days in hospital, he continued with Mandarin lessons. "His mind was always working. He wanted to learn all the time."

Choo, the Nyonya Wife

Dr Lee recalls with amusement one loving aspect of the special relationship between LKY and Mrs Lee. "My sister-in-law was ever so diplomatic. If he was eating chocolate cake, which he loved, she would say, 'Harry, I think it's too much. Can you give me half?' She never said don't eat."

Mrs Lee, or Kwa Geok Choo was the third daughter of OCBC banker Kwa Siew Tee, a Peranakan from Semarang, and Wee Yew Neo, a Singapore nyonya. Dr Lee remembers that Mrs Lee could cook nyonya food: "Before she got married she was using Ellice Handy's cookbook." Mrs Handy was the principal of Methodist Girls' School where Mrs Lee had been a student. Dr Lee says his brother's love for his alma mater Raffles Institution and Fitzwilliam College in Cambridge University - was "very deep". LKY was "a very loyal person" and donated to these two institutions and also to education and charity.

"A lot of people did not know. He gave quietly." After LKY's death, Fitzwilliam College conducted a memorial service for him. 200 Singaporean students studying in Cambridge attended, including Christopher Eng, the grandson of LKY's brother, Dennis. Dr Lee's wife, Pamelia, and their two grandchildren who happened to be in London, were also present.

"He was very frugal. But when it came to education and charity, he gave generously," says Dr Lee, citing a donation of more than S\$10 million for learning the Chinese language. "He believed in education."

A Strong, Caring Brother

LKY was always the leader.

However, he was more than an older brother to his siblings. "He sometimes talked like a father. But he was never condescending. Instead, he advised us and he was always practical."

For instance, LKY had suggested that Dr Lee take up law at the Inns of Court in England and finish within three and a half years. "My brother tried to save my mother's money. But my passion was medicine." Dr Lee made it to Cambridge University.

LKY influenced his youngest brother to become an elocutionist. "I was 17 then. I was keen on public speaking and was chosen to represent ACS at interschool contests. I had training from my teacher, the Reverend Doraisamy, who later became the bishop of the Methodist church."

Dr Lee says one experience was particularly memorable. In 1951, the US daily Herald Tribune sought student representatives from various countries to meet President Harry S Truman at the White House. The ACS principal then, Mr Thio Chan Bee, selected him to compete against the other local students for the golden opportunity to visit New York and Washington.

Dr Lee consulted his brother, who was already back from London and practising as a lawyer. LKY thought political questions would be fielded and prepared him with knowledge on Nehru and Mao. "I still remember the hour-long chat in our living room." Unfortunately,



Left, The newlyweds after registering their marriage in Singapore in 1950, with Kwa Geok Choo's mother Wee Yew Neo.

Right, Mr and Mrs Lee at the home of his brother, Dr Lee Suan Yew during one Christmas Eve in the early 1990s. Between them is the portrait of his great grandfather, Lee Bok Boon.



66 He was very frugal. But

when it came to education and

charity, he gave generously. ??

politics was not fielded at the interview. He lost to a student from Saint Joseph's Institution. When the dejected student came home, LKY smiled encouragingly: "You can't win every time you know, you've got to lose sometime."

LKY and his bride, Kwa Geok Choo also took Dr Lee out every now and then in his navy blue Studebaker. "He wanted a change of diet. So he said 'Come, let's go to Johor'. At that time we were one country. We used to frequent the food market in Johor Bahru, which was famous for its *satay* and *mee rebus*. He just loved this combination."

The Final Lap, With Family

LKY was very close to his wife, children and grandchildren. He made it a point for the extended family, including the families of his siblings, to come together during the eve and first day of the Lunar New Year. *Chap Goh Meh* (the last day of the New Year) was the occasion to meet up with his cousins when he was available.

Dr Lee says that having meals together on festive

occasions and birthdays were "the best days of our lives together. LKY would be most relaxed when he was with the family."

Sitting back in his dining chair, Dr Lee smiles

thoughtfully, "When he was at my home, we made sure to have food he enjoyed, like sashimi and cordyceps soup. The last time he was here he saw us eating roast beef. We dared not offer him in case of indigestion. But he said, 'Can I have a piece of that please?' And he enjoyed it. He finished a whole

piece with no after effects." Dr Lee says happily, yet with a tinge of sadness, "We had a marvellous time at my 81st birthday last October at Four Seasons Hotel. He stayed for much of the evening. He was in a jolly mood. He was in good form. Towards the end of his life he had his good days.

"Then he came to my home last Christmas Eve for a family reunion. His grandson, Yipeng, was here too. We had a lovely time. My brother would not miss it. He could eat selectively." Dr Lee shows us a photograph of LKY at the head of the dining table, with a large platter of *sashimi* served to him. "He took his time to savour every slice with sips of fine Riesling."

An Exceptional Character

LKY's serious, no-nonsense demeanour belied his dry wit.

In a recent facebook posting by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong that went viral, he showed his father's telegram in 1958 using the word "battleship" instead of "steam boat" for dinner, to save words and money. It caught the public's fancy and "battleship" became, for a while, the new moniker for steam-boat. Dr Lee nods, "His humour was not the friendly banter but he had sharp and intelligent wit. My brother was not given to small talk."

Dr Lee says that as Prime Minister then, LKY was allowed to stay at Sri Temasek within the Istana. But

> he only used the place to exercise or meet people for lunch. "He was very careful about using state money."

LKY never believed in building up a personality

cult. Dr Lee vouches that "he just believed in doing good for Singapore and he and Rajaratnam couched it into the pledge: One nation, one people. Now, the young say, 'Wow, he did all that for us'."

Raised as a Peranakan, the English-educated LKY stayed true to his traditional Chinese roots till the end. He had lived out by example the Confucian values that were instilled in babas and nyonyas from young values such as family unity, filial piety and education, which he believed were essential building blocks for a strong, cohesive nation.

I ask why LKY never admitted to his cultural identity as a Peranakan. Dr Lee feels it was his way of expressing his cultural and even religious neutrality for nation building, adding that, "Even when it came to religion, he said, 'Don't try to convert me'."

He was above all interests, a Singaporean.

All photographs copyright of Dr Lee Suan Yew.

Above left, Celebrating Lunar New Year at a lohei dinner with siblings and their spouses. Clockwise from left: Dr Lee Suan Yew, Mrs Eleanor Lee, Kwa Geok Choo, Lee Kuan Yew, Freddy Lee, Mrs Pamelia Lee, George Chan, Monica Lee and Mrs Gloria Lee.

Above right, Lee Kuan Yew with his granddaughter Li Xiuqi as a toddler at his Oxley Road home one Lunar New Year's Eve.

Impressions of LKY

A Bridge Between Two Worlds

eature

Gavin Gareth Chan, a 30-year-old Baba serving the grassroots in Marine Parade and Joo Chiat, reflects on his encounters with LKY

Worlds Knew him as Minister Mentor Lee. He was larger than life; more of a concept and an institution that I held in awe. Until I met him in person.

It was in 2007. I was a university student at a ministerial forum with LKY. His first order of business was to establish which school I came from. Catholic High School, I replied. 'A good school that embraces bilingualism. Young man, how is your Chinese?' He quizzed. Sheepishly I answered that I seldom spoke it. 'Work on your Chinese, it will be very important in your future,' he added. At another chance encounter several months later,



LKY remembered our conversation. He quizzed me about my Chinese once again. I replied to him in Mandarin. I might have imagined it but I thought he gave a nod of approval. That was the last time I would meet him in person. I would catch fleeting glances of him during public engagements but did not have the chance to speak to him again.

What struck me the most about LKY was how he sought a personal connection with those he came into contact with.

Even though he was the former prime minister, he treated all as though we were his grandchildren. A little distant, yet warmly affectionate. At the same time, his questions dug deeper and belied his concerns - education of the young, for the future of Singapore. And the unyielding conviction to be, at least, bilingual.

Just like our Peranakan forefathers, LKY emphasized the significance of having the ability to communicate with the West and East. He spared no effort to impress upon the younger generation the importance of being a bridge between two worlds. He had the foresight and moulded Singapore to exemplify the best of both worlds." 66All the maternal (Chua) cousins are very close. LKY was our eldest cousin, nearly 20 years older than me. His mother used to host the *Chap Goh Meh* dinners for all her brothers and sisters, their children and spouses. After my mother, who was the last sister, passed away, LKY insisted that the cousins continue with the *Chap Goh Meh* gatherings. When he was the Prime Minister it was a challenge for him to join us. We were so pleased that after he retired and became Minister Mentor he could finally join us. He was a very warm, family man. ??

Mrs Irene Ooi, first cousin to LKY

66 I was 20 and a medical student in 1965. I remember Lim Yew Hock and David Marshall as possible leaders but doubt they would have been able to accomplish what he did. The Plen and other communists, first in the PAP and then the Barisan Socialis, would have driven us in a different direction.

What I admire most about him is his intelligence reflected in his analysis of situations, political and administrative. He had the ability to do what was necessary to meet his goals. Sometimes the cost could be high but as a leader he knew the buck stopped with him. For that I respected him even when I did not always agree with him. **??**

Dr Jenny Lee Soon, *retired public health professional* 66 It was sometime in the 1980s when LKY was flying out of Singapore. The aircraft had an engine snag. LKY had to wait in the VIP room instead of going straight into the aircraft as usual. I gave him the facts and updated him continually during the 20-minute delay. He accepted it and did not make a fuss. It struck me that if you did your work well, there was nothing to be fearful of him. 99

Sally Chan, then-Chief of Passenger Relations, Singapore Airlines

66 My parents have always described LKY as a great man, a great leader of Singapore. And I grew up (I was 11 years old in 1965) listening to his fiery speeches. I was in awe of him. It's because he was tough on everyone that we became so disciplined, so self reliant and so successful.

Knowing that he was a Peranakan struck me with nostalgia. I realized that LKY must have relished his mother's *sambal* dishes. She would probably be calling out in Baba Malay to come get some *kueh* she just finished steaming, and he would be replying in our patois! **99**

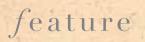
Mrs Yvonne Khoo, a nyonya who grew up in Singapore

66 He was an exceptional individual. One of a kind. As a Peranakan I would like to believe the cultural environment of his upbringing had a lot to do with what he became. Naturally the community is proud to claim him as our most outstanding Peranakan. He was certainly not perfect, and I think he stayed in politics far too long for Singapore's good, but Singapore is what it is because of him and his team of national pioneers, many of who were also Peranakan. 🤊

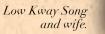
Peter Lee, independent scholar and honorary curator of the NUS Baba House



Like us at Kim Poh Hong Goldsmith



Oei Tiong Ham.



*



affectionstaty yours

Tan Tock Seng..

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B CONTRACTOR OF THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM IN CELEBRATING OUR REMARKABLE PIONEERS -

TAN JIAK KIM (Singapore b.1859–1917d. Singapore)

Tan Jiak Kim was the grandson of pioneering philanthropist Tan Kim Seng. He joined Kim Seng & Company and served on the Straits Legislative Council, the Municipal Commission and the Chinese Advisory Board. In 1900, he founded the Straits Chinese British Association (now known as The Peranakan Association Singapore) and served as its first president. A strong ally of the British, Tan helped to organize the Straits Chinese volunteer division and generously donated to the British military. He attended the coronation of King George V in 1911 as a representative of the Straits Settlements. In 1912, he was made Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George. Tan was also a strong supporter of education. He contributed \$12,000 to help start a medical school in Singapore.

TAN TOCK SENG (Malacca b. 1798–1850d. Singapore)

Born in Malacca, Tan Tock Seng arrived in

Singapore in 1819, the year it was established by the British. He began as a produce seller before building his fortune as a land owner. Tan was a leader of the Hokkien community in Singapore and, in 1839, led the establishment of the Thian Hock Keng (Temple of Heavenly Blessings), the oldest Chinese temple in Singapore. In honour of his public service, Tan became the first Asian Justice of the Peace. He is most remembered as the founder of Singapore's first hospital for poor Chinese, contributing \$7,000 at the request of Governor William Butterworth. The hospital was re-named in his honour in 1850.

OEI TIONG HAM

(Semarang, Java b. 1866 - 1924d. Singapore)

Oei Tiong Ham took over the running of his father's company Kian Gwan and expanded it into the Oei Tiong Ham Concern. The conglomerate had a diverse portfolio, though much of its profits in the 1890s came from the opium trade. Oei later acquired a number of sugar cane plantations and mills, and by 1900, his company was the leading sugar producer in the Dutch East Indies. In 1920, Oei moved from Semarang to Singapore. His charitable contributions included \$150,000 to Raffles College, and in 1910 he donated the land for the building of Tao Nan School.



Tan Jiak Kim.

LOW KWAY SONG (Singapore b.1889–1982d. Singapore)

Low Kway Song was a self-taught artist who was known for his portraits of prominent members of society in Singapore and Malaya. As a member of the Singapore Amateur Drawing Society, he organized and participated in exhibitions in Singapore and Malaya. He was also a cartoonist for the Eastern Illustrated Review. He was reportedly the first Singapore artist to receive a four-figure sum for a commission, the portrait of Oei Tiong Ham in 1927.



Dr Lee Choo Neo.

Low was also a founding member of the Merrilads Musical and Dramatic Association, a popular Peranakan performing arts group started in 1923.

