

# BATIK *BONANZA!*

Feting the fabric we love

## A **DOG'S** *life*

*Musings about  
man's best friend,  
baby powder  
and durians*

## **ROCKING** *ROMBONGS* REVISITING THE WOVEN TREASURE CHEST

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THE  
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### ON THE COVER

A spotty dog runs after a butterfly on this antique batik. See page 8, 'Textile Tales'.  
Photo by Nyonya Dawn Marie Lee.

### BACK

Rare blue monochrome tile with a hound. Made in England by Minton Hollins & Co, 1870-1895. Photo by Baba Victor Lim.



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The Peranakan Magazine house style reflects the Baba Malay spelling found in A Baba Malay Dictionary by Baba William Gwee Thian Hock

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# Timeless Treasure

## Abundance Bestowed Through Generations



*Mother*



*Daughter*



*Granddaughter*

"Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from Him." - Psalm 127:3 (NLT)



"Every good and perfect gift is from above,  
and comes down from the Father of lights,  
with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."  
James 1:17 (NKJV)

Every grown up child is a gift from God.  
Treasure your loved ones this New Year  
and give them a gift that keeps on giving.

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# BATIK BONANZA

**B**etter late than *sambair lewa* (to do a job sloppily)! I know many of you have been eagerly waiting for this issue of The Peranakan Magazine, and I apologise for its lateness. There have been significant changes to the editorial team. At the same time, we have been working hard to make the magazine better. The new QR Code for example, gives you more to read, bonus recipes, and even videos to watch online. Thank you for your patience and I hope you enjoy all the stories.

We dedicate this issue to batik. I must admit, I didn't appreciate batik when I was younger. To me, it was a curious brown cloth with weird patterns, the stuff of old men's shirts, requisite attire for my dad and *Chek Chek* (youngest uncle) to gain entry into the casino at Genting Highlands. The batik shirt-casino association stuck in my head. When I saw Dad packing one, I knew our two families (four adults and four kids) would pile into Dad's sky blue Morris Minor and make the long drive up to the Malaysian hill resort.

Once a year, I give all my sarongs an airing. It's a simple exercise that shouldn't take long, but I find myself lingering over the batiks for hours, flipping through my reference books to spot similar patterns. Marie Kondo would balk. Instead of getting rid of items that don't "spark joy", as the Japanese decluttering guru famously recommends, my batik-airing exercise often ends with more pieces being added when I discover that I don't have this pattern or that colour in my collection.



*My Mama, Mary Law Poh Gwek, in batik sarong, with me on her lap.*

Simply put, batik has become an addiction.

My earliest memory of batik was my Mama's soft sarongs, which she wore while pottering about the house. When she passed on, a pile of her batiks were kept for me. They remained packed away for years as I had no interest in them. Decades later, after I gave birth to my son, I was desperate for comfortable clothes to nurse in. My mum, who is handy with the sewing machine, dug out Mama's old batiks and turned them into pinafore-style dresses – imagine a sarong pulled up to the chest with detachable shoulder straps fastened by two large buttons in front. So practical and convenient for a nursing mother! It's been years since I put those dresses away, but they are still among my most loved batiks.

The "fabled cloth of Java" is what we Peranakans seem to love best, so in this issue, journey with Colin Chee to the batik hubs of Yogyakarta and Solo. Koh Hwei Ling reveals the Confucian ideals in batik. Re-visit a long-forgotten treasure chest in *Simpan Rombong*. Read Eliza Ong's winning story, *Tingkat*, which moved me to tears. Ronney Tan shares his memories of his beloved pets in a nod to the Year of the Dog.

Since dogs are man's best friend, let's hope that the *Taon Anjing* is kind to us. The Peranakan Magazine wishes all our readers an excellent year ahead!

**Dawn Marie Lee**  
Editor  
[editor@peranakan.org.sg](mailto:editor@peranakan.org.sg)



## Thanks Peter!

We bid a fond farewell to Baba Peter Lee (far right) who retired from The Peranakan Magazine in 2017 after serving on the Editorial Committee for 22 years. He was the Editor from 1995, then Co-Editor with Linda Chee from July 2004 till March 2009, and continued in an advisory role thereafter. Over two decades, the Editorial Team transformed the original black & white newsletter into a full-fledged magazine. Peter's fascinating and heartwarming stories have captured the hearts and minds of readers. We thank Peter for his years of dedicated service to the Magazine and wish him the very best.

# CONFUCIAN IDEALS IN BATIK

NYONYA KOH HWEI LING LOOKS AT CONFUCIAN MOTIFS AND MEANINGS IN BATIK | PHOTOS BY NYONYA KOH HWEI LING

When I was growing up, I spent a large part of my childhood with my maternal grandparents who lived on Cheang Hong Lim Street, a stone's throw from the Thian Hock Keng Temple on Telok Ayer Street. I have vivid childhood memories of my family participating in temple activities. Whenever exams were around the corner, my mother brought my sister and I to pay respects to an effigy of Confucius at the temple and carry out our family's unique worship rituals.

A few months ago on 15 October 2017, I went to the Thian Hock Keng Temple with my parents to celebrate the 2,568<sup>th</sup> year of Confucius' birthday. In the subsequent weeks, I began to reflect on how Confucianism had influenced our country's pioneers, including the Peranakan Chinese, many of whom came to be known as Confucian Merchants.

Confucian ideals were not only adopted by pioneer Peranakan merchants and businessmen in their daily lives, but were also embodied symbolically as motifs on material objects and batik favoured by the Peranakans.



ABOVE  
Machine printed batik with phoenix motifs from the 1950s.

RIGHT  
Recently made batik kombinasi.



## BIRDS ON BATIK

According to the *Book of Birds* (written in the Spring and Autumn periods of 771 to 476 BC), the phoenix is considered to be the leader of all birds. A phoenix seen among a flock of birds is like a ruler among his subjects. While it is rare to find batik with a phoenix shown among other birds, phoenixes are often depicted in pairs on batik to represent male and female.

According to the *I Ching or Book of Changes* written in the late 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC, a crane's offspring can recognise its call and respond even when out of sight. This brings to mind the close bond between parent and child. Crane

motifs are often found on batik. The heron, which looks similar to a crane, is often drawn with lotus and reeds because their Chinese names are homonyms for a continuous and successful career.

Mandarin ducks represent the relationship between husband and wife. Shown together, a pair symbolises a faithful and loyal couple. This meaning originates from the book, *Gu Jin Zhu*, which means "Notes to Things Old and New". It is an encyclopedia attributed to the Jin Period (265-420 AD). In a chapter on beasts and birds, mandarin ducks are described as "inseparable, paired birds".



LEFT TO RIGHT  
Batik with crane motifs from the collection of Baba Peter Wee.

## THE FAMOUS FIVE

These five birds are often found in classical Chinese paintings and porcelain. As Peranakan culture draws influence from Chinese culture, we can find similar expressions of Confucian ideals on material objects and batik favoured by the Peranakans.

**Orioles**  
represent the relationship between Friends.



**Cranes**  
represent the Parent-Child relationship.



**Wagtails** represent the relationship between Siblings.



The **Phoenix** with a flock of birds represents the Ruler-Subject relationship.