SONG ONG SIANG (Singapore b.1871-1941d.Singapore)

Song Ong Siang was the first Straits Chinese from Malaya to receive a British knighthood (1936) and was committed to reformation within the Chinese community in the Straits. He was the second Queen's Scholar from Singapore, studying law in Cambridge. Song was a member of the Straits Legislative Council and represented the colony at Edward VII's coronation in 1902. In 1894, he started the first romanized Malay newspaper in Singapore, Bintang Timor, which lasted only one year. Together with fellow Peranakan Lim Boon Keng, Song was responsible for several progressive projects, particularly the Straits Chinese Magazine and the Singapore Chinese Girls' School. One of his most ambitious publications was One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore, a detailed survey of Chinese life in Singapore and a key source for researchers today.

LEE CHOO NEO (Singapore b.1895–1947d. Singapore)

Lee Choo Neo was the first female physician in Singapore. She was notable for breaking away from the traditional domestic roles of Peranakan women at the time. Educated at the Singapore Chinese Girls' School and Raffles Girls' School, she was the first Straits Chinese woman to obtain a Senior Cambridge Certificate in 1911. She would go on to study medicine at the King Edward VII Medical School in Singapore and opened her own clinic in 1930. Lee also took a keen interest in Malay drama, and in 1912 she wrote, co-directed, and acted in the three-part comedy Mustapha, presented at a Red Cross benefit in Victoria Theatre. Together with other prominent Peranakan women of the day, Lee co-founded the Chinese Ladies' Association (now known as the Chinese Women's Association).

TAN CHIN TUAN (Singapore b.1908 –2005d. Singapore)

Tan Chin Tuan was a notable banker, taking on important leadership roles at the Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation, which was an amalgamation of Chinese Commercial Bank, Ho Hong Bank and Oversea-Chinese Bank. Tan was responsible for developing OCBC's successful strategy of blue-chip investments during periods of economic uncertainty. As a public figure, Tan worked closely with the British government for gradual self-government, served as Municipal Councillor in 1939, and was appointed to the Advisory Council of the British Military Administration in 1945.

MRS SEOW PECK LENG, NÉE IRIS CHUA SENG KIM (Singapore b.1911-2007d. Singapore)

Iris Chua (Mrs Seow Peck Leng) was the country's first female opposition member of the Legislative Assembly, serving one term from 1959 to 1963. She also founded the Siglap Girls Club (now known as the Singapore Women's Association) to help underprivileged girls, and served as its president for 37 years. Mrs Seow was educated at Singapore Chinese Girls' School and Raffles Girls' School, and was a teacher and principal for a great many years. She represented the Mountbatten constituency for the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA) and in her time there, proposed legislation to outlaw polygamous marriages. This eventually led to the passing of the Women's Charter in 1961. In 1965, she retired from politics to concentrate on social work.

Text for this article is derived from the catalogue of Great Peranakans: 50 Remarkable Lives – an ongoing exhibition at the Peranakan Museum. See page 56, The Peranakan Guide.



To mark Singapore's jubilee in our own way, The Peranakan magazine identified 50 things that embody our multi-hued culture. We came up with a veritable feast for the five senses. Nyonya Linda Chee mulls over our choice picks

QUINTESSENTIALLY PERANAKAN

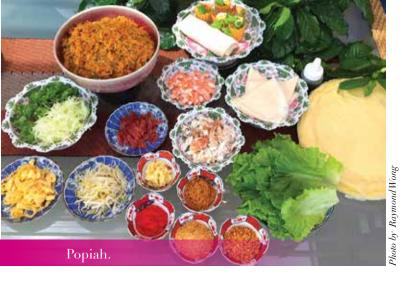
the taste of ambrosia With so many naysayers out there, choosing just ten of the most iconic Peranakan foods is like opting to walk on a bed of nails! We closed our eyes and vouched for our favourite dishes here.



Ayam buah keluak

This is a classic Peranakan dish that is so *sedap!* (delicious!). The first spoonful hits your palate all at once spicy, salty, tart, slightly sweet and umami. Every family claims to have the best recipe. Some say the original dish had pork ribs and not chicken, as Peranakans ate mostly pork. Perhaps it first appeared in Indonesia, where we get most of our nuts from, and later became popular in Malacca when Javanese Peranakans married into Malacca families. An anthropological study would be most valuable.





Babi pongteh (stewed pork with gravy)

Belly pork, potatoes, bamboo shoots and black mushrooms are cooked with a sauté of fermented taucheo (soyabean) and garlic to create a full-bodied stew. Some families add chicken. The gravy can be soupy or thick and dark, almost like a sauce. The best way to eat *pongteh* is to tear a green chilli into it and stir a touch of sambal belachan into the gravy. Chelop (dip) a slice of crusty French loaf and pop the gravy-soaked morsel into your mouth. Heavenly!

9 Popiah (spring rolls)

igced No other dish compares with *popiah* for community bonding. The whole of Malacca and Singapore comes together to help out with the peeling, slicing, chopping, frying...preparing from morning till evening for days, before we come together for just as many days to break the eating record *lu makan berapa biji?* (how many did you eat?) The Peranakans are unique in using crepe-like kulit telor (egg skin wraps). Except for my family and our close relatives, I have not seen anyone else serving *popiah* with home-made *buay cheo*, a sweet sauce made from flour, gula Melaka and dark soya sauce.

Bakwan kepiting (crab meat ball soup)

If small flower crabs *(kepiting lenjong)* are used, their red shells are a pretty sight floating in this wholesome, yet delicate soup. It was always a treat when I was a child when my mother would serve this dish on festive occasions. The day before, my two brothers and I would be at the dining table, busily shelling freshly-steamed crabs and in between, stealing a morsel or two of the sweet, white flesh. We helped to mix the minced pork with the crabmeat, stuffing half the amount into the crab shells and shaping the remaining half into balls. Such are the delicious memories shared by siblings.

Pong tauhu (tofu ball soup)

Pong tauhu is said to be the everyday, more economical, variation of the *bakwan kepiting*. Malacca nyonyas sometimes call this tepong tauhu. Mashed tauhu (firm tofu) and minced pork or prawns are mixed and shaped into balls and cooked in a soup made with sautéed taucheo and garlic. Belly pork (samchien bak) strips are added to enrich the soup. My family uses fresh fish paste instead of pork it is a healthier and no less enjoyable variation that I have been enjoying since childhood.





Itek tim (braised duck soup)

O My father just loves *itek tim* served with generous lashings of brandy (the anglophile touch), torn green chilli (local) and freshly squeezed *lemo kasturi* (Malay). This is a robust duck and pork trotter soup which the Teochews call kiam chye ark (salted vegetable duck) and add serngboey (preserved plum) for tartness. We Peranakans have been clever

to add assam poey (tamarind skin) and *belimbing* for the extra tang.

Itek Tim.



Chap chye (mixed vegetable stew)

After the heavy feasting on Chinese New Year's eve, *chap chye* is our comfort food the morning after, for overworked tummies. The very economical cabbage is the dominant ingredient in what was originally a Hokkien stew. *Chap chye* uses many dried foods such as black mushrooms, *bok jee* (wood ears), *kim chiam* (lily buds), *taukee* (soya bean sticks) and sometimes *tanghoon* (glass noodles). Nyonyas cook it with sautéed *taucheo* and garlic, adding prawns, belly pork and fish balls.

8 Hati babi bungkus (wrapped pig's liver) My Makmak's (maternal grandmother) hati babi bungkus was the best. No one made it like she did. She had a secret recipe for rempah panas (spice powder) that elevated her hati babi to ambrosial heaven. This cute little old lady who smoked and drank brandy until her late 80s also made the best tapeh (sweet glutinous rice wine). Once a year I would spend the whole afternoon with Makmak in the kitchen to chop pork and dice pig liver, wrap the mixture into 'pingpong' balls with pang sek eu (pig's caul), then steam and fry them into cholesterol-filled wonders - a heart patient's nightmare!

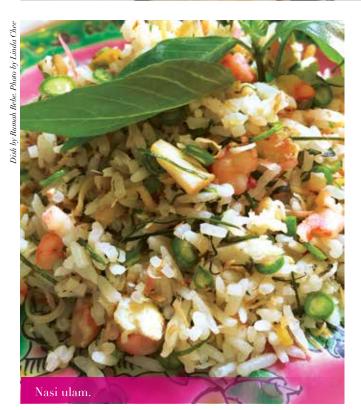
9 Sambal jantong pisang (banana 'heart' salad) Peranakans are practical and make good use of what comes from the garden, like *jantong pisang* actually the banana flowers found beneath the bract of the whole inflorescence that constitutes a giant banana bud. The *jantong* is steamed and tossed with a gamut of ingredients including *sambal belachan*, lime, cucumber, *belimbing*, *serondeng* (toasted shredded coconut), fried garlic and shallots, prawns and sliced red chillies. Finally, a luxurious topping of coconut cream. The poor man's version is *sambal timun* (cucumber salad).

10 Nasi ulam (rice with raw vegetables) The seriously classical *nasi ulam* is reputed to contain 17 different kinds of fresh aromatic herbs according to a Malacca Peranakan lady, but in Singapore terms it is usual to muster only about



Photo by Linda Chee





seven or eight herbs. They include daon *kunyit* (turmeric leaf), *daon lemo perot* (kaffir lime leaf), *serai* (lemongrass), *bunga kantan* (torch ginger bud), *timun* (cucumber), *kachang botol* (wing beans) and *kachang panjang* (long beans). *Nasi ulam* is adapted from a Malay dish. White rice is spiced with *sambal belachan* and tossed with the herbs. Flaked fish - *chencharu*, *selar* or *parang* - is usually included. Prawns are also sometimes added. Meats are absent.

colourful insights Peranakan culture is renowned for its rich palette

of colours, textures and extravagant finishes.



Sarong kebaya

To the uninitiated, wrapping the sarong and pinning the kerosang (brooches) onto the kebaya is a notoriously sweaty challenge. Tips from inexpert users: Wrap the sarong around and create two or three deep pleats at the inner end or the fit will not enable you to walk comfortably. Hold your breath and tie an old nylon stocking around your waist if you are not confident that the sarong will hold up. Then secure tightly with the *tali* pinggang (silver belt). Secure your kebaya front with three large baby safety pins before replacing each one with a *kerosang*. Practice makes perfect.

A Batiks

🚄 The best batiks are known to originate from Indonesia. The colours and motifs distinguish the specific village they come from and even the master batikmaker who designed it. Many books have been written about batiks. The latest is Peter Lee's tome, Sarong Kebaya (see page 46). Indeed batiks have a fascinating history!

🕦 Kasot manek

Come to the east coast and visit Rumah Bebe or Rumah Kim Choo. You will see students of all ages and races learning to stitch kasot manek (beaded slippers). Intricate patterns are brought to life



by fine needles looping tiny faceted glass beads onto canvas or cotton fabric. The colours are jewel-like. The motifs can range from traditional, like flowers, to unconventional like Mickey Mouse.



Kerosang In the old days, the nyonya's baju banjang, like that of my great grand-aunt Tan Geok Kim Neo (above), had no butang (buttons) and was fastened by three *kerosang serong* (brooches).



Tali pinggang.



The size of a *bibik*'s gold *kerosang* was an indicator of the family wealth and status. The bigger and the more embellished with intan (unfaceted diamonds) - sampay mata buta! (blinding!) - the higher up the ranking.

Tali pinggang The *tali pinggang* (chainlink silver belt) has intricate patterns that are totally concealed when worn under the *baju* panjang. But with the more revealing *kebaya*, the buckle peeps out at the waist, continuing from the *kerosang* the ostentatious display of ornamentation. Once in a while you may spot an outsized gold buckle and wickedly wonder if the nyonya had benefitted from an unknown inheritance.

Photo bi Linda Chee

Nyonyaware.

6 Nyonyaware Gone are the days when hard-pressed Peranakan families sold their inheritance in baskets to the karang guni man. Good pieces of original Peranakan porcelain are hard to come by these days. Prices have reached exorbitant levels for rare artifacts. Kamchengs, *chanaps*, plates, cups, vases... reproductions are being made in China to meet popular demand. Some are of very high quality.

Gelai tutop

In the old days, gelai tutop (glass bell jars) enclosing glittery metallic tinsel and figurines were popular among wellheeled anglophile Peranakans. They purchased or made these ornaments for the bridal chamber. Inside the glass are English or Chinese figures of animals, flowers, fruits and foliage arranged in a whimsical manner. Gelai tutop are still collected although they are rarely seen in Peranakan homes these days.



silicate and calcium carbonate. My Makmak used to plaster her face white with a layer of *bedak* and then clean off the excess with a handkerchief until her skin showed a fresh, pink glow. I use it to clean my silver jewellery. The tarnish comes off instantly, like magic!

Weddings Elaborate 12-day wedding celebrations to signify wealth and status are a thing of the past in our *chepat chepat* (fastpaced) lifestyle. Where can you find the elaborate sedan chairs and bearers these days? However, Peranakan-themed weddings with the couple in traditional costume are in vogue as babas and nyonyas become aware of their heritage. The simplified celebration usually lasts not more than three days.

🜔 Bedak sejok

O This square box of bedak sejok (literally, cold powder) with a fair skinned beauty on the lid has been in production since the late 19th century. It is still produced in Tangerang, Indonesia, using magnesium



Bedak sejok.