**Mandarin Ducks**  
represent the Husband-Wife relationship.



## BROTHERHOOD

Brotherhood is an important ideal in Confucianism. One of the oft-quoted phrases on brotherhood from the Confucian Analects says: “Within the four seas all men are brothers”. This phrase is used as the motto of the Keng Teck Whay, an association established in 1831 by a group of 36 Hokkien Peranakan merchants, many from Malacca. The founders took an oath of fraternity to become sworn brothers before the effigy of San Guan Da Di (a deity) and established the rules of the association



based on Confucian ideals.

Influenced by these ideals, our pioneer Peranakan forefathers upheld integrity in their trade and personal lives. The key Confucian ideals they believed in are beautifully captured on these pieces of *batik tulis*. It serves to remind us that Confucianism is still relevant to us today. Without these core beliefs, can we truly live a blessed life?

### TOP

*Batik tulis with the Chinese characters 仁 for benevolence, 成信 for Trust and Integrity, and 福 for good fortune, luck or blessings. From the collection of Nyonya Koh Hwei Ling.*

### MIDDLE

*Sinographs on this batik tulis read: “Within the four seas all men are brothers”. From the collection of Nyonya Koh Hwei Ling.*

### BOTTOM

*A pair of Mandarin ducks in a lotus pond on a recently made batik tulis.*



To read this article in Mandarin, visit the Peranakan Association’s website at: [www.peranakan.org.sg](http://www.peranakan.org.sg) or scan the QR code here.





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No.7- Seven Terraces  
No.11- Muntri Grove



# BATIK JOURNEY

BABA COLIN CHEE TRAVELS INTO THE HEART OF JAVA'S BATIK COUNTRY | PHOTO ESSAY BY BABA COLIN CHEE

For five days in July 2017, my wife Linda and I joined a handful of Peranakan Association committee members to discover the batik hubs of Yogyakarta (Yogja) and Solo. Our itinerary was designed by a member of the Solo royal family who is a good friend of one in our group. Yogja is Java's artistic and intellectual heart. Solo (also known as Surakarta), is the birthplace of Indonesian President Joko Widodo, and home to some of the best batik ateliers in the country.

We stayed in comfortable hotels and had good *makan*;

visited well-known batik workshops and explored the busy batik markets of both cities. We travelled by train between Yogja and Solo. The highlight of the tour was the exquisite luncheon at the Solo *kraton* (palace), hosted by a princess. She hinted that she might open the palace to our members again in 2018 to sample Solo's royal cuisine. The biggest challenge for us was to try to balance seeing all the sights in these two lively Javanese cities against spending meaningful time on what the tour was for – a deeper appreciation of batik.

## Day 1

After checking into the hotel we did an early evening tour of Yogja's very busy Malioboro Market. There, the narrow streets full of batik stores were cramped with *bechaks* (trishaws) and *dokars* (traditional horse-cart taxis). At the well-known Mirota Store, we watched an elderly batik painter at work.



## Day 2

After breakfast, we visited *Pasar Beringhardjo*, a wholesale batik market, and then an exquisite silver shop called *Silversmith Harto Suhardjo*. Unlike the batik galleries that stock more costly batiks, *Pasar Beringhardjo* has

batiks for all budgets. On the way back to the hotel to refresh ourselves before dinner, we chanced upon an open field with a stunning graffiti wall and a few young men having their dinner on a mat.



## Day 3

We took the train from Yogja to Solo. The carriages were air-conditioned, clean and comfy, and we chatted with friendly passengers. Scenes at the railway crossings hinted at what life in a smaller town is like.

As soon as we reached Solo, we hopped into bechaks and headed to batik master

Go Tik Swan's atelier. His workshop flourished under Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, who encouraged the development of nationalistic batik motifs. Go's creations were so well loved by the Solo royal family that they gave him the honorific title of Panembahan Hardjonagoro. As we went

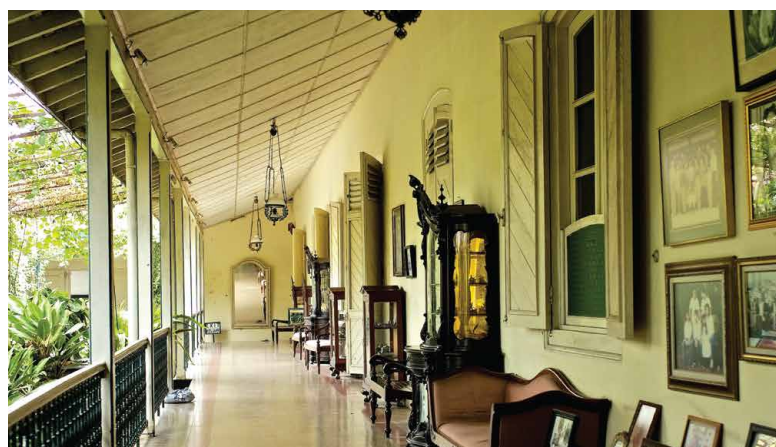
further into the compound, we discovered airy pondoks (huts) where experienced female artists languidly crafted their masterpieces with patience and grace. Later that afternoon, we visited the Dinar Hadi Batik Museum, arguably the best batik museum in Indonesia. Unfortunately, no photography was allowed!



## Day 4

Despite Solo's reputation as the batik capital of Indonesia, Pasar Klewer, the main batik market, is smaller than Yogja's Pasar Beringharjo. However, we found a place that was far more interesting to visit – Kampoeng Batik Laweyan, a large village on the banks of the Bengawan Solo is home to many batik workshops including Batik Omah Laweyan.

How often does one get to dine with royalty? That afternoon, at Solo's Mangkunegaran Palace, we were treated to a spread of royal cuisine. A senior palace official helpfully described each dish in detail. On hand, too, were samples of Solo's best traditional street food, specially curated by the palace.



## Day 5

On our final day, we did some last minute shopping before heading to the airport. Linda and I thoroughly enjoyed the tour.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ARE WORKING CLOSELY WITH OUR JAVANESE CONTACTS TO TWEAK THE ITINERARY AND MAKE IT MORE ENJOYABLE FOR PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION MEMBERS. THE ASSOCIATION HOPES TO ANNOUNCE THE TOUR DATES LATER THIS YEAR, SO IF YOU LOVE BATIK AND TRAVEL, LOOK OUT FOR IT!

# TEXTILE TALES

NYONYA DAWN MARIE LEE IS SPELLBOUND BY SOME BATIKS THAT TELL TALES

PHOTOS BY NYONYA DAWN MARIE LEE | BATIKS FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR AND MRS LEE KIP LEE

Once upon a time, in an ancient *kraton* (palace) not so far away, the King wanted something special to wear. His artisans toiled day and night to produce a magnificent *kain* (cloth) full of symbols of might. Daggers danced between the wings of the great Garuda, the universe represented in squares, ovals and stars. The deep brown patterns pleased him so much that he decreed only his family and those in his court could wear such cloth. For centuries, *batik kraton* was reserved only for royals.

Hundreds of years flew by, and foreigners invaded the land. Their ladies wanted to ditch stuffy corsets and crinoline in the hot, tropical climate. They looked to the locals, cool and comfy in cotton sarongs, and came up with ideas of their own. Soon, floral bouquets, birds, and butterflies appeared on batiks made along the coast. The new *batik pesisir* (coastal batik) became hugely popular; everyone was wearing it. To stand out from the *hoi polloi*, rich ladies commissioned finely drawn cloths with fairy tales and stories of triumph in great wars. These fine batiks became precious and rare. Here they are now, for me to share!