Shophouses Different cultural influences merge in the ornate architecture of over 6,000 conserved shophouses (tiam chu in Hokkien) and residential terrace houses (pai chu) seen in certain parts of Singapore. Popularly associated with the Peranakans, many were also lived in by other ethnic groups such as the Arabs, Banjar and Chettiars. These houses typically feature high ceilings, airwells and wooden upper floors as 'cooling' buffers against our tropical climate.



roasted or dried in the sun before use. But beware of upsetting your neighbours. The *bau amis* (stink) spreads for miles.

udang geragau, belachan should be

Chinchalok

24 Fried fish never tasted so good without this appetite enhancer. My father could polish off a couple of deep-fried *ikan chencharu sumbat* chilli *bawang puteh* (stuffed with chilli paste and garlic) and plenty of white rice when he had his *chinchalok* served with sliced shallots, red chillies and lime juice. Some Peranakans spike this concoction of fermented *udang geragau*, dry cooked rice and salt with brandy. *Lagi shiok*!

the **fragrance** of home Did someone mention that Babas like to *kentut* (break

Did someone mention that Babas like to *kentut* (break wind) around the house? From the pungent to the sweet-smelling, our culture takes the prime position.

Photo by Linda Che

21 Bunga rampay (potpourri) The bunga rampay comes from a Malay custom. Peranakans like to have bunga rampay as a traditional touch at weddings and other festive occasions or in the room for a nice fragrance.

It is essentially a potpourri of many *wangi* (sweet-smelling) materials. These include shredded *pandan* (screwpine) leaves and flowers such as jasmine, rose and chempaka, additionally scented with perfume, patchouli being a popular fragrance. Shredded *lemo perot*

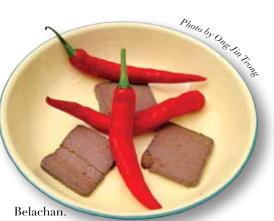
(kaffir lime) rind lends a fresh, citrusy smell.

22 Aromatic herbs

Peranakans use plenty of herbs to produce complex flavours in their foods. Imagine plucking fresh from your herb garden *daon lemo perot* (kaffir lime), b*unga kantan* (torch ginger bud), *daon kesom* (laksa leaf), *daon kemangi* (basil leaf), *daon kunyit* (turmeric leaf) and *daon salam* (bay leaf) for *sambals*, curries and *nasi ulam*. Just a few sprigs of any herb when steaming white rice would be divine!

> Belachan Aiyee, kusmangat, lu nyonya tak tau makan *sambal belachan?* (you are a nyonya but don't eat sambal belachan?) Aunties and uncles look in mock horror at my niece for not being true to her heritage. Indeed, Peranakans from Malacca or Penang also fiercely dispute the merits of their hometown belachan, a.k.a. Peranakan 'cheese'. Made from fermenting crustaceans or

Bunga kantan.



Chinchalok.

⁹hoto by Colin Chee



Tumis rempah (stir-frying ${\it 20}$ the spice paste) Rempah to the Peranakans is like pesto to the Italians, only more potent. The strong aroma of the *rempah* frying in hot oil never fails to make me sneeze. A good nyonya cook is discerned by the way she uses the ladle to *tumis* (stir fry) rempah. A sizzle must be heard when the *rempah mentah* (raw) is poured into the kuali, instantly absorbing the oil. The rempah is just about ready when it pechah minyak (throws out the oil, that is, when the oil exudes to the surface). She knows when the *rempah* is ready by the garing (crispy) smell when the fragrance rises.

26 Sambal petai Kentot busok, kenching

kuning (smelly fart, yellow pee) aptly describes the potency of these bright green almond-sized antioxidants also known as stink beans. Peranakans love their *petai* raw or tossed into a rich sambal gravy to be eaten with plenty of rice.

4711 Eau de 🖌 Cologne

My 87-year old father used to splash this German-made "water from Cologne" on his face and neck, every morning before work and every evening before dinner. A throwback to British colonial times, it was one of the importedfrom-England toiletries popular among anglophile Babas for its fresh, cooling fragrance.

Sambal petai.

Brylcreem

Ong Jin Teong

For that all-day shine and hold, use Brylcreem! Sounds familiar? This clean-smelling oldschool grooming pomade gave virile, young Babas visions of achieving the desired silver screen Clark Gable hairstyle. Remember your father and uncles in their high-waisted long pants and starched white shirts with rolledup sleeves? They slicked on sticky pomade until not a hair was out of place. Then after a shower, wet hair towel-rubbed, they would look electrified!

90 English lavender talcum þowder

Both my nyonya mother and mother-in-law insisted on using only Yardley talc and soap by Yardley of London in their younger days. Women of their generation loved the refinement of English-made toiletries.

Joss sticks

These bring back delightful memories for me when children could stay up late on the ninth day of the Lunar New Year to pai Ti

Kong seh (pray to the Jade Emperor on the deity's birthday). The altar table set up in our garage would be laden with colourful fruits and Peranakan food served in even more colourful

> nyonyaware. The sandalwood joss sticks emanated a woody fragrance throughout the house, later overpowered by the metallic smell of firecrackers that were joyfully set off.

4711 Eau de Cologne.

a **touch** of dexterity

The babas and nyonyas have a certain deftness of hand, whether it be in gambling, embroidery, or reining in the recalcitrant young.



Yeo Kaytua

Yeo Kasut

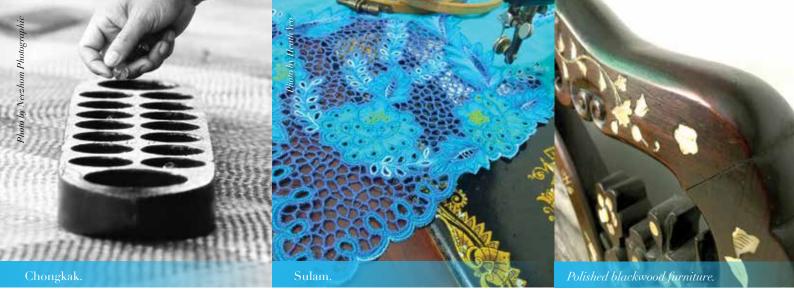
Cherki cards.

Cherki

Cherki was so popular for gambling that the British colonial government outlawed the game at the turn of the 20th century. Many bibiks were cherki addicts who neglected their families. They pawned jewellery and lost small fortunes. Those caught gambling were hauled to jail in Black Maria vans - a sight that inspired the hugely successful 2002 theatre production Bibiks Behind Bars (see page 6). Cherki was modified by the Peranakans from an old Chinese leaf game known as daun cherki. The cards have many Hokkien and Baba Malay words.

Chongkak

Growing up in 1960s Singapore, our cousins would converge in our house a large bungalow in a rubber estate - during the holidays. The mothers cooked and fathers enjoyed a tipple. The children played endless games. We became *ninjas* (remember Shintaro?) darting around the rubber trees,





rubbed rubber seeds to 'burn' each other, or played *chongkak*. Instead of glass marbles, we used cowrie shells. *Chongkak* was a popular pastime among Malays and Peranakans up to the 1970s.

33 Batu giling and batu lesong (granite roller and mortar & pestle) In the old days, every Peranakan kitchen had its own

set of raw granite 'appliances' the *batu giling* and *batu lesong* - to grind wet spices. Today, few local households use the heavy *batu giling* to grind *rempah*. I have turned mine into a décor item. But I still use the *lesong* to crush ginger, peppercorns and salt. Somehow, the food tastes better. The unevenly crushed spices release more flavour than ingredients cut finely in a blender or processor.

Polishing blackwood furniture

When we were younger, my brothers and I had to clean our blackwood living set a week or so before the Lunar New Year. We had a system. First, wrap a lightly damp cloth around a chopstick. Then poke the 'mini-mop' through every gap in the intricate carvings to remove the dust. Give a good overall wipe - your chair is clean, ready to be applied with beeswax or *tung* oil and polished twice till glossy.

Sulam (embroidery) 35 I remember my mother skillfully pedalling her treadle Singer sewing machine every afternoon when I was a young girl. As I watched over her shoulder, the needle would dance effortlessly, threading exactly over the traced *sulam* (embroidery) patterns. Colourful flowers and butterflies would come alive within the wooden hoop. Delicate net-like patterns emerged as she carefully snipped out the fabric. Like her, young nyonyas made their own kebayas. Sadly, that era has passed. Working mothers like

36 Carving chanap flowers This is a vanishing art in Singapore and Malaysia. Happily, young Lee Yuen Thien (below) of Bukit Berendam, Malacca, who is only all of 28 years old, has been conscientious enough to acquire the skill and demonstrate it to others willing to learn.

me neither inherited the passion

nor the skill.



Eating with fingers

As children, we would eat with our fingers at home like the Malays. Forks and spoons were reserved for special occasions when we had guests. The correct etiquette is to put the food at the tips of the fingers and push it towards the mouth daintily. Simply putting the food into the whole of the hand and stuffing it into the mouth is not considered *halus* (refined).

38 Siseh rambot,

chochok sanggol

their hair back so tightly over their scalps

until their hairlines receded. The *sanggol*

(chignon) was the

to touch a bibik's

crowning glory of every

bibik. Never attempt

hair she has spent

Kim Puay Neo (left), poked three large gilt

hairpins into her tiny

greying chignon.

much time gelling it. I

remember my paternal grandmother, Chee

(combs and hairpins)

Bibiks used to comb



Chochok sanggol.

Paper folding

Peranakan women recycled their cherki cards after these became worn out from frequent play. When they were not gambling, bibiks and nyonyas would skilfully fold the cards with origami-like precision to produce pretty paper lanterns, flowers and animals to present to their friends.

Rotan (the cane)

Siap pantat! (Prepare your butt!) Every baba remembers mother's lethal weapon from their boyhood days. From experience, the thinnest rotan produces the deadliest whack (rembat or sebat). TPAS president Peter Wee, now in his 70s, admits being caned for disobedience. TPAS first vice-president Alan Koh, 61, laughs over his many canings "I was quite naughty". Richard Tan, 60, creative director of Main Wayang, vividly remembers the *rotan* was always "gantong kat blakang pintu dapor" (hung behind the kitchen door)...on standby!" Kuala Lumpur Peranakan association president Cedric Tan, who turns 50 in June, says of the merah merah or 'red' stripes on his legs: "Depending on the crowd...it was shameful with the girls and relatives or cool with your schoolmates.

the **sound** of the

NYONYa Baba David Neo's love of patois rings deep in his thoughts. Bantering from Kuala Lumpur...

Patois or Baba Malay

After living two and a half decades abroad, my ear aches to hear Baba Malay! It was great to converse in patois with lain orang embok-embok when I was helping to start the Peranakan Association of Australia (PAA) in Melbourne some years ago. Now that I am based in Kuala Lumpur, and Malacca being just two hours away, speaking patois never fails to liven me up. It makes me feel so at home.

🕦 Accents (Baba Malay versus Bahasa Malay)

42 Dengair baik-baik yeh (listen carefully): Learning Bahasa Malay in school, I came home and asked my grandmother, "Mama, mana pisau (where is the knife)?" She responded swiftly: "Pisau...lu apa? Anak Melayu, yeh?" ("What are you? Son of a Malay?") At my cousin's Malay class, her che'gu (teacher) wrote on the board: ULAR (snake in Bahasa Malay) and pronounced it; my cousin raised her hand and said, "salah, Che'gu. Ulair...'

43 Melatah and charok (exclamations, usually of vulgarities

when startled, and swearing)

As a little boy, I used to creep up behind my grandmother with a blown up bag and pop it just to hear Mama melatah and charok, which a well brought up, bertapi-tapi (refined) Baba such as I daren't repeat! But gone are the days when one would have a good chuckle over the unabashed

bibiks' brazen charok-charok banter it still tickles me when they come to mind!

The nyonya's sharp wit and tongue

14 It used to irk me when I could not find something and asking my mother, her response would be: "lu charek barang pakay mata ka pakay mulot (do you look with your eves or your mouth)?" Her (and the nyonyas') wicked sarcasm and wit are what I miss terribly these days. I still vividly remember her critical comment of a newsreader on television: "Tengok mulot dia macham geledak abis idung dia pesak sekali!" (Look at how wide her mouth and flat her

nose is!" This exclamation gets lost in translation). Or, her remark of the mother of my sister's ex-boyfriend singing in church: "Dengair mak dia nyanyi macham itek gila (His mother sings like a crazy duck)!"

> **Tumbok** lesong 45

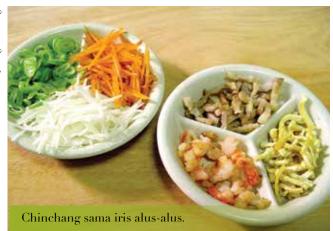
(pounding of the mortar and pestle) I used to hear and read that nyonyas of old could gauge your culinary skills by just listening to how one *tumbok* lesong. I could not comprehend this logic until I heard a non-Peranakan Chinese (whom we referred to as *Cheena gerk*) *tumbok* lesong! Now I know betol tak ada (there is no) rhythm mia!

Tumbok lesong.

photo by Ong Jin Teogo

Chinchang sama iris alus-alus (chopping 46 and slicing finely)

If you grew up in an extended Peranakan family, you would be used to the hustle and bustle in the kitchen. It was always heartwarming to be involved in the communal cooking at Botan House (my mother's rumah abu, or ancestral home on Neil Road, mentioned in Lee Kip Lin's *The Singapore House* pp. 172-173). But my Ee (maternal aunty) begged to differ, remembering the melodrama she often witnessed: "The nyonyas are full of colour... they will laugh and cry in the kitchen!" Laugh and cry in the kitchen we did. As children it was horror to our ears when my mother decided to masak poh pia sama chia satu dunia (cook popiah and invite the whole world)! The next three days entailed endless chopping and slicing for the rempah popiah (filling) that would fill a periok satu budak kechik boleh masok (the huge aluminium pot that could fit a little child)! There goes our playtime... Even my blind Dad was recruited to *persiang taugeh* (pluck the roots off the beansprouts)!