## Colonial War

SARONG, PEKALONGAN, JAVA (1890s - 1910s)  
BATIK TULIS (HAND-DRAWN BATIK)  
SIGNED: H.L.OJIE

Victorious battles of Dutch colonial armies in the Java War were a curious subject depicted on batiks worn by European or Eurasian women. In this batik, colonial soldiers in plain blue uniforms (easily identified by their rifles with bayonets) face-off with Javanese soldiers in patterned *baju* (clothes), wielding spears and *parangs* (swords). A *joglo* (traditional Javanese house) is also seen.





## Snow White

SARONG, PEKALONGAN, JAVA  
(1890s - 1910s)  
BATIK TULIS (HAND-DRAWN BATIK)  
SIGNED: LIEN METZELAAR

Depictions of fairy tales on batik pesisir were pioneered by Carolina von Franquemont, the earliest known Eurasian batik maker who had a workshop in 1840 in Surabaya. By the end of the 19th century, batiks with scenes from popular European fairy tales were fashionable with Eurasian batik makers, who copied such designs from storybook illustrations.

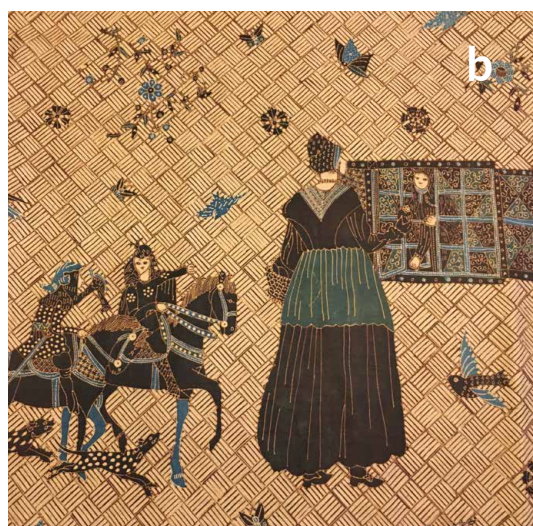
Sarongs for young women, like this one featuring Snow White, were specially commissioned by a

few wealthy families. On this batik, the Evil Queen is shown gazing into the mirror (c), also, disguised as a crone offering Snow White the infamous poisoned apple (b). Snow White is seen surrounded by the Dwarves and her Prince Charming.

The batik maker, Lien Metzelaar was a young Indische widow from Pekalongan. Indische referred to people of European/Asian origin who had settled in the East Indies for a long time. They were often part

Dutch and part Javanese, but could also be part Chinese or Arab combined with any other European nationality.

With four small children to support and only a small pension from the Dutch government, Metzelaar began designing batiks in 1880. She became known for her trademark border – seven leaves on a straight branch alternated by four flowers, seen here next to her signature (a).



# Cinderella

KAIN PANJANG (SKIRT CLOTH),  
NORTH COAST OF JAVA, 1920s  
BATIK TULIS (HAND-DRAWN BATIK)

The tale of Cinderella was well-known in the Dutch and British colonies and found its way into popular theater as *Nyai Puteri Sepatu Glas* (The Glass Shoe Princess). This kain panjang features scenes from Cinderella including the clock striking midnight (b), Prince Charming (a), the fairy godmother, and a glass slipper (c).



# Animal Fables

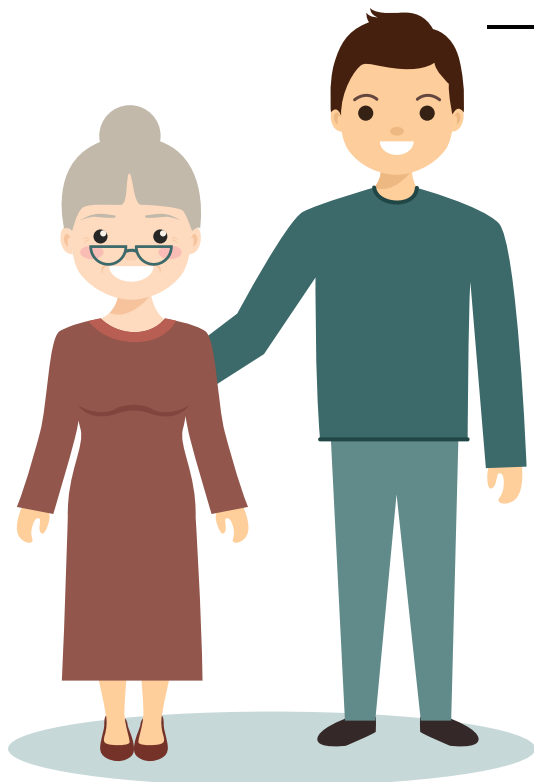
BATIK CLOTH,  
NORTH COAST OF JAVA  
(LATE 1800s)

A menagerie of different animals including dogs, stags, peacocks, butterflies and bulls are depicted on this batik, coloured with natural dyes including the distinctive mengkudu (madder

root) red. The design could have perhaps been inspired by the Alas-Alasan (forest scene) motifs of Javanese court batik. The mythical creature in the center, (maybe a Qilin?) is flanked by

two dogs and two tigers. Curiously, the animals are surrounded by baroque-looking flourishes, perhaps to appeal to the European market.





# MAMA'S LAST LUNAR NEW YEAR TEMARU SAMA MAMA

BABA CEDRIC TAN FONDLY REMEMBERS HIS  
GRANDMOTHER'S LAST NEW YEAR

“Cedric, tolong Mama bukak pintu besair”, Mama teriak lagi dari Thia Datok. “Skejap, Mama. Cedric tengah luak rambot”, saya nyahot lagi saibod kat chim che blakang. Saya ni tengah siseh rambot sama setepok *Brylcreem*.

Mama dulu tegap. Kalu diri tegak sia boleh sampay sehlak atair pintu besair tapi blakang-blakang ni, Mama dah tak sedap badan. Badan Mama ada kena semacham mia penyakit kulit serupa macham kena chelor ayer panair. Kulit dah pian gelombong ayer. Kalu tak jaga, kulit nanti glechet nampak isi merah. Selama ni Mama tak chakap apa pun. Chuma pantang tak makan barang tok macham udang, kepiting sama ayam.

“Bawak skali tempat bara sama teh kuan teh keluair. Mama tadi dah nyalakan arang sama siapkan teh’, Mama ingatkan. “Baik Mama. Nanti Cedric bawakkan stangee kat siaktang dalam piak tu skali”, saya bilang.

Aloji tembok dah bunyi tujuh kali. Nyari Chia Guek Chui It - Hari Temaru. Mama dah moh Sambot Taon. Mama dulu ada bilang kita embok-embok tak payah tengok see bukak pintu. Ikot satu-satu kluarga mia jalan adat. Jadi taon-taon kita orang bukak pintu pukol tujuh pagi. Mama ni pagi nampak segar skali sungguh pun semalam malam Mama dudok kat krosi lentang kat Thia Abu tengok TV sampay entah pukol brapa.