Cherita dulu kala (stories from the olden days) Sam Pek Eng Tai (Butterfly Lovers) and the Sam Kok (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) were two great Chinese classics that were translated into Baba Malay and became very popular. Sam Pek Eng Tai is the tragic folktale about star-crossed lovers who became united as butterflies only in their afterlife.



Cherita dulu kala.

It was beautifully adapted for the stage by the late playwright Felix Chia in the 1980s.

48 Keronchung What is more soothing and lembut (directly translated

as 'soft', an aesthetic valued by the Malays and Peranakans that captures agility and form) than lagu-lagu (tunes of) keronchong, which used to lull me to sleep. In vogue from the



1920s through 1960s, this genre of music originated in Indonesia and till today is much loved by the Peranakans.

Panton (poems)

I miss Kong Cho's (great grandfather's) grand birthday and ronggeng (dancing) parties at Botan House when Mama would always sing the *dondang* sayang and engage in repartee with clever verses in panton... She had a book of panton that she would faithfully consult to keep her mind sharp.

Ramay-ramay, laojiat-laojiat (gather 20 together and make merry again, somewhat lost in translation)

For me, the greatest thing about being Peranakan is the hospitality. To ramay-ramay, laojiat-laojiat at the slightest excuse is what we live for, especially having grown up with Kong Cho's (great grandfather's) lavish parties... I can't afford to throw such costly parties but I find every excuse to masak (cook) and chia orang makan (invite people for a meal) so that we can ramay-ramay, laojiat-laojiat sama makan sampay gila (and eat like mad)!

dalam dapor

learning to cook in post-indep

NYONYA LINDA CHEE REMINISCES ON GROWING UP WITH CUTTINGS AND COOKBOOKS NEXT TO HER STUDY TABLE

Singapore was in dire straits after independence in 1965. The young nation had been cast out of Malaysia. The British armed forces were moving out East of Suez, threatening high unemployment. Money was tight for the local populace during those early years. It was a luxury to dine in the few fancy restaurants like Troika or Cathay. Schoolchildren invariably went home for their meals before hawker centres made eating out affordable decades later. Home cooking was thus an essential routine of daily life. English-educated Peranakan housewives and their daughters, or sons who liked to cook, honed their culinary skills largely from local cookbooks, magazines or newspapers. It was also a time when girls learnt the domestic sciences in school.

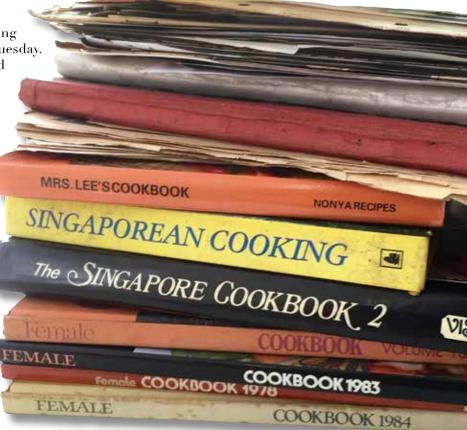
Wan remarked as she bit into Wan remarked as she bit into the rock bun. My partner, Teo Lee Huang, and I were mortified. We had overlooked this essential ingredient. Our eyes fell to the ground. Three golden rock buns dotted with dark raisins fell from the corner of my tray onto the cold floor. None broke. Our shortcrust wonders were rocks indeed. Lee Huang and I muffled giggles but quickly shut up. Mrs Wan was not amused.

So much for beginner's luck. It was my first cookery lesson at Raffles Girls' Secondary School (RGS). I was in Secondary One in 1970. But I was undeterred by that humbling start and loved my cookery classes every Tuesday. Our bible was *Let's Learn to Cook*, authored by Mrs Christina M C Fones in 1970. Our principal was the cultured Miss Evelyn Norris, much feared and much loved by many.

All Secondary One and Two classes had to undergo domestic science training. We had to become proficient in skills that would make us good wives. From the single-storey Home Economics Block along Anderson Road, long demolished since, Mrs Fones and Mrs Wan taught gingham-aproned teenagers how to cook, sew and keep the house and kitchen in proper order. For reasons that I had no clue then, we also attended technical class, where we commuted to Swiss Cottage Secondary School for two years to do woodwork and metalwork. It was fun sawing and drilling, and probably good for nation building. But to me it was largely a waste of time.

I was more interested in cooking.

Armed with our orange compendium, my classmates and I learnt to cook local favourites such as chicken porridge, curry puffs, *bubor cha cha*, banana *hoon kueh* and a Eurasian curry called fish *moolie*. But for the most part, we were taught how to prepare English food. In anglicised fashion, we cooked our first French toast; fried eggs sunny side up; and baked marble cake, scones and shortcrust biscuits, where we rubbed lumps of butter into flour with cool fingers until they looked like breadcrumbs. We learnt how to cream butter and sugar until glossy with a wooden spoon, in a Green's mixing bowl made in England.



Just a small pile of the recipes I had amassed over 40 years.

endence Singapore

I opted for domestic science as a subject for my 'O' levels. Instead of struggling with the pure sciences like physics and chemistry, I breezed through two years of planning menus and cooking lavish meals. It was a joyous episode of building up my foundational skills in Western-style cooking. I discovered that successful roasts and bakes depended on precise ingredients and temperatures, in contrast with the *agak agak* (estimating) style of Peranakan cooking that I picked up from my mother, Low Suan Neo.

I had found my element with the oven. Swiss rolls, sandwich cakes, doughnuts, éclairs, blancmange and the spiffy trifle these mouthwatering *ang mo* desserts were demystified in the school kitchen. Western cooking was so methodical. Even with sauces. To this day, whenever I cook a stew, I still see in my mind's eye Mrs Wan stirring flour into melted butter in a saucepan to demostrate a *roux*. As she added the milk a little at a time over gentle heat, keeping the *roux* perfectly smooth, the girls would be covertly admiring our elegantly dressed teacher, standing between the ring stoves in her straight-cut cheongsam and pumps.

My copy of Mrs Fone's classic was long gone when we moved house. The one you see here is a dogeared collectible kindly lent to me by my friend, Low Whee Hoon. Thumbing through the

pages and reminiscing her French toast days, Whee Hoon is inspired to try out at least a couple of recipes, like our famous rock buns! Who can forget Let's Learn to Cook, with its brilliant orange cover?

LET'S

COOK Christina M C Fones



A smattering of yellowed recipe cuttings that remind us of the lifestyles in post-independence Singapore.

dalam dapor

other avenues to learn to cook. Black-and-white television aired news, comedies, wrestling and the Andy Williams Show. I could not understand cooking programmes in Chinese on Rediffusion. If my mother did not venture to community centres for cooking classes, neither did I.

Our treasure trove came from magazines and newspapers. I have to thank my mother for instilling in me a passion for collecting recipes. Since I was a toddler, she had been subscribing to the UK-based Woman's Own, Woman and the local Her World magazines, later adding Female. After poring over them from front to back, she would cut out the recipes neatly and compile them in plastic files. Or paste them in large foolscap exercise books, the ones that came with speckled black covers taped in red at the spine.

My mother copied recipes in cursive British-style longhand, in a mix of patois and ungrammatical English that only Peranakans could understand. With measures like genggam (handful), jari (thumbsized) and *mangkok*

Every cook is a

better cook with

(Douga

Dougall

SELF-RAISING

(cupful). "Aiyee, ya juga," she would say as she gleefully recorded cooking tips or short cuts revealed by this auntie or that grandauntie from Singapore and Malacca.

Holidays were the best time of the year. We cousins would bunch together and play the whole day or persiang taugeh (pluck the roots off the bean sprouts) while a cacophony of our nyonya mothers gossiped as they prepared popiah or mee siam in the backyard of our house.

I have duly documented my mother's precious versions AJI-NO-MOTO ER/SEASONING

at 12-8 IND'S RESTS WITH GUALL'S ERGS

Siamese Curry should

whet your appetite

by ELLICE HANDY

Malayan Kitche making those or sambals

resh ingredients

advises cookery expert ELIZABETH JAY





of Peranakan dishes, many of which were handed down from my grandmother. I have also kept important recipes from my late mother-in-law, Ada Law (Mum Ada), such as for curry powder, rendang and butter cake, which is my husband Colin's alltime favourite.

Before the days when half of Singapore flew out

during school holidays, we had plenty of time on our hands at home. I designed my own recipe book when I was 13 years old. The cover was lovingly wrapped in Reynold's aluminium foil

Cuttings from Her World in the 1960's. Ellice Handy was perhaps the first local celebrity chef.

with a giant cut-out of a doughnut in the middle, surrounded by smaller cut-outs of dishes. Many

of the recipes were copied by hand. Just the other day I dusted it from a corner of my bedroom. The foil has discoloured and deteriorated with age. It looks amateurishly silly now. Still, my book was a carefree schoolgirl's work of art.

Every long holiday break until I was in Secondary Four, I would be at the verandah of our terraced house using my father's white Olympia typewriter to copy recipes from the magazines. In the process I mastered speed typing, later becoming the fastest on the keyboard at the School of Journalism in Times Organisation (now Singapore Press Holdings).

While thinking about what to write for this article, I remembered keeping a pile of cuttings hoping that I would try out a recipe or two when I had the time. Trust a working mother to say that. Fortunately, Colin did not send them to the recycle bin. One of my yellowed Her World cuttings, dated November 1961 (when I was just three years old), carries Ellice Handy's famous Siamese Curry recipe to "whet your appetite", along with recipes for Boiled Vegetable and Coconut Milk Sambal, Crab Curry and Dried Curried Chicken (Malayan style).

Her World was then known for its extensive spread of local recipes. One important column that carried on for many years in the 1960s was "Malayan Kitchen".





Chicken Curry dingredients: teacups coconut milk from 1 coconut(1 cup first squeeze, cups second.) chicken out inti pieces ground:-ketumbar edients tobe dessertspoon jintan manis dessertspoon dessertspoon jintan putch dried chillies(seeded) together inch piece dry buah keras turmerio serai sliced slices lengkuas together small onions cloves garlic Boil chicken in 3 2 cups of coconut milk, adding salt, till i is tender and milk becomes oil. Fry the ground ingredients of the second group and after about ten minutes add ingredients of the first group. Fry well and when well cooked add the one oup of thick milk. Simmer till gravy becomes thick.

Female magazine was also very popular among home cooks. Its recipes commanded such influence that a host of annual cookbooks were spawned for more than a decade. These were

As a schoolgirl, I copiously typed out recipes from British magazines. It was a great way to practise typing.

eagerly snapped up as soon as they rolled off the press.

The Straits Times and New Nation as well as their Sunday editions, are equally to be credited for rolling out thousands of recipes for home cooks through the decades. These newspapers brought fame to numerous regular contributors, many of whom went on to author cookbooks. Besides the doyenne Ellice Handy, they included Joan Frois, Elizabeth Jay, Aloyah Alkaff, Wendy Hutton and Peranakans such as Terry Tan, Tan Lee Leng, Violet Oon, Lee Geok Boi, Margaret Chan and Sylvia Tan.

Iconic Cookbooks

Ask any ardent home cook about Peranakan recipes and chances are that she or he would own a copy of the iconic Mrs Lee's Cookbook by Mrs Lee Chin Koon, who was none other than the mother of our founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (see pages 11 and 36). It was first produced in December 1974 and reprinted over a dozen times by popular demand. Hers was probably the first compilation of traditional nyonya recipes in an easy-to-follow style for budding cooks. Another timeless classic first produced in the 1970s, in two thick volumes, is Singaporean Cooking by Mrs Leong Yee Soo, who happened to be the sister of Mrs Lee Chin Koon. Besides Peranakan recipes, her book added household staples from Chinese, Eurasian, Malay and even Indian kitchens.

But way before Mrs Lee's or Mrs Leong's books

My mother. Low Suan Neo, and Ng Kim (maternal aunty) Bong from Malacca cooking lunch at home during my wedding celebration in 1980.

appeared, culinary history was made when the seminal $M\gamma$ Favourite Recipes was published by Ellice Handy in 1952 to raise funds for Methodist Girls' School where she was the principal. Mrs Handy pioneered Singaporean

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Raymond Wong

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SINGAPOREAN COOKING



MRS. LEE CHIN KOON

Iconic titles that are a must-have for every Peranakan cook - Mrs Lee's Cookbook and Singaporean Cooking.

recipes that were inexpensive, nutritious and unpretentious. She was said to be the first to give accurate measures and timings. Her only book is a gem prized by grandmothers, mothers and their daughters.

A best seller even now, Mrs Handy's colonial-era recipes reflect the eating lifestyles from the 1930s to the 1950s: From Duck Pot Roast, Date Chutney and Savoury Brinjal Sandwiches to Coconut Candy, Pie Tee, Curry Devil, Mee Siam, Fried Curry Puffs and even Fish Ball Soup. Many of my mother-in-law's dishes so loved by our family originated from Mrs Handy's book. When Mum Ada was cashstrapped in the 1970s, raising

a young family, she modified Mrs Handy's aromatic curry powder into her own version and sold them in packets. I am sure that like Mum Ada, Mrs Handy's book has blessed many other people in more ways than one. I know of at least one Peranakan culinary celebrity who still swears by her recipes such as Hainanese *babi panggang* (spiced roast pork).

The Next Generation

I have not found any need to replicate Mum Ada's curry powder with my trusty Sumeet grinder.

> Female magazine was renowned for its annual series of cookbooks featuring recipes from a plethora of sources including home cooks, restaurants and hotels.

It is so convenient to buy curry powder from many sources in Singapore and Malacca now. Her recipe will be passed down to my son, Keith, and daughter-in-law, Melinda, who makes the world's best French onion soup. They are well matched he does the mains, such as excellent steaks, and she, the starters and dessert, like raspberry *panna cotta*.

Keith learnt much from watching celebrity chefs who show their mettle on food channels on television and clips on google and youtube. These chefs cook from anywhere around the world and are highly entertaining as well. For tasting the actual food, he can pop into any of the fine restaurants that are commonplace in Singapore the global city. Melinda is a hospitality management graduate from Adelaide trained in the classroom kitchen. Married for over a year, the young couple has begun working together on Peranakan staples such as *babi pong teh* (see page 20), sambal timun and bakwan kepiting. My daughter Olivia, who works in Brisbane, recently concocted a mean sambal jantong pisang using ingredients available from Chinatown and the Vietnamese markets. She posted an image of the dish (see page22) on one of

our Peranakan food chat groups on facebook, earning much praise from aunties and uncles there. As a *nyonya* mother, I am gratified.

dalam dapor

a much-loved legacy

Even the most experienced nyonya cooks swear by *Mrs Lee's Cookbook*. The late Mrs Lee Chin Koon (Chua Jim Neo) authored this Peranakan classic in 1974 when she was already 67 years old. She had a mission to pass on to "the younger people in Singapore" recipes that were handed down for several generations within her family. We reproduce her recipe for *Mee Siam*, a favourite dish of her eldest son who was Singapore's founding Prime Minister, the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew.



Mrs Lee's *Mee Siam*

(Fried rice noodles served with a spicy coconut gravy) As retested by Mrs Lee's granddaughter, Shermay Lee.

600g (1 packet) *beehoon* (rice vermicelli) 600g medium-sized prawns 150g *kuchai* (chives) 400g (2 pieces) *taukua* (firm tofu) 10 *lemo kasturi* (calamansi limes) 160g *udang kering* (dried prawns) 300 ml oil 8 eggs 570 ml water 600g *taugeh* (bean sprouts)

Rempah:

300g *bawang merah* (shallots) 15 red chillies or 60 dried chillies 3 tbsp *belachan* (shrimp paste) 3 tbsp oil

Gravy:

300g *taucheo* (salted soy beans) 800 ml *santan* (coconut milk, using 150g grated coconut and sufficient water) = 1 small pkt Heng Guan Coconut 'Cream' (250 g) 1 medium-sized onion 4 tbsp sugar

Preparation

If dried chillies are used for the *rempah*, soak them in hot water. Soak the rice vermicelli (in cold or tap water) for 15 minutes then drain.

Add prawns to boiling water then simmer for 10 minutes. Set aside to cool. Shell, devein then halve prawns lengthwise. (Freeze the shells for use in other recipes).

Hardboil the eggs. Remove and allow to cool. Shell then slice into wedges.

Cut chives into 2 cm lengths.

(Discard the light green and white portion, which is about 5 cm from the base).

Cut the firm tofu into 3 cm strips and halve the limes. Pound/grind the dried prawns until finely minced.

Rinse the bean sprouts. Remove roots, leave the caps.

Prepare the *rempah*. Deseed then roughly chop the soaked fresh chillies. Peel and roughly chop the shallots. Pound/blend together with the prawn paste and oil. It should have a creamy orange texture.

Prepare the gravy. Lightly pound the salted soybeans, if whole beans are used. Peel and thinly slice the onions.

Prepare the coconut milk by soaking the grated coconut in the water for a few minutes and squeezing the pulp dry through a muslin cloth or sieve.

Method

In a pot, add salted soybeans, coconut milk, onions and sugar. Place pot over the stove, but leave the flame off.

Heat a wok over a high flame until it smokes. Add the oil. Add the tofu then lower the flame. Stir-fry in batches until light golden brown but still soft in the centre. (Avoid overcooking as it will become rubbery). Remove and drain.

Leave about 200 ml oil in the wok then stir-fry the *rempah*. After 5-10 minutes, add the dried prawns and continue frying for 1-2 minutes.

Remove 4 tablespoons of the mixture and set it aside in a small serving dish. Serve it on the side for those who want their *Mee Siam* spicier.

Stir-fry the mixture for about 15-20 minutes or more, until it turns a deep golden brown and the oil has separated.

Scoop out 5 tablespoons of the *rempah* and place it in the pot with the gravy ingredients. Over a medium flame, allow the gravy to simmer (uncovered) for about 30 minutes. Once it has thickened slightly, keep it warm over a very low flame.

Add 570 ml water to the remaining *rempah* in the wok. Stir thoroughly and bring to boil. Add the bean sprouts and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.

Add the rice vermicelli then lower the flame. Using cooking chopsticks or tongs (to prevent the vermicelli from breaking), turn the rice vermicelli and bean sprouts over in the wok. This helps the riace vermicelli to cook evenly and mixes all the ingredients.

Dish the rice vermicelli out onto a large serving plate or onto individual plates. Garnish with the fried tofu, chives and prawns. Arrange the sliced eggs and limes around the edge of the dish.

Serve the gravy in a separate bowl. Pour the gravy over the rice vermicelli just before eating.

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characteristic

hakap

You have been acting since 1974. Has being a Peranakan influenced you to become an actor?

*c*hakap

I'm not conscious of any overt Peranakan influence on my decision to become an actor. I would call my parents - my father was born in China and my mother was a seventh generation Peranakan - modern, being the first in their families to go to university. There were always books, overseas newspapers and magazines around the house. And there was music, my dad being an audiophile. But being modern meant dispensing with tradition, which meant I was never infused with either Chinese or Peranakan culture.

The closest I got to that is a visual memory of what my grandparents wore. My father's Hokkien parents wore flared floodwater pants and Chinese tunic tops. My mother's Peranakan parents couldn't have been more different. Grandfather usually wore a white *baju tutup* outfit and Mak (grandmother) would always be in a sarong kebaya. So my DNA is somewhat fused between the two. I'm really not sure where my inner urge to become an actor came from. All I know was I discovered a buzz going on stage which was both physical and intellectual.

Do you feel Peranakan and in what aspects?

I feel Peranakan because of my almost total inability to speak Mandarin or Hokkien! Now that must be in the blood.

Do you think our culture is sustainable?

In my life and family, it's almost

all gone. I have no knowledge of Baba Malay or any decent knowledge of Peranakan culture. A lot of this stems from my father's belief that his Chinese roots were a thing of the bad old past and that English was the language of the future. Here was a man who could speak Mandarin as well as all the dialects. I'm not sure how my mother felt. Of course my mother spoke to Mak only in the patois and with her siblings as well. So the patter was always within

earshot, but never spoken to me. There was never pressure to learn the Peranakan vernacular.

Only my wife, Sylvia, has hung onto a few traditions. Every time there is a wedding in the younger generation, she insists on a *tok panjang* ('long table' feast) during the celebrations. The Peranakan Association Singapore is doing a fine job. Perhaps it is the conduit for passing down the traditions.

How do you feel about receiving acclaim for your performances?

Acclaim is a side issue, because it is only accorded by the eye of the beholder. I am critical about what I do, so I take praise very cautiously and find criticism more useful for the future. I try to be very objective



In the 2004 movie Perth, Kay Tong's lead performance as deranged taxi driver Harry Lee won wide acclaim from film critics.

about a performance. What is important is my own appraisal of what I've done, what I can improve on, what was good, what was bad. I'm only interested in getting better and that will continue for a lifetime.

What motivates you as an actor? Who is your inspiration?

At this time of my life, what matters is an interesting role, and if possible something different from what I have done before. Rather than emulate anyone, the inspiration for a

part comes from within - which is a strange mix of learnt technique, work and life experience and imagination.

Which medium do you enjoy most - stage, television or film?

Television and film have more of a place for me. Stage, when you're young, gets your adrenalin going. But film and television are more intimate. I enjoy the interior work required for the screen. Stage work has to be projected, so there's a barrier to the character's inner life. The camera tries to pick up what's inside a person.

What was it like acting in the long-running serial Growing Up (1996 -2001)?

Growing Up was one of the best times I had in my career. Working

Dubbed as Singapore's Robert de Niro, character actor Lim Kay Tong has turned in scintillating performances in all three mediums - television, stage and film. He has starred opposite Sean Penn and Pierce Brosnan in his long film career and is a board member of Theatreworks, which he co-founded in 1985. The ex-rugby national is happily married to popular cookbook author, Sylvia Tan.





Above, Kay Tong as our late founding Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in the famous press conference scene from the SG50 movie, 1965. (Photograph is by courtesy of Blue3 Pictures and mm2 Entertainment).

Left, The Tay family in the awardwinning serial, Growing Up, set in the 1960s to 1980s.

regularly day in and day out for six years taught me much about screen acting and building a character for the medium. If there is another worthy series I would not hesitate. I have, post-*Growing Up*, enjoyed working on *The Pupil*. But it only lasted two seasons, even though it picked up a couple of awards at the Asian Television Awards.

You were once a journalist in The Sunday Times and New Nation. Would you have made a good journalist if you were not acting?

I was a journalist for nearly five years and I enjoyed the writing. Perhaps I was fortunate the press was going through a tough time the Anson by-election, the rise and fall of the Singapore Monitor. My wife could see I was getting frustrated and urged me to strike out full time as an actor.

That was the best advice and show of support I could only have dreamt of, but it was real! My marriage and being an actor are all I can ask for. Maybe if the acting work dries up, I will return to writing. But then this is someone who loves Samuel Beckett!

What advice can you give to aspiring local actors?

From my experience as an actor - work very hard on your audition piece. Strive to be better than anyone else going for the part and get the job! Easier said than done and luck does play a part, but you have to make the most of that when it does come your way.



Above, Kay Tong and Sylvia at their tok panjang wedding dinner at home in 1983. Next to them is playwright Michael Chiang, who first introduced Kay Tong to Sylvia.

As a founder of TheatreWorks, are you satisfied with how theatre has progressed in Singapore?

The theatre scene has developed tremendously. However performance standards vary. I think a proper apprenticeship is necessary to get the basics right. But we are always in a hurry. Aspiring artists want to get somewhere fast without dwelling too long on the fundamentals.

We started TheatreWorks to give ourselves work and it's heartening to see so many more practitioners doing so much more. What is deeply encouraging is that I meet young actors who have bravely ventured out and are earning a living from acting in the most pragmatic way - doing both commercial and artistic work. art

Jung

1975

0

The Holy Family (150 x 200cm) is painted in acrylic and oil on linen. It was commissioned to be a stunning visual compendium of cultural references: the poh kia ee, the Virgin's kasot manek, her udang galah tinted sarong kebaya, Joseph's sarong, a mother-of-pearl chair, the belimbing tree and the potted plants.

PROMISE

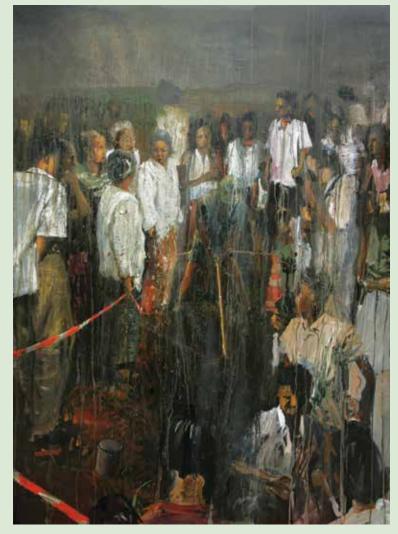
BABA BRYAN TAN SITS DOWN WITH ALVIN ONG TO DISCUSS HIS INFLUENCES AND ASPIRATIONS AS A PAINTER

Then I heard I was to interview Alvin Ong, a prodigious local painter and youngest winner of the UOB Painting of the Year award in 2005 at the age of 16, I immediately imagined someone who had been cooped up for too long in a room without showering. Someone who always had smudges of paint pigments on his fingers and clothes. But the person who turned up at my doorstep was quite something else.

As a fellow contemporary aged 27, Alvin is the perfect depiction of the boy next door. Affable and unassuming, he smiles seriously as he recounts his humble beginnings growing up.

"I'm not Peranakan by descent, but I spent a lot of time with my godparents and their extended family who are Peranakan. I assimilated a lot of aspects of the culture growing up with them," he recalls. "My paintings are a record of social memory, stories that I think are worth preserving."

One of his earlier sketches featured the living room





of his godparents' house."This place has a special place in my heart, because it holds many memories of family events. It was very organic and eclectic. Antique furniture and photos sat casually next to their modern counterparts. For me it is a way in which memories are layered on top of one another."

Fast-forward to the present, and Alvin describes a recent privately commissioned piece, *The Holy Family* for a Peranakan home. Looking past the religious subject matter, one discovers the painting to be a stunning visual compendium of cultural references:

the poh kia ee, the Virgin's kasot manek, her udang galah tinted sarong kebaya, Joseph's sarong, a mother-of-pearl chair, the belimbing tree and the potted plants. All of these combine to conjure a world perhaps only familiar to an older generation.

Alvin talks about the Bukit Brown cemetery; witnessing its subsequent redevelopment prompted him to interrogate his roots and the price we pay for development. *In Search of Tanah Airku* is a recent work in which many of these thoughts come together. This work features what seems to be an exhumation amongst a gathering of figures.

I probe into its slightly dark and morbid elements and he nods wryly in acknowledgement, "My paintings may seem a bit melancholic and nostalgic, but sometimes I think death and loss isn't something to be *pantang* (superstitious) about, because they are part and parcel of life."