“Dah abis bukak pintu tu, terus pasangkan teng, ya? Mama dah siap mo sohio. Ah Cedric! Meh sini dolu”, Mama panggil bila tengah kira batang hio kat Tok Datok. “Bagus jugak Cedric dah pichitkan nasi sambot taon sama ang kim kan daon bawang

“Cedric, please help me to open the main door”, hollered Mama from the Thia Datok (Main Hall). “Just a moment Mama, I’m combing my hair”, I replied while peering into the sideboard mirror next to the last *chim che* (air-well). I plastered my hair with a generous scoop of *Brylcreem*.

Mama used to be healthy. If she stood upright, she could easily reach the upper latch of the main door; but of late, she suffered a strange skin disease akin to being scalded by hot water. Boils appeared on her skin and if she was not careful, she could tear her skin and expose the raw, red flesh underneath. All this while, Mama kept mum about her condition, but avoided foods such as prawns, crab and chicken which Peranakans believed aggravated an itch.

“Cedric, bring along the *tempat bara* (clay ember holder) and teapot. I have already stoked the embers onto the charcoal and prepared the tea earlier.”

“Yes Mama. I will also bring the *stangee* (a fragrant incense) kept in the metal container from the *piak tu* (built-in cupboard)”, I replied.

The clock on the wall chimed seven times. It was *Chia Guek Chui It* or *Hari Temaru* - the first day of the Lunar New Year. Mama was about to commence the *Sambot Taon* (New Year Welcoming ceremony). Mama told me that in the past, Peranakans did not depend on astrology to pick a time to open the main door (to usher in the New Year). Each family had its own tradition. In our family, we welcomed the New Year at seven o’clock in the morning. Mama looked very fresh even though she spent the night on the planter’s chair in the *Thia Abu* (Ancestral Hall) watching television until the wee hours of the morning.

“After opening the door, please raise the lanterns. I’m ready to offer incense,” she called out to me as she carefully counted joss sticks at the main altar. “Cedric, it’s good that you have prepared the *nasi sambot taon* (New Year rice) and trimmed the spring onion and *anak sawi* (Chinese Mustard sprout) with *ang kim* (gold-lined



sama anak sawi semalam malam. Tu jam, Mama ada penat sikit. Besok-besok bila Mama sua takda, ni suma nanti Cedric dah tau bikin. Ah! Ni nasi sambot taon makna dia, ada nasi lebih (chun png) – mana-mana pergi ada hock makan. Anak sawi dalam ayer ni pulak mintakkan banyak chai – boleh untong-untong sama panjang umo. Kalu ikot nama Hokkien sayur ni kita panggil Tng-mia-chai. Huat kueh tindeh kueh bakol ni kasi bintang kita huat tinggi ke langit. Anak chuchu suma boleh chin sama panday-panday surat jadi orang baik-baik”, Mama ingatkan.

Bila saya sudah siap gantungkan tien teng sama ji-seh teng, Mama terus pasang lilin merah kat Tok Datok. Ng Kong sudah limablair taon pergi, jadi Mama ni jam jadi kepala rumah. Saya kawankan Mama pasal anak-branak lain suma dah masok Christian, tak pegang hio lagi. Mama dah tak kuat khui lagi jadi kena diri sia kat tengah-tengah pintu besair sama hio kat tangan mintak sama Tuanallah pohpee peng ann satu rumah tangga. Saya pulak sibok tambahkan stangee kat bara. Asap dia naik berkepol-kepol. Bila masok musim Temaru ni, angin dia kuat sama sejok skali. Bila asapkan Thia Datok, satu rumah boleh bau wangi. Ni baru kata Temaru! Satu rumah ch’ng chantek-chantek. Ada macham-macham mia kueh sama ayer maino siap atair tok bulat kasi sedara nang datang nanti makan sama minom.

Sambot Taon offerings: Anak sawi (left), huat kueh stacked on kueh bakol (centre), nasi sambot taon (right). Photo by Baba Cedric Tan.

red paper cuttings) last night,” she beamed. “When I am gone, I’m glad that you know the correct way to prepare the New Year offerings.”

Mama explained, “The *nasi sambot taon* symbolises rice in abundance, meaning that you will always have food wherever you go. The *anak sawi* is dipped in water to wish for abundant wealth, prosperity and longevity.

In Hokkien, this vegetable is known as the longevity vegetable. The stacked *huat kueh* on *kueh bakol* represents ascending talent and fortune. May our descendants have good rapport, be well educated and become respectable people.”

After I hung the *tien teng* (God of Heaven’s lantern) and family surname lanterns, Mama lit the red candles on the Main Altar. Kong Kong left us fifteen years ago and since then, Mama conducted the prayers. As other family members had converted to Christianity and did not want to participate in the traditional New Year prayers, I offered incense with Mama. She was not steady enough to kneel, so she stood in the middle of the main door with incense in her hands seeking God’s blessing for the family. I busily added more *stangee* onto the embers, the thick scent perfuming the air. During the Lunar New Year season, the breeze was usually strong and cool; the heady fragrance of *stangee* quickly wafted throughout the entire house. Ah, this was Lunar New Year indeed!



Abis sohio sia, saya pimpin Mama pi dudok kat krosi Thia Abu pasal moh soja Mama. Mama ni main wayang kata toksa-lah tapi bila sampay krosi sia, Mama pelan-pelan betolkan kain dia lepar tu dudok tarok tangan atair paha siap tunggu orang soja.

“Ni jam dah peshyen baru Cedric, toksa soja lagi. Shake hands sudah”, Mama bukak mulut. Tapi bila saya khui sama ketok kepala kat batu tiga kali, Mama diam-diam prati sia. Boleh tengok mata Mama berair.

“Mintakkan Mama panjang-panjang umo, boleh tengok banyak lagi chichit. Happy New Year, Mama!”, saya kasi uchap sama tangan jari sepuluh rapat-rapat. Sama ketawa kechik, Mama pindahkan tangan lagi paha tarok kat pipi saya. Abis tu Mama bilang, “Alah si mulot manis ni. Mintakkan badan Mama kuat-kuat sudah! Mama ni dah lapan puloh taon, dah hidop puair. Dah ada satu chichit. Apa lagi Mama moh?”

“Mama tak moh tengok chuchu tulang Mama suma kawin, timang chichit tulang pulak?” saya usek Mama sama urut tangan Mama kat pipi saya. Mama memang tau Ako Besair baru kawen tinggeh lagi kita dua ekor adek tengah bujang lagi.



My grandmother, Nyonya Tay Kim Im (1912-1992)

The house was beautifully decorated, delicious *kueh* and fizzy orange drinks neatly laid out on the round table, ready for relatives when they dropped by later.

After offering incense, I led Mama to her chair in the *Thia Abu* to pay my respects. Mama made a show of insisting that I could dispense with the traditional *soja* (kneeling). However, once she settled into her chair, she slowly adjusted her sarong and placed her hands onto her lap as a sign she was ready to accept my obeisance.

“We are in modern times Cedric, forgo the kneeling, just shake hands,” Mama uttered. However when I obediently knelt in front of her and *kowtowed* three times, she watched me silently, her eyes glistening with tears.

“Wishing you long life Mama! May you live to see more great-grandchildren! Happy New Year Mama!” I wished her with clasped hands. With a chuckle, Mama moved her hands from her lap and rested them on my cheeks. “Oh

you smooth talker! Just wish me good health! I am already eighty years old and had a good life. I have one great-grandchild. What more could I want?”

“Mama, don’t you want to see all your *chuchu tulang* (grandchildren of your bloodline) married? Cradle many more *chichit tulang* (great-grandchildren of your bloodline) too?” I teased her while caressing her hands on my cheeks. My eldest brother had recently married, while my sibling and I were still single.

“All that lies in the hands of God. I don’t know long I will be around Cedric. Never mind, you just hurry up and *pakay kopiah* (don the cap i.e. graduate quickly) for me to see,” she replied, smiling so widely that her dentures showed while she fought back her tears. She then drew an *angpow* (red packet) from the pocket of her self-made blouse, newly sewn for the New Year. “This is a little gift from me. Wishing that you graduate soon and find a good job after that.”

Four months later, Mama passed away, just after I had graduated from university and was looking for a job. That last New Year that I had spent with her, Mama realised that her time was almost up, but in her heart she was happy that she had successfully passed on important traditions to me. Mama could truly rest in peace knowing that I would keep our family’s New Year practices alive.

## WHEN I AM GONE, I’M GLAD THAT YOU KNOW THE CORRECT WAY TO PREPARE THE NEW YEAR OFFERINGS

“Suma tu dalam tangan Tuanallah. Entah brapa lama lagi Mama boleh idop. Takpa, lu chepat-chepat pakay kopiah kasi Mama tengok”. Mama senyum sampay nampak gigi bohong kat gusi tapi sama tahan ayer mata. Mama tarek satu angpow kuluair lagi kochek baju rumah baru nang Mama baru jait seniri. Mama chakap “Ah, Ni Mama kasi sikit wisit. Mintakkan Cedric chepat-chepat pakay kopiah. Lepair tu dapat kerja baik-baik”.

Empat bulan kemudian, Mama pulang Tng Suah. Tempoh tu ngam-ngam saya baru abis sekolah tinggi moh charik kerja pulak. Mama dah tau tempoh dia sudah moh sampay tapi dalam ati Mama, apa nang dia mo turunkan sama chuchu suma dah selamat sampaykan. Sunggoh pun sedeh, mata Mama sua boleh tutop rapat-rapat pasal Mama tau chuchu dia tentu teruskan adat embok-embok kita blakang hari nanti.

# FINDING RUMAH

A SHINING STAR LEADS BABA IAN NG BACK TO HIS ROOTS | PHOTOS BY BABA IAN NG

Throughout my youth, I never consciously thought about my Peranakan heritage. After my parents' divorce, my mother wanted to forget the past. She sold or got rid of everything that reminded her that she had married into a Peranakan family, including a set of leaf-shaped *kerosang rantay* (a chain-linked set of three brooches) an *intan* (rose-cut diamond) pendant and matching bracelet, some rare decorative buttons and a glossy *bakol sia* (lacquered bamboo basket with cover).

Had she kept them, they would have become my precious heirlooms, but where I saw cultural value, she only saw disappointment. She did not want to teach me about my Peranakan heritage to spare us both the heartache of remembering what was lost, so I do not blame her. At home, I neither tasted nor saw Peranakan dishes prepared. In school, I learned Mandarin. In short, I felt little passion for Baba culture because I had little practice being Baba.

My return to my Baba roots in adulthood was serendipitous. A few years ago, I found out about the Peranakan Museum's docent training programme by chance. Little did I expect that my decision to become a volunteer docent would lead me back to my roots. I studied the history of the Peranakans, their elaborate wedding rituals, including the intricate beadwork, kebayas, and jewellery. What began as an academic interest grew steadily to become an inseparable part of my life.



Kueh ku that I made using intricately carved wooden moulds.

## THE KUEH TO MY HEART

It is often said that food is the way to a man's heart; for me, it was *kueh*. While I was training to become a docent, I learnt about the nyonyas' devotion to their cuisine. It inspired me to make my own *kueh ku* (tortoise-shaped cake made of glutinous rice flour filled with bean paste). I began scouring antique shops for wooden *kueh ku* moulds. My first wooden mould has since grown into a collection of 20. My mum was surprised at my sudden interest in *kueh*-making, but decided to humour me and participate in my culinary experiment.

As I trawled antique shops, I purchased a black-and-gold *bakol sia* in near mint condition. This evoked many memories for Mum, who was reminded of a similar one she received decades ago during the *cheo thau* (hair-combing) ceremony at her wedding. In time, I used my *bakol sia* to deliver my freshly steamed *kueh ku* to family members who savoured the treat.

Seeing my enthusiasm for Peranakan culture continue to blossom, Mum gradually warmed up to it. Her interest in nyonya fashion was reawakened when I surprised her with a peacock-print batik sarong. Later, we would make many trips to Katong to pick out kebayas and sarongs together.

To wear her new kebayas, Mum needed an essential piece of nyonya jewellery – a *kerosang*. During one of our shopping trips, she bought a *kerosang rantay* which brought back memories of the set she sold off years ago. She said it was uncanny how Peranakan objects she once relinquished seemed to be finding their way back to our *rumah* (house) through me.

Mum's *kerosang* purchase piqued my interest in Peranakan jewellery. During my research, I was dismayed to discover that less than a handful of jewellery shops in Singapore stock Peranakan jewellery; even fewer made their own pieces.



Guiding a tour at the Peranakan Museum.



My Bintang Besair, a symbol of my return to my roots.

### BINTANG BESAIR

In July 2017, Mum and I visited a jewellery fair where something immediately caught my eye at one of the booths. It was a star brooch. It reminded me of those I had seen in photos during my docent training. Star brooches were worn prominently on

the brim of a Baba groom's skullcap during his wedding. My mum was equally taken by the dazzling brooch and decided to buy one for me.

When we discovered that the jeweler was local, we decided to have my brooch custom made. I wanted my brooch to have a vintage look, so I asked for *intans* to be set in the centre instead of modern brilliant-cut diamonds. Thus began our friendship with Caroline and Thomis Kwan of Foundation Jewellers. Ever the perfectionist, Thomis tirelessly sourced for a large, near-colourless rose-cut diamond to complete my star. When I saw the finished brooch I was mesmerized by its radiance. With the slightest movements, light darted from the star in rainbow brilliance. To me it symbolises a new beginning for Mum and I. She has since named our brooch *Bintang Besair*: the big star.

More than a piece of jewellery, our *Bintang Besair* is a symbol of my mother's reconciliation with her past, and a reminder for me of her love and support during my search for my Peranakan roots. The star reminds me to safeguard my heritage so that my descendants will continue the Peranakan traditions I have come to hold so dear. If fate is kind, I hope that I will one day wear my *bintang besair* for my wedding, and later, pass it on to my *anak* (child) for his.



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# SIMPAN ROMBONG

NYONYA LINDA CHEE TAKES STOCK OF AN OLD WORLD PORTABLE CLOSET | PHOTOS BY NYONYA LINDA CHEE

The congregation of St Hilda's Church in Katong where I worship has a large population of babas and nyonias. It is a quaint 'old' church going back over 80 years. Quite a few dear uncles and aunties worship alongside their many grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. The joke is, you have to be careful what you say because everybody is related to everybody!