When asked about the parallels to Peranakan culture, whether discovering what is past and forgotten is a way to move forward, Alvin wholeheartedly agrees. "Culture and

In Search of Tanah Airku (125 x 180cm). Painted in oil on canvas in 2015, it features what seems to be an exhumation amongst a gathering of figures. tradition are our anchors in a changing world," he muses. "But at the same time not static, because of the people who inherit it and continue to sustain it." Alvin is now reading fine art in Oxford.

a love affair with canvas

FINGER PAINTER NYONYA ADELINE YEO CELEBRATES THE BEAUTY OF LIFE IN THE VIBRANCY OF HER WORKS, SHE ALSO PAINTS BLINDFOLDED, AS NYONYA LINDA CHEE MARVELS

eeting Adeline Yeo recently for the first time was like Lchancing upon a ray of sunshine in your living room. Her effervescence brims over. She squeals with giggly delight. And holds your arm like an old friend. I cannot help but smile at her brightness. Her personality dominates her works: exuberant, confident and joyful.

Adeline's transition from public relations consultant to full-time painting was fast-tracked, and serendipitous to discovering her roots. Her first painting was of a phoenix, as part of a fashion show that was Peranakan influenced. It became the design motif for a gown. That was in 2010. The trendy fashionista felt a calling to follow her passion for art.

Adeline has not looked back since. Her five solo exhibitions as a finger painter promptly sold out. She often paints blindfolded for charity. Her works are inspired by themes of love, journeys, dreams, visions and her own life.

Adeline is quick to declare that her path to success has not been a bed of roses. "You need to be very, very strong mentally and you need to have friends who support you in many ways." Adeline's strong network has been crucial "and I do everything myself. My sixth sense, intuition, efficiency. And most of all, the presence of a higher being. Art is spiritual. I am Christian but I understand what *fengshui* means."

Her works have surpassed a rather unusual benchmark. "Chanel has always been my inspiration. She once said, 'My passion will challenge convention. I told myself that one day, my art will be the same, or if not more, than the price of a Chanel suit.

Adeline hopes to "build an empire and a legacy". Her ambition is to "be globally recognized and to be a highly valued stock in the marketplace." By then, she smiles, "every single stroke would have to be measured in its entirety."

I have achieved that."





Chandelier (36x36 inches in acrylic on canvas) was done while blindfolded. Showing her dare, Adeline once completed a blindfold painting in one minute.

an eye for detail



vonva Carolyn Law never really was in touch with her Peranakan self until about two years ago.

She says: "I was always surrounded by the culture. But I did not take notice of it until I recently reconnected with a few family members whom I never knew existed. After the start of my studio ARThaus, I also got to know more people who showed me how colourful Peranakan culture is."

It helped too that when Carolyn was a child she was already exposed to the culture. "I was brought up by my nanny who was a Peranakan. She would make traditional kueh kueh (desserts) during Chinese New Year. She wore the sarong kebaya and cooked traditional Peranakan food. These are memories that will stay with me forever.

"When I was older and lived with my parents, family gatherings on my dad's side were always interesting. They all spoke in a smattering of English, Malay, Hokkien or just simply Baba patois," says the young and earnest painter, who is armed with a masters in Fine Art majoring in oil painting.

BABA COLIN CHEE IS IMPRESSED WITH ART TEACHER NYONYA CAROLYN LAW'S LATEST WORKS



Carolyn painted Genesis - a couple in Peranakan wedding costumes in oil on canvas on two panels, each 48 x 18 inches. Her current series of artworks on a Peranakan theme has sold very well.

Looking at her paintings of the Peranakan bridal couple and *kamchengs*, Carolyn muses: "I particularly like extremely detailed work. Peranakan ceramics, clothing, fashion accessories and even Peranakan cuisine are replete with minute details and flavours, and are laborious to produce. Peranakan colours are striking yet subtle in their blends."

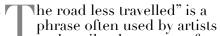
Her art is remarkable in the very fine details that she has managed to painstakingly document on canvas. In the flowers, the animals, birds and geometric patterns.

Carolyn started Arthaus, an art school in June 2011. Her students read like the United Nations: Brazilian, Indian, Japanese, Dutch, German, French, Swiss, Australian and British, amongst others. The youngest is four years old and the oldest, about 65.

Carolyn is busy planning for an exhibition in 2016 featuring only contemporary Peranakan works.

the adoptee as artist

THE SERENE FLORALS OF SYDNEY-BASED ARTIST GABBY MALPAS' PAINTINGS BARELY HINT OF THE STORIED LIFE SHE HAS LED AS A TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEE, BABA EMERIC LAU DISCOVERS.



L to describe the course of their lives. For Gabby Malpas, however, that choice was made for her.

Malpas was born in 1966 in Auckland, New Zealand. She lived in the United Kingdom for 14 years and has been in Sydney since 2003. Ethnically, she is "100% Chinese" although the revelation that she wasn't white, like the rest of her adoptive family, occurred fairly late: "I did not see myself as Asian at all until I hit my late teens". Hers was a "closed adoption", meaning that there were no real avenues for the adoptee or birth family to contact each other.

After a couple of unsuccessful attempts, Malpas was reunited with her birth mother — also an artist - in 2004. This was the start of a healing process that continues today.

Knowing her full ethnic heritage has made a huge difference in her artwork and life attitude: Malpas' work has exploded with "Asianness". She terms it Chinoiserie, in reference to the romanticised, Western view of Asia that was initially developed for Europeans.

Malpas is fascinated by the fusion or rather, profusion of Eastern and Western elements in Peranakan culture. She first encountered Peranakan objects in Malaysia, and was also introduced to Indonesian batiks which she finds the most beautiful fabrics in the world. She purchased a Peranakan teapot in Penang and it stars in many of her paintings. Cross-cultural elements permeate Malpas' artwork in a manner that may seem jarring to purists; quite unwittingly thus, she challenges stereotypes.

She would love to exhibit in Singapore and is keen to see how an Asian audience reacts to her work. *Titled* "I Will Not Love You Long Time", *this vibrant setting with nyonyaware combined watercolour, gouache and pencil on Arches paper. 57cm x 76cm.*





moving across images

AWARD-WINNING SHERMAN ONG EXTOLS TO AMIT PRITAM HIS LOVE FOR THE CAMERA AND THE THEMES THAT MOTIVATE HIS WORK

Photography, filmmaking and storytelling: Sherman Ong expertly uses these mediums to express and showcase his interest in the human condition and its surrounding environments. Sherman was born in 1971 in Malacca. Growing up as a seventh generation Peranakan, he fondly recalls his time in school and how his classmates used to describe him. "They used to call me *orang*



China, bukan China or OCBC because of my mixed descent and the fact that I didn't speak Chinese. I found it strange for a short time but eventually, I just got used to it."

Sherman had cultivated an affinity for capturing visuals through the lens after his father presented him with his first Kodak camera when he was 10 years old.

"My interest in imagery started when I started taking photographs of my pets including dogs, cats and fish. Photographing them was also a way for me to understand them and nature better," he muses.

As he grew older, Sherman gained further

momentum through photographing people. "They are more complex as emotionally layered people compared to animals and nature," he clarifies pensively.

Sherman subsequently developed an interest in videography and filming moving images. He was exposed to world cinema The photograph above is part of Sherman's Spaces series and was shot at the Basel zoo in Germany during winter where the elephants are brought indoors to protect them from the cold. It was part of a series of works that won for him the prestigious 2012 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu Photography Award.

when he volunteered as an usher at the Singapore International Film Festival. "I started to have an interest in films and how I could use the power of moving images to tell my own stories."

Sherman's visual style is focused on forming narratives based on the themes of origin, migration and diaspora. His work, which has been showcased across the world, touches on the human aspects of life, death, love, hope and the relationships which people forge owing to their particular environments.

Sherman has travelled the world and honed his craft in artist residences from Hanoi to Fukuoka to Dar Es Salaam. In 2012, he won the prestigious 2012 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu Photography Award for outstanding achievement in his field of art. His current showcases include a series of documentary video installations, titled *Islands in Between*, that can be viewed at the National Library Building as part of the Geo|Graphic series.

bespoke *sulam*

BABA HEATH YEO LOVES TO EXPERIMENT – HIS ONE-OF-A-KIND KEBAYAS ARE WEARABLE FANTASIES. BABA EMERIC LAU INTERVIEWS THIS DEDICATED EMBROIDERER.

B aba Heath Yeo struggles to qualify himself when asked if he is Peranakan. His paternal grandmother is *tionghoa* Peranakan from Indonesia, but his mother is Singaporean Chinese, "so I guess I'm half". His growing-up memories include seeing the sarong worn often at home, listening to the adults converse in patois and inhaling the aromas of nyonya cuisine wafting out from the kitchen.



When he was enrolled at St Anthony's Primary School, his parents selected Malay as his second language. But he was "reunited" with the Chinese class after his mother gave up, as he "cried and cried, wondering why I was singled out to learn Malay."

Heath studied Fashion Design at Lasalle College of the Arts. When working as a designer of formal and evening wear, he started to learn embroidery techniques. Each design had to be handdrawn to fit the garment, and he was charmed by the simplicity of how needle and thread could render various Above, an elaborate twosided sulam (embroidery) of goldfish - an auspicious motif - embellished with kerawang, or fine 'cutwork' embroidery where holes are cut out after the embroidery work to create a lace-like effect.

White cotton voile with scallop lace applied in layers for a wave effect.



motifs, richly shading them into life. Technically speaking, embroidery was but one method of garment

Heath wears his own sulam creation, displaying his fine handiwork.

embellishment, alongside beading, *inspire nanawe* lacework and applique. What made it special was his recollection of his late grandmother donning her beautifully embroidered (*sulam*) *kebayas* and how different the effect was when compared with its use on more contemporary fashion. Heath embarked on

a journey of sorts researching books, museums, antique stores and even consulting friends who had vintage *kebayas*. Sadly, his grandmother's *kebayas* had been buried with her.

Heath found a teacher in Madam Moi of Kim Seng Kebaya who imparted the art of embroidering kebayas to him.

He experiments with designs. His facebook wall sports a photo of supermodel Christy Turlington printed on a kebaya a commendable attempt to evolve away from traditional expectations. Heath believes that the *kebaya* form will change. He has a strong affinity for traditional

> methods, including sulam produced on a manuallyoperated Singer sewing machine for its singular uniqueness, but also acknowledges that industrialscale machines can embroider kebayas at a faster pace and in ever more sophisticated designs.

"Kebaya sulam deserves its place alongside traditional techniques such as Indian embroidery and handembroidered Chinese silk above all, it is unique to us."

books

SARONG KEBAYA: Peranakan Fashion in an Intercon

BABA COLIN CHEE EXPLORES THE HYBRID WORLD OF THE NYONYAS AS TOLD BY BABA PETER LEE

Can only describe Peter Lee's tome as monumental. Monumental in its singular, passionate pursuit of the *sarong kebaya*. Monumental in its research. Monumental in the rarity and subject of its illustrations. Monumental in its 352 story-telling pages in a weighty volume. And a monumental nine years to write and produce.

For the past five years, the editorial team of *The Peranakan* magazine had asked the author each time they met at his Bukit Timah family home, "Are you finished with the book yet, Peter?" illustrated books about the *sarong kebaya* to date.

Sarong Kebaya, a Dying Community or What?

The book is one man's private journey to discover the origins of his Peranakan community. The journey may have started with a simple search for the story behind this once iconic attire for the Peranakan nyonya in Southeast Asia the *sarong kebaya*.

But his intellectual curiosity and "dissatisfaction with the histories of the Peranakan world, and by the way the Peranakan

community describes itself" like *Peranakan jati* or pure Peranakan - sparked a search that extended the initial study of the *sarong kebaya* into an evolved history of the Peranakan community from the 16th century to 1950.

And what is Peter's conclusion from this search?

He challenges, "Can any community ever be characterized as having a fixed set of characteristics? When did social

history become a branch of

biology?" If this is true,

silver print. In this is true, then perhaps there is hope yet for the Peranakan community.

It will not simply die away as its DNA gets diluted through marriages with the larger community, as many Peranakan elders fear (see review of Mr Felix

A Eurasian

family, Java, ca

1920s. Gelatin

Chia's book *The Babas* on Page 50). Instead, will it simply evolve like a resilient social organism through its assimilations with other cultures, as it did in the past, into something different yet the same because it has retained parts of its cultural uniqueness and peculiarities?

Only time will tell.

In the meantime, simply enjoy this well-written if scholastic book.

As a reader aptly describes, "the book itself is a heroic endeavour with a lot of references for the scholastically minded to follow up. Not every theory put up will meet with agreement but any critic will have to plough through the references to nit pick with any credibility."

What is in a Name?

Indeed, as the author will have it, a name is nothing to fuss about.

Peter writes, "As words travel and mutate between cultures, as they have over centuries across the Indian Ocean, they leave significant trails."

Except that they do have "complicated histories." Words like *baju*, *kebaya* and *sarong*, which describe a nyonya's dress in Baba Malay, are actually the results of the "circulation and shifting semantics mirroring the cosmopolitan and cross-cultural conditions that created the Peranakan *sarong kebaya*."

He discovered that Malay and Portuguese were the dominant languages in the Indian Ocean in the early centuries. They facilitated the spread of ideas and words.

Malay, as a trading language, was spoken in the Cape of Good Hope, western India and along the Chinese coast. As for Portuguese, the language of invaders during



His coy reply would be, "Not yet. There's so much to do." The next thing we knew he would be away in the Netherlands, Portugal, India, Malaysia or Indonesia in feverish pursuit of some fabled holy grail.

It has been a worthwhile long wait for those in the know. The book is easily one of the best, if not the best, researched and

nected World

the sixteenth century, variants of it continue to be spoken as Papia Kristang in Melaka.

Along with the spread of these languages, sartorial fashions and references of the time gained geographical traction.

Allow me to condense the histories of the three Peranakan fashion words in Peter's book.

Baju - which today refers to clothing in general was once used to describe tailored garments for the torso or upper body. The word has references in Persian, Portuguese, Indian, Sri Lankan, Chinese and Malay texts. Because the word *baju* also appears in the oldest Malay word list found in an early 16th century Chinese text in which various types of attire have clear Arabic and Persian origins, it is assumed the word *baju* has the same Arabic and Persian roots.

The word *kebaya*, however, seems to have a less complicated



colour to a

REQUIRED



story. Today it describes the short lace trimmed variant of the top once worn by Dutch women in Indonesia, and Malay and Peranakan women in the late 19th century. They are still worn in a variety of styles and materials. The word was existent during Dutch colonial times and it was probably derived from the Portuguese colonial word "cabaye" which was used to describe a coat. Indeed, the Portuguese creole that was spoken in Sri Lanka soon saw "cabaye" transliterated

Instructions accompanying a tracing paper pattern for kebaya embroidery; issued by Clarke and Company of Paisley, Scotland, 1950s.

into "kebaya" in Sinhalese, with both words referring to coat. Then the Dutch came east and kebaya became what it is today. Sarong is one of a few Malay words that has spread into the vocabulary of other world languages. It originally referred to any kind of sheath or covering, such as *sarong bantal* (pillow cover) or sarong kris (kris scabbard). Unlike the kebaya which appeared in European colonial records much earlier, sarong is found in Dutch records of the 18th century in Batavia or today's Jakarta. These days, *sarong* refers to the ubiquitous wrap around or body dress for the quintessential Malay and Peranakan woman.

Indeed, the sarong kebaya first came into its own as a symbol of tropical colonial life during the Dutch rule of the East Indies. But it is not unique to any particular community. It is a marvelous result of hybridity as cultural currents criss-crossed one another over time. Peter aptly quoted art

books

Sarong kebayas dating back to the 1930s-40s. The kebayas were tailored in Indonesia. The sarongs were painted by renowned batik artists from Kedungwuni and Pekalongan. From the Peranakan Museum.



historian Finbarr Barry Flood who described the phenomenon as the result of "people and things *having* been mixed up for a very long time".

Like an intricate batik design with its minutae of whorls and curls.

The Nyonya

"An understanding of the development of Peranakan fashion is impossible without first gaining clarity on certain critical issues about the Peranakans that have, to date, remained nebulous, even within the Peranakan community. At the centre of these is the identity of the Peranakan woman. Who is the *nyonya*? When and how did she come about?" Above, Chua Wan Neo (seated centre), widow of the pioneer rubber planter Tan Chay Yan, with her children and their spouses. Toyo Studio, Singapore, 1931. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Sharron Chee Guek Kee.

Right, Li Lihua, legend of Shanghai and Hongkong cinema, in the Chinese film Nyonya and Baba, Cathay; 1956. The sarong and kebaya had been strategically fitted to accentuate her figure.

By asking these questions at the start of the chapter on *Slave Girls and Heiresses; Mothers of All Peranakans,* the author bravely gave

> his answer. He starts by controversially demolishing a long-held and much-loved belief:

"Indeed the very origins of the Peranakan community are imprecisely perceived, and

"Citizen living in Batavia, with his wife", 1670s. Georg Franz Muller. Watercolour on paper. therefore myths have held sway in the popular imagination. For example, one of the quasi-historical narratives about the origins of the royal family in Malacca, as recorded in the Malay Annals, perhaps written around 1612, has been appropriated to explain the origins of the Peranakan Chinese. Hang Liu, an imperial Chinese princess, was said to have arrived in Malacca with a retinue of five hundred young men and women, who converted to Islam en masse... She herself married the sultan. This union is not corroborated by Ming histories ... "

Peter carries on:

"Exactly how Peranakans have "mixed blood" has been imperfectly understood. That native-born



Chinese women were a rarity outside China until the late 19th century is well established. Therefore the wives of the pioneering Chinese migrants to the Malay Archipelago must have belonged to other ethnic groups."

Peter went on to quote travelogues,

books, references, studies of the day to show that in days of old our Chinese pioneers married slave girls and local women from the archipelago including Bali, Celebes, Sulawesi, Java, Sumatra, and Guinea. From these pragmatic beginnings, he builds the case for a community that started to look inward but grew in wealth, sophistication and social status, in the milieu of growing urbanization and colonial exploitation of the region's natural wealth, fast adapting to changes and even transforming itself to ever changing social and economic environs.

Sarong Kebaya is published by the Asian Civilisation Museum. Available at the Asian Civilisations Museum, thePeranakan Museum and Select Books.



the babas live on

BABA COLIN CHEE EXAMINES THE REPRINT OF A CLASSIC TITLE BY BABA FELIX CHIA

This is the third print of the late Felix Chia's book, *The Babas*, which was highly sought after when it was first printed in 1980. A reprint was made in 1993, titled *The Babas Revisited*, where the author revised substantial parts of his original text. The revisions accommodated feedback on his first book, provided clarifications and expositions on lines of thought and opinions taken, and expanded on material in the original text that he thought was necessary.

Said a feisty Mr Chia in the Introduction to his 1993 reprint: "To retain the essence and charm of the previous edition, I have chosen only the most interesting of the old text and improved it with the addition of new information.... Upon recollecting the opinions and criticisms of my books recently, I realized that it would not be a bad idea if I were to conduct an 'autopsy' on them and spearhead further discussion."

Mr Chia's book provides a fairly comprehensive and rare glimpse of

Peranakan life as it was lived in Singapore and Malacca during the late pre-war and early post-independence years. He takes the reader breezily through most aspects of life then.

Many years from now this single book will serve as a basic reference or record of what is and how the Peranakan community evolved, flourished and declined. More importantly, it was written by one who lived that life. Mr Chia wrote with a passionate interest in the community.

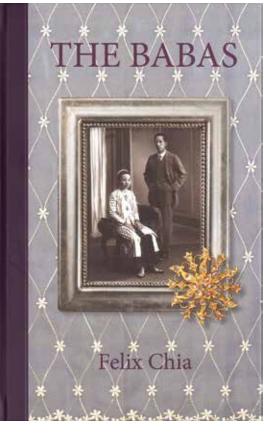
In Mr Chia's last chapter on *The Future*, he unabashedly predicted the community's eventual extinction in Singapore. In 1993, he may have been pessimistically prescient:

"What of the present-day Babas? There is no future for them as a community, for they are fast disappearing with each generation. The Babas who marry Nyonyas today do so more out of love than for the

> propagation of Babas and Nyonyas....A minority race which keeps dwindling cannot hope to survive. The sad fate of this dwindling race is perpetuated by the ignorance of Baba culture among the young....The lot of the Singapore Baba now is to be assimilated by those around them; to continue in their inherent nature of integrating into different cultures, as their forebears had so wisely done."

Unfortunately, Mr Chia didn't have the benefit of experiencing the impact

Baba Felix Chia's paternal grandfather, Baba Chia Hood Sang, and his daughters – Choo Neo 'Lau Cute' and Poh Neo.



that the mega-hit TV series *The Little Nyonya* had on kick-starting interest in the culture outside this dwindling community. Nor did he foresee the establishment of Singapore's Peranakan Museum and privately-owned Peranakan museums that have sprouted up in the region. Or the subtle influence of *The Peranakan* magazine inside and outside the community.

He also did not live to see the formation of a federation of Peranakan associations in Southeast Asia and as far away as Australia. Neither could he have anticipated the success of commercial enterprises such as Main Wayang in mass-popularizing the culture in schools and the corporate world.

In an innocuous way, the success of social media, particularly facebook communities such as *The Peranakan (Nyonya and Baba) Clan, Perot Rumah – Peranakan Food Culture, and Peranakan Material Culture, has brought the community* across the world a lot closer to their cultural roots and to each other.

The late Mr Felix Chia, I am sure, would breathe a sigh of relief for this extension.

The Babas is co-published by the Estate of Felix Chia and Landmark Books.





the LKY musical. not to be missed.

THE LOVE STORY OF LEE KUAN YEW AND KWA GEOK CHOO

he Marina Bay Sands' MasterCard Theatres will host its first local musical from 21 July this year for a limited season only.

The LKY Musical by Metropolitan Productions has been three years in the making. It tells the love story of our late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his late wife Kwa Geok Choo. It also cleverly weaves in the socio-political drama of Singapore's early independence years.

Baba Dick Lee composed the music, with London-based Laurence Olivier Award winner Stephen Clark providing the lyrics. Veteran London director Steven Dexter, who last directed Forbidden City: Portrait

Baba Dick says the music for the multi-million dollar production is his "best score to date."

of an Empress, has returned to direct this musical. The creative team includes playwright Tony Petito and

writer Meira Chand.

Playing the key roles are local actors Adrian Pang as Lee Kuan Yew; Sharon Au in the coveted role of Mrs Lee; Sebastian Tan as rickshaw puller Koh Teong Koo who saved Mr Lee's life during the Japanese Occupation; and Benjamin Chow in his debut as activist Lim Chin Siong.

At the musical's introduction to the media on 13 April, Dick said he was at first unsure how to pitch his music. It could not be just like his usual musicals. He told *The Peranakan*: "Working with such a serious subject matter, I had to approach the writing carefully. Music is used to convey emotions and situations. This story had plenty of that, so it was wonderful to craft a dramatic score where I could write from my heart without too many considerations of commercialism."

Sebastian Tan said in jest at the media conference that he would look like a well-fed rickshaw puller.

come discover the hidden truth

GSA'S NEW PLAY PROMISES A REVELATION

or their annual *Wayang* Peranakan and to mark its 105th anniversary, Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) is presenting a new work written by Alvin Teo. Udang Sebalik Batu The *Hidden Truth* promises an evening that will tug at the heartstrings even as it delivers a potpourri of amusing gags.

The plot centres around young lovers Daisy Tan and Jeff Koh, who have known each other since they were children. Jeff was brought up by his single mother, Lian Neo, who slogged all her life so her son could have a bright future. Eventually, Jeff secures a scholarship to study in England and has to be separated from Daisy. Daisy's stepmother, Bibik Guek Neo, plots to split the young couple due to their class difference and is determined to

do all she can to marry Daisy into the wealthy Lim family with the help of matchmaker Bibik Taik Lalat. How does she cause the split? Did Daisy really marry into the Lim family? Who exactly knows The Hidden Truth?

You'll have to go watch to find out!

The *wayang* is directed by Tony Quek. The cast includes Audrey Tan as Daisy, Eugene Tay as Jeff and a host of other experienced actors including Lee Yong Ming, Jessie Cheang, Christina Wee, KT, Cynthia Lee, Jeannette Chan, Frederick Soh, Alvin Teo, Ameline Goh



and Matthew Chen. It is performed in Peranakan patois with English subtitles.

Watch the intrigue to split young lovers.

There are just three shows at the Drama Centre from 30 31 October so book your seats early. Tickets are available at all SISTIC outlets from August 2015.

events

the thrill of conventions

KL ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT BABA CEDRIC TAN IS ENTHUSED BY THE JAKARTA CONVENTION



Then Aspertina (Association of Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia) was announced as the Jakarta host for the 27th Baba Nyonya Convention 2014, I was eager to sign up. Having attended almost 20 conventions, I can conclude with confidence that inaugural events are usually remarkable.

First of all, it is proof that the Peranakan community is truly diasporic and diverse. Secondly, the new host is likely to spare no expense to create an excellent first impression. Personally, it was the first time for me leading delegates from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor as President of the PPBNKLS (Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor).

On Friday, 28 November, we arrived in Jakarta and proceeded to dinner. The highlight was the traditional *Wayang Potehi* or puppet show featuring the story of *Seet Jin Kwee* performed by young and upcoming masters of the trade, and to live music. The evening continued with performances by the participating Peranakan associations and closed with delegates dancing the night away.

The opening ceremony the next day at the host hotel, Grand Sahid Jaya, was followed by simple-to-digest introductions into the heritage of the local Peranakans. Bapak Joseph 'Aji' Chen Bromokusumo whetted our appetites in his talk on Peranakan cuisine while Bapak Hartono Sumarsono enthralled us with a visual feast of his vast batik collection. Prof Abdullah Dahana covered the history of Peranakan culture in Indonesia. During the break, delegates shopped at the bazaar and left satiated with bags of batik, kebayas, books and handicraft.

Aspertina staged a spectacular fashion show. Renowned Indonesian fashion designers were roped in to share their Peranakan-inspired creations, such as Samuel Wattimena, Poppy Dharsono, Itang Yunasz, Geraldus Sugeng, Afif Syakur and Hendy Wijaya.

On the third and final day, we

visited north Jakarta for a whirlwind tour of the old city and port. After the convention ended, some delegates headed to Tangerang where the From left to right, The Peranakaninspired fashion show at the gala night.

The Wayang Potehi dolls on display:

Javanese-style Chinese-icons in wayang kulit.

Persaudaraan Peranakan Tionghoa Warga Indonesia (Pertiwi) had prepared a three-day programme covering historic Benteng, Bogor and Ciputat. In Benteng, I saw rare batik masterpieces by doyen Oey Soen Tjoen in the Heritage Museum. At Roemah Boeroeng we were feted with an astounding 111 types of local appetizers, mains, desserts and fruits. I recalled familiar dishes like *masak chin*, *masak sio* and *masak buah keluak*.

My experiences in Indonesia have reaffirmed my commitment to attend future conventions. I love the thrill of stepping into an unexplored room without any inkling of what I will find within, and the 'wow' moment when something awesome sweeps by.

virtually peranakan

BABA NORMAN CHO EXPERIENCES THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR...WELL, SOCIALISING!