At breakfast one Sunday after service, I asked around if anyone still kept a *rombong* or two. To my disappointment, the response was a forlorn echo: "No more, *sudah buang* (threw away)!", "*Mana ada lagi?* (Where got?)", "*Sayang, when we moved, semua hilang* (all gone)!"

*Linda's aunt Caroline Mok's laces from the rombongs that her grandmother, brought down from Melaka to Singapore.*

*"They were probably her favourites that she could not bear to part with."*



But, many had stories about what went into their *rombongs*.

Nyonya Josephine Lee, in her 60s, was born in Joo Chiat and lived there until she moved to Siglap in the mid-1950s. She trundled to school in a "*pow hong chiu*" (pirate taxi). "Mother was from Kuantan. I am the youngest of four brothers and four sisters. I don't remember what the boys had, but we girls had *rombongs* that were placed at the foot of where we slept. They acted as our cupboards."

"We kept our clothes, combs and things like that. I remember Mother had bigger ones where she kept tablecloths, pillowcases and I don't know what else. Off and on, someone would come around the street on a bicycle to sell *rombongs*. If ours had worn out, we would get new ones."

So, Josephine's *rombongs* were long gone.

Church pianist Nyonya Patricia Low kept several somewhere deep in the family storeroom where they "*sudah rapoh*" (disintegrated) and were discarded. With a laugh, Patricia says that living in the same house in Telok Kurau for decades, she tends to forget where things disappear.

Her octogenarian mother used to keep all the children's baby clothes in *rombongs*, "as it was the tradition". After Patricia and her brother grew up, "Mother used them for storing Christmas tree decorations". Some Christmas hangings are more than half a century old, stashed away long forgotten until I poked her memory. Patricia's earnest smile and busy lifestyle hinted of little chance to catch a glimpse of her vintage memorabilia.

I fanned out wider, to my family and other friends, to look for this erstwhile storage item. My maternal aunt, Nyonya Caroline Mok, a passionate genealogy hobbyist, keeps her two *rombongs* in pristine condition. They were brought down by her maternal grandmother, Seow Geok Bee, from Melaka when she came to Singapore to help look after the grandchildren, and were used to store her 'treasures'. Among her precious *harta* were rolls of unused *broderie anglaise* lace trimmings bought in Melaka.

Caroline, in her 50s, is four years younger than I and descends from the second wife of my maternal great-grandfather, Tan Tek Joon. Her spare time is consumed by tracing the extensive roots of our

*This beautiful, rather 'English-looking' wicker & screw pine rombong with a delicate handle belonged to Linda's paternal grandmother, Chee Kim Puay Neo.*





Linda's collection of rombongs from her maternal grandmother, Tan Poh Neo. They hold keepsakes with a rich provenance. Among them, rolls of Victorian laces, sapu tangan (handkerchiefs), o to (stomach covers) and baju hari hari (everyday clothing).

extended families in Melaka. Caroline squirrels everything old that she can lay her hands on. She remembers her childhood: "We kept all our clothes in *rombongs*. Every year we would get new ones."

"I have tried to buy *rombongs* but no one makes them the way they used to. The old ones were tightly woven and the patterns were nicer. The coloured ones helped me and my siblings to differentiate whose *rombong* it was," Caroline adds.

Further probing showed that the *rombong* was indeed used as an all-purpose storage box. For keeping old photos. Or beads. My breakfast *kaki* (friend) Richard Tan, a retired HR professional, remembers organising his clothes and personal essentials in a *rombong* simply because "we had a big extended family". A total of 31 members, to be precise. Using a *rombong* was most practical. It was convenient and easy to store anywhere." Times have vastly changed, families are smaller, and so *rombongs* have mostly departed from being a part of the lives of the Peranakans.

To some others like my husband, Colin, the *rombong* is the perfect receptacle to keep his aged *pu erh* tea leaves well ventilated.

Colin remembers buying *rombongs* for our daughter, Olivia's cotton towels, diapers and tees from the time she was a baby and toddler.

Whenever we drove to Melaka 35 years ago with my parents, we would go *rombong-hunting* among the few beach-side stalls that could be found at the far end of Tanjong Kling. There, we bought a few really fine pieces for no other reason than that they looked so well made.

Sometimes we would find coarsely woven *rombongs* among the tourist stalls closer to the former Melaka Padang (roughly where *Mahkota* is now) fronting the Straits of Malacca. These stalls, including the esplanade's makan (food) stalls famed for their *orh chien*, *ice kacang* and *satay*, have since given way to urban development.

To me, my collection of *rombongs* that were handed down to me, and what they contain, are precious keepsakes in memory of my dear mother, Low Suan Neo and father, Louis Tan.



## APA NI, ROMBONG?

The *rombong* or in its plural, *rombongs*\* are covered baskets commonly woven from dried mengkuang or screwpine (*pandanus tectorius*) leaves. I was surprised to discover another meaning: in Indonesia, *rombong* refers to the small wooden pushcarts on wheels used by itinerant hawkers. *Rombongan* refers to a group of people who work or travel to and fro together.

The screwpine is a seaside plant that grows quite tall on a

strong stem and produces a fruit that looks vaguely like a pineapple. The mature leaves are long and thorny. After shaving off the prickly edges, the leaves are cut in strips to the desired widths, dried and used plain or dyed for functional or decorative purposes. From the simple to elaborate, they are woven into anything from *rombong*, *tikar* (mats) or *tudong saji* (food covers) to accessories such as slippers, hats, fans, pouches and purses.

\*Peranakan-speak has a way of exclusively anglicising the Malay plural. The correct term is *rombong-rombong*.

# CHARM BRACELET CONTEST WINNERS

SAVOUR ELIZA ONG'S BITTERSWEET MEMORIES IN HER WINNING STORY WHICH WON THE HEARTS OF OUR JUDGES

## TINGKAT

BY ELIZA ONG

The first signs of Mama's dementia showed in her cooking. It started with the subtle details that only someone familiar with her food would notice: the *sambal belachan* lacking its usual fiery kick, or the cucumbers and carrots in the *achar* (pickles) not cut to the same length. Soon, ingredients were missing from her dishes. At first it was less conspicuous, like the dried lily bulbs absent from her *chap chye* or the bean sprouts in the prawn mee. But one day when Mama forgot to add the chicken to her *ayam buah beluak*, we knew that something was wrong.

The doctors diagnosed Mama with Alzheimer's disease. We were devastated, but Mama, then still fairly lucid and unfazed. "Amboi! What's the big deal! Everyone becomes forgetful with age. I'll keep cooking to stay mentally active", she said stoically.