"Why don't you start a Facebook Group on Peranakan material culture?" a friend who knew my passion for Peranakan artefacts cajoled me. With my experience and knowledge from almost 30 years of collecting Peranakan antiques, she thought I deserved a wider audience! This was how the Peranakan Material Culture

facebook group was conceived in 2012.

To my astonishment, there are over 2,000 members registered in my virtual group today. I have discarded the notion of *bibiks* behind the *kuali* with ladles in hand; instead, the *bibiks* of today are more often found surfing facebook on their mobile phones. A few members are in



fact octogenarians! Topics range from food to antiques to customs and practices.

Earlier last year, someone posted an online review of the top 10 Peranakan restaurants in Singapore. This prompted our group to organise a food outing. Our first meeting was at the Candlenut restaurant on 4 October 2014. Already acquainted virtually, it was effortless to warm up to one another's company. There were 20 of us in all.

We have had three other outings since: To the Peranakan Museum followed by dinner at True Blue Cuisine next door on 15 November; the Eurasian Association on 7 February where I gave a talk on Peranakan jewellery, followed by dinner at Quentin's; and the latest on 18 April at Rumah Kim Choo where 30 members including one from Malacca and two from Kuala Lumpur - learnt how to play *cherki*.

The Peranakans' penchant for parties and good food has never been a secret. We can look forward to more socialising and *Learning to* camaraderie through *play* cherki social media! • *at Rumah Kim Choo*

christmas joy at peacehaven



n 19 December 2014, The Peranakan Voices (TPVs) brought Christmas joy to over 400 residents and their families at the Salvation Army Peacehaven Nursing Home for elderly patients. To witness joy in the faces of those in need of care was a truly meaningful way to end 2014, offering a timely reminder for us to cherish and celebrate precious moments with our loved ones.

chingay spectacular



Chingay 2015 in Singapore's jubilee year was the grandest parade ever organized! The Main Wayang Company and the Eurasian Association combined with the Vintage/Classic Cars Enthusiasts
Group to present an enthralling spectacle on 27 and 28
February. Over 100 babas and nyonyas young and old dressed in traditional costumes took to the streets to showcase the Peranakan culture. This mega multi-cultural event involved 11,000 performers.

THE FEDERATION OF PERANAKAN ASSOCIATIONS

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

Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) 50 Lorong 24A, Geylang Road,

50 Lorong 24A, Geylang Road, Singapore 398574 Email: gunongsayang@hotmail.com Fax: 65 6441 1569 Website: gunongsayang.com

Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indians) Singapore

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

MALAYSIA MALACCA Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka

Mobile: 9678 1767

(PPCM) 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 Phua Jin Hock, please email phuajh@ gmail.com.

PENANG

State Chinese (Penang) Association / Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinaang 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) Address: PO Box 3151, Pusat Serahan Subang Jaya, 47509 Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. Contact: Nyonya Nancy Peng, Hon. Secretary Email: peranakan_kl@yahoo.com.my Tel No: +6012-3151451 Website: http://www.peranakan-kl.org/ Facebook page: PPBNKLS To contact President, Baba Cedric Tan please email cedric_cctan@yahoo.com

THAILAND

Thai Peranakan Association 61 Satul Road, Muang District, Phuket 83000, Thailand Contacts: Dr Kosol Taenguthai at email: k_tanguthai@hotmail.com; Ajan Pranee Sakulpipatana at email: Pranee81@yahoo.com, mobile: +66 81 693 3576; or Piyarat Kulvanich at email: kpiyarat2000@yahoo.com or mobile: +66 81 719 0967. Fax: +66 76 258179 Tel: +66 76 258124 Website: Thaiperanakan.com

INDONESIA

Association of Peranakan Tionghoa

Indonesia (Aspertina) Hero Building II Suite 902, Jl. Jend. Gatot Subroto 177A Kav. 64 Jakarta 12870, Indonesia Contact: Chairman Mr Andrew Susanto Tel +6221 8317751 Fax +6221 8317731 Email: info@aspertina.org Website: aspertina.org

Peranakan Tionghoa Warga Indonesia (Pertiwi)

Yayasan PERTIWI c/o KING'S EEC Jalan Baharudin No. 8 Tangerang 15111 Banten Indonesia Contact: Mr Udaya Halim, President Tel: +62215523880/ +62215526748 Email: info@pertiwi.org / info@ bentengheritage.com

AUSTRALIA

MELBOURNE Peranakan Association

Australia Inc P.O. Box 1278, Hawksburn, Victoria, Australia 3142 Contacts: Joseph Then, Secretary, at email j.then@bigpond.com Website: www.peranakan.org.au.

SYDNEY

Peranakan Association Australia (PAA) 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. Melissa Chan Bee Cheng
- 2. Grace Katherine Kiong Min Li
- 3. Carolyn Law Yu Lin
- 4. Radiance Lee Kim Hong

5. Wong Hon Seng

durians galore!

The association is organising a day trip to Johore for members to feast on durians. Eat to your heart's content!

All meals are included. You will also visit a mushroom farm and a noodle factory and still have time for shopping.

| Date | : 27 June 2015 (Saturday) |
|---------------|--|
| Time | : 7.00 am |
| Pick-up point | : Newton car park |
| | : Nasi lemak breakfast / Foochow noodle & fishball |
| 1 | lunch / seafood dinner |
| Cost | : S\$80.00 (inclusive of travel insurance and guide/ |
| | driver tips) |
| | * / |

Please email secretariat@peranakan.org.sg to register.

grand aunty makes an entrance

BABA BRYAN TAN JOINS THE YEOWS FOR A NIGHT OF DINNER AND GOSSIP

Not frazzled. Despite spending her days juggling cleaning, gardening, cooking and berating her reticent husband, nothing could interrupt her regimented schedule which she could not vary. It was 1985; she was in her prime and dressed to the hilt. She turned from the window and glared at Willie, who had managed to rumple his *baju lokchuan* and sat woolgathering on the sofa.

"Willie! *Toksa dudok lagi* (don't sit around anymore), come and stand here!" she hissed. At that moment, three loud raps came from the door. Smoothing down her *kebaya*, Molly pulled open the door with a beatific smile on her face. "*Kohpoh Chik*, *sua datang* (you're here)! Please come in!"

As a daughter born of a mistress, Molly felt an unconscious need to present a faultless image to a member of the main family. Grand aunty had never looked upon her favorably, and had only grudgingly accepted her invitation to dinner. "Bok Neo, how long has it been? Your *kebaya chantek* (pretty) *lah*, I must say," she eyed Molly up and down.

Soh Bee Neo was tall and willowy at 74 years. Her eyes however, had the glint of frosted steel in them, and glanced around imperiously for any signs of shabbiness.

"Oowa, kinajeet lu pasang kuat eh (you're all dressed up), Willie?" She nodded coldly at Molly's husband, her permed silver curls bobbing, subtly rolling her eyes at his creased baju. She stepped into the house. "Thiam Hin, take off your shoes and masok (enter)," she clucked sharply. Grand aunty's husband was also very tall. He greeted Molly and Willie jovially.

"Grand uncle, how are you?" Molly enquired pleasantly. "Ko ko (older brother) Jimmy, long time no see! Cousin Florence and Sophie, you must be hungry."

Grand aunty's children were just like her in image and mannerism, but for one. Sophie was an oddity. Her hair was slightly tangled, her nails looked chewed on and she refused eye contact with everyone.

They gathered around the dining table to admire the feast Molly had prepared.

"Bok Neo, *baik* (good) *lah*, you remember *gua suka makan hati babi bungkus*" (I like to eat wrapped pig's liver). She observed approvingly, her tone softening. Molly bowed her head demurely.

Grand aunty took her place at the head of the table. "So how are your children? I heard Vera went to Singapore to *kerja* (work).

"Betul Kohpoh Chik (that's right), she *charek* (looking for) a good job and a good man. But sad for me *lah*, all my *anak-anak* (children) leaving me one by one to go overseas," Molly sighed.



"Tapi baik lah (but it's good), Singapore is a better place to live in. Jimmy is being posted to Germany; I think he is to be promoted soon," said Bee Neo smugly. "You know *ah*, my poor Sophie is the only one who won't leave me. Do you know any *laki kawan* (male friends) who wants to marry?" Sophie had managed to get *ayam buah keluak* on her *kebaya* and was sucking the *kuah* (gravy) off her fingers.

"It's ok *lah* dear, Sophie will *kawen* (marry) eventually," grand uncle interjected peevishly.

Grand aunty was delighted with the food, and a glass of wine kept her spirits up. Even Sophie, who was usually sullen, ate voraciously and thanked Molly.

A phone chimed from somewhere in the house. Molly excused herself from the dining table and disappeared into a room. An abrupt moment later, a shriek came piercing through. Everyone stood up.

"Aiyee kusmangat. Dia nampat hantu ah (goodness, did she see a ghost)?" Grand aunty Bee Neo wondered out loud. Molly came out looking as pale as death.

"Vera... Vera is pregnant!"

*In the next episode, Molly Yeow makes a trip down to Singapore!

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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. 39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941. website:www.peranakanmuseum.sg Email: nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg Tel: 6332 7591.

Great Peranakans: Fifty Remarkable Lives

23 May 2015 to 31 March 2016,

Peranakan Museum. This exhibition celebrates the achievements of 50 Peranakans such as Tan Tock Seng, Lim Boon Keng, and Goh Keng Swee. Merchants, statesmen, philanthropists, and writers they have shaped Singaporean



life in significant ways over the past two centuries. Moreover, they have connected Singapore with the region. Peranakans have also been involved in some of the most controversial chapters in our history, from opium dealing and secret societies, to the political struggles around independence. Their stories and the almost 200 objects from their lives will help visitors understand the evolving identities not just of the Peranakans but also of Singapore as a whole.

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

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

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall The old Sun Yat Sen Villa reopened in October 2011 after extensive renovations with a new name. Fitting tribute is given to the former owners of the house, especially Teo Eng Hock, a son of Teo Lee, one of the pioneer Teochew merchants in Singapore, together with his nephew Lim Nee Soon, were among the loyal supporters of Sun Yat Sen's



Sun Yat Sen's bid to overthrow the Qing government. The exhibition shows how Singapore, and the Chinese community here

played an important part in this pivotal moment of world history. Intimate photos of family life, and of Teo Eng Hock's nyonya mother, Mrs Teo Lee née Tan Poh Neo (granddaughter of the kapitan of Muntok), add charm and a Peranakan angle to the experience. 12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874, Tel: 6256 7377, Opening Hours: 10am-5pm daily.

Website: wanqingyuan.org.sg.

LANDMARKS

Blair Plain. A typical Peranakan residential area around Spottiswoode Park, Blair Road and Neil Road which is worth a stroll. Visit Guan Antiques nearby at Kampong Bahru Road, a treasure trove of Peranakan heirlooms. http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/ design_studio/dds2b/blair/study/Blair. html.

Emerald Hill Road. Another interesting residential district showcasing the best of eclectic Peranakan residential architecture, just off Orchard Road. Katong and Joo Chiat. Once the nerve centre of Peranakan life in Singapore. In its heyday it was the site of nearby grand seaside villas and elaborate Peranakan terraced houses. The latter can still be seen in a walk along Koon Seng Road. Also visit Peranakan shops such as Katong Antique House (208 East Coast Road) and Rumah Bebe (113 East Coast Road) as well as the great variety



of Peranakan restaurants in the neighbourhood. http://www. visitsingapore. com/publish/ stbportal/en/

home/what_to_see/suburban_living/ katong.html.

Also http://www.myjoochiat.com.

Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street. One of the first Peranakan enclaves, now occupied by restaurants and offices. Many Peranakans from Malacca moved to this area as soon as the East India Company began to lease out land for sale.

Thian Hock Keng. The oldest Hokkien temple in Singapore was founded in 1821 although the present structure, built without nails, was completed only in 1841. The temple is dedicated to Mazu, the Daoist goddess of the sea and protector of all seamen. Many of

the temple's patrons were Peranakan pioneers, such as Tan Tock Seng, who donated



\$30,000 for renovations. He also founded the hospital named after him. The Hokkien Huay Kuan, a community organisation for Hokkien people in Singapore was housed at the temple and also helmed by Peranakan pioneers. Thian Hock Keng, 158 Telok Ayer Street, Tel: 6423 4616.

Tan Si Chong Su. Built in 1878, Tan Si Chong Su is the ancestral temple of the Tan clan, and was founded by prominent Baba philanthropists Tan Kim Ching, son of Tan Tock Seng, and Tan Beng Swee, the son of Tan Kim Seng. The



first president of the temple, Tan Kim Tian, was a well-known Baba shipping tycoon. The

temple consists of shrines for the ancestral tablets of Tan clansmen, as well as altars to the clan deities. The elaborate stone and wood carvings as well as the swooping ceramic roof finials makes this one of the most elaborate Chinese temples in Singapore, quaintly located amid the gleaming towers of the financial district. Tan Si Chong Su, 15 Magazine Road.



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Singapore 2015

4 to 8 November 2015 www.peranakanfest.com

Festival Location: Empress Place, Victoria Theatre & Concert Hall Festival Hours: Wednesday 4 November to Sunday 8 November 2015 10am to 9pm

Admission:

The Bazaar, Exhibitions and Cultural Shows are free to the public. Please refer to the Festival website for the show schedule. Theatre Shows & Convention Forums: Get your tickets at WWW.SISTIC.COM from July 1, 2015! For Advertising & Sponsorships: Please email paf@peopletrends.org or call +65 6509 1384