Mama, a true blue Nyonya matriarch, was always in her element in the kitchen. I grew up with the piquant smells of Mama's cooking in our family home in Katong. She cooked daily for eight of us with ease and aplomb. After we moved out, Mama continued cooking for us and our families – she despatched the food in the many *tingkats* (tiffin carriers) she owned. Mama had close to a dozen *tingkats*, neatly arranged in a row on a kitchen shelf. The simple but clever design of the *tingkat*, featuring three or four stackable containers held in place by a metal frame, meant that its recipient



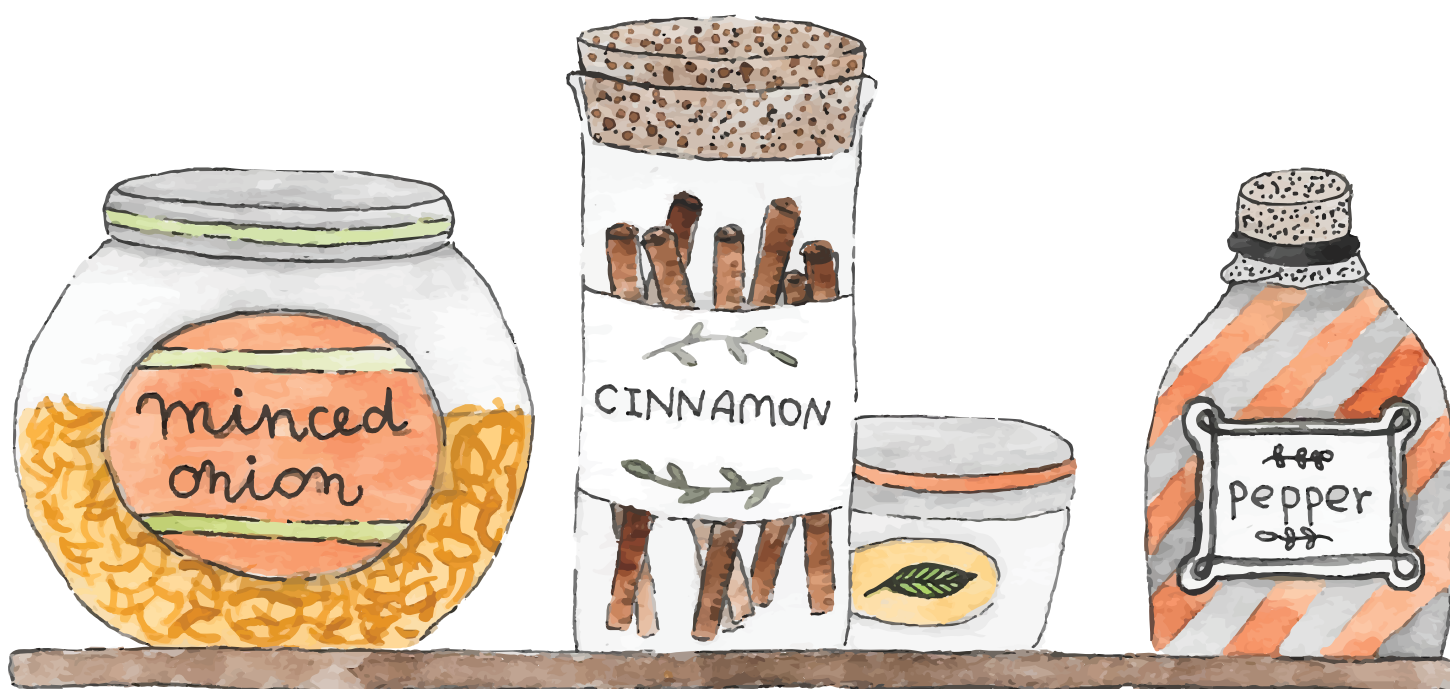
### PART OF THE JOY WAS GUESSING WHAT LAY HIDDEN WITHIN EACH TIER

could be brought a variety of dishes within one portable carrier. Made of steel with a glossy enamel finish, they came in different pastel hues, embellished by painted flowers. Mama arranged them by colour, and had a designated *tingkat* for each family.

I had the honour of having my own pink *tingkat* which would be delivered with my favourite dishes. Part of the joy was guessing what lay hidden within each tier. The top tier would typically contain an appetizer of sorts: Mama's *ngoh hiang* (meat roll), deep fried to a crispy golden brown, or her *otak-otak*, studded with generous chunks of fish. This would invariably be followed

by a vegetable dish in the next tier – perhaps *sambal kangkong*, glistening in oily goodness from a quick stir-fry to retain maximum crunch, or *chap chye*, softened from hours of careful simmering in a flavourful stock. The third and final tier would be reserved for the highlight of the meal: a meat or seafood dish. My favourite was Mama's *udang masak lemak nanas*, which presented a riot of flavours for the palate – the sweetness of the prawns and pineapple chunks complemented by the spiciness of chilli paste, the richness of coconut milk balanced by the tanginess from the turmeric, lemongrass and other spices.

After the doctor's diagnosis, it struck me that Mama had not managed to impart her cooking skills to any of her children or grandchildren, all of whom had more interest in eating than cooking. Mama had spoken of preserving her legacy by



publishing a cookbook, but we never took that seriously, choosing instead to tease her about it.

Desperate to make up for lost time, I started following Mama round the kitchen, determined to document her cooking. But it was too late: Mama no longer navigated the kitchen with her usual adeptness. The sessions would start promisingly, as Mama began pounding the spices for her rempah rhythmically. But before long she would start to fumble and falter, missing a step, spilling some sauce, or allowing the soup to boil over. It was a futile exercise that often ended with Mama in tears of frustration. Soon, she was no longer able to cook even a simple meal for herself.

Mama passed away after a bout of pneumonia. My grief was deepened by my immense sense of regret at not having spent more time with her. With a heavy heart, I joined my family in the arduous task of clearing the house, made more painful by the reminders of Mama everywhere. Mama had always been a fastidious and orderly housekeeper, but in her last days, the illness had resulted in misplaced items appearing in odd corners of the house. I discovered my pink *tingkat* tucked away in Mama's clothes cupboard.

As I picked it up, I was surprised to feel that there was weight within. With trembling fingers, I lifted the lid. In the first container lay a single item: an old photo of Mama carrying me as a baby in her arms,



few sheets of paper. I unfolded them tremulously.

They were recipes – Mama's recipes for my favourite dishes, painstakingly handwritten with careful, precise instructions. I had to fight to keep my tears from spilling to avoid smudging the ink.

Mama had delivered her last meal to me in the *tingkat*, one that would last an eternity.

beaming proudly at the camera. I swallowed a lump in my throat, and carefully set aside the first container. The second tier had more old photos scattered within. They were taken at different times and places, but had something in common: me. In one photo, I was about three or four, seated at the dining table attempting to feed myself, with gravy dribbling down my chin. Next to me was Mama, looking on with amused pride. In another, Mama was squatting on the kitchen floor with the *lesong batu* (mortar and pestle made of granite), while I stood behind with my arms flung round her neck, an impish grin on my face.

I was so absorbed in the memories that came flooding back that I almost forgot the last tier. Remembering Mama's mantra of saving the best for the last, I felt my stomach tighten with an odd sense of anticipation. Gingerly, I lifted the second container to reveal what lay in the third and final tier. In it was some of Mama's jewellery, including her favourite kerosangs. But there was more. Beneath the jewellery lay a

# WINNERS

Congratulations to the winners of the Charm Bracelet contest we ran in the last issue. Kamsiah to all entrants for participating.



## 1st Prize – TINGKAT by Eliza Ong

(A sterling silver bracelet with 5 Peranakan Charms.)

The following stories win a sterling silver Peranakan Charm each:

- DESPERATE TIMES by Maureen Lim
- THE DIAMOND LICKER by Baba Tan Geok Koon
- PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE by Maureen Lim



Read the other winning entries on the Peranakan Association's website at: [www.peranakan.org.sg](http://www.peranakan.org.sg) or scan the QR code here.



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# GROWING UP IS A DOG'S LIFE

IN A NOD TO THE TAON ANJING (YEAR OF THE DOG), BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG MUSES ABOUT HIS BOYHOOD PETS, GROWING UP IN A RUBBER ESTATE ALONG UPPER THOMSON ROAD | PHOTOS COURTESY OF BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG

To me, a dog is always a friend. Whether wagging its tail or its long tongue, a happy dog is a happy friend. As I was growing up from a toddler to a teenager, my best friends were Tikko, then Blackie, then Happy. Just as the photo shows, Happy was a jolly pet who always had a 'smile' on his face.

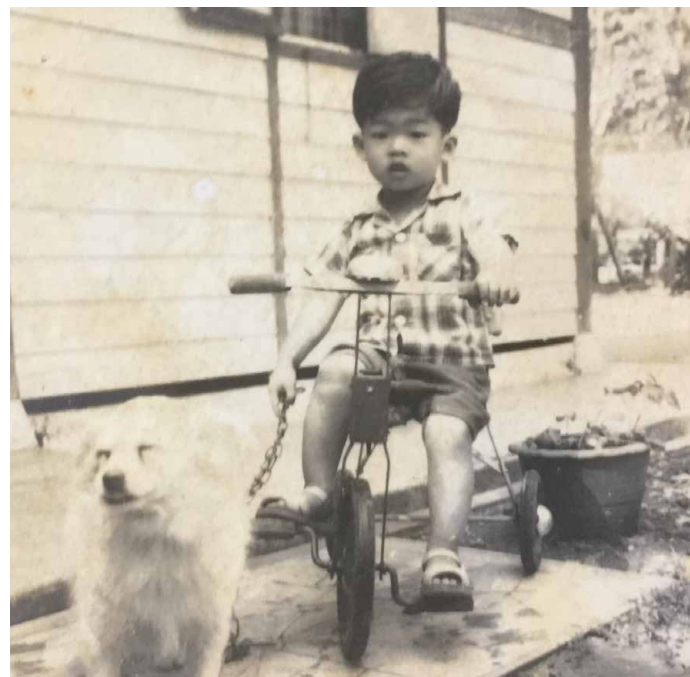
Mum was the inspiration behind my love for dogs. She loved dogs since her childhood days at Tranquerah Beach in Melaka. I grew up on a rubber estate which my dad managed, so we had plenty of space for our dogs.

## HO MIA DOGS

Apart from Tikko, who was a pedigree dog, all our other dogs were mixed breed and were very *ho mia* (fortunate) to be as free as the wind. They roamed at liberty on the sprawling grounds of the rubber estate.

Even today, I squirm when I see dogs on a leash, confined to tiny cages or tied to a fence. Mum believed that a dog should not be denied its natural freedom to roam, after all, dogs descended from wolves who ran wild! I believe she was right. A dog let loose is a happy dog. We never had any problems with our dogs, and never once did they bite anyone.

Before Happy, we had a black dog called Blackie who later sired a son called Brownie. Both father and son would roam the rubber estate at Upper Thomson Road near the Pierce Reservoir. There was no danger from cars because in the 1950s and 60s, there were very few cars in our neck of the woods.



Me and Tikko.

Mum would be careful to leave out prawns from their diet. Believe it or not, our dogs loved ice cream and durians! We had our very own durian tree which was four-storeys high and dwarfed the modest rubber estate manager's bungalow we called home. In 1968, my family moved from the Tiang Guan rubber estate. I have so many good memories of our years there. The plantation was a full 123 acres, complete with a swamp and lovely pastoral streams. The area today is Windsor Park, a public nature reserve. My sister Linda continued to have dogs as pets even after she got married, and her husband Colin did a marvellous job of grooming them.

Unlike today's apartment living, during my childhood, most of the houses on the estate were unlocked all day. It was common for neighbours to pop in at any time. We only locked up our house before going to bed at 10.30pm.

Growing up in a Peranakan household, I never paid much attention to the strange-looking lion-dog immortalised as a finial on the top of every *kamcheng* lid which my parents inherited or collected. I did not know the significance of the lion-dog in our culture until two years ago when I became a volunteer museum docent. The dogs are our guardians! It's no wonder our house on the rubber estate was always protected. We often find statues of lion-dogs at the entrances of public buildings. When I think about all the dogs who have shared my life, a dog's life is indeed a happy one.

## A LIFE OF BABY POWDER & ICE CREAM

Mum would bathe our dogs once a week. The dogs loved bath time and Mum would smother them with Johnson's Baby Powder to finish. At the same time, she would remove ticks from them. As young children, we had fun chasing ticks scuttling across our living room. We would squish them between our fingers or use our slippers to smash them with such sadistic pleasure!

We didn't buy any kibble for our dogs. Preparing their food was simple – they ate whatever we ate, except that

# BEAD BY BIT: 3D MANEK

NYONYA VICTORIA CHANEL LEE LOOKS AT HOW A YOUNG DESIGNER IS USING 3D PRINTING TO CREATE MODERN MANEK

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUDREY CHUA



3D-printed beaded jewellery created by Audrey Chua.



As far as anyone can remember, skilled nyonys have solely used fabric as a base to create their detailed *manek* (bead) masterpieces. Plain white cotton toile is often the textile of choice to sew on miniscule glass beads by hand. Once completed, the intricately beaded panels are then made into shoes, purses or whatever the beader intended. Anyone who has done *manek* beading will tell you what a headache it is if you miscount and miss a stitch or two. Worse if you sew on a wrong coloured bead! Sometimes you may even have to unpick rows of beads to correct a mistake. *Pengsan!*

Now, Audrey Chua, 24, a recent graduate from the Division of Industrial Design at the National University of Singapore, has created 3D-printed canvasses where beads can be easily sewn on a perforated, pre-fabricated base to recreate the vibrant aesthetics of *manek* beadwork sans all the frustration.

**Victoria Chanel Lee:** Tell us what Bead by Bit is about?

**Audrey Chua:** Bead by Bit uses 3D printing technology and algorithmic software to produce 3D forms such as shoes and vases to make beading easier. Traditionally, Peranakan beading is done on a flat textile surface, and is later constructed into a 3D object. So I thought, why not create a 3D base to bead on right from the start?

**VCL:** What was your inspiration behind the project?

**AC:** I have always been very interested in the vanishing traditional crafts of Singapore. With my industrial design training, I reflected on how I could help to proliferate a craft, or simplify the process to make it more sustainable.

**VCL:** Why did you focus your work on Peranakan beading?

**AC:** I felt that Peranakan beading offered many design possibilities that I could try out. Also, with Mr Raymond Wong's help, it was easier for me to explore the craft.

**VCL:** How did Baba Raymond Wong come into the picture?

**AC:** Before I embarked on this project, I had never tried beading. I needed a professional opinion to gain insight into this craft, to determine if there is a market for my 3D designs, and most importantly, learn the techniques of Peranakan beading. I approached Rumah Kim Choo, and Mr Wong readily offered his help. He taught me beading. Subsequently, we decided to collaborate and he even bought some of my 3D canvasses to use for his workshops. Mr Wong was keen to try out new methods of creating Peranakan beadwork.

**VCL:** Why did you choose to create shoes, a vase, and jewellery as your 3D canvasses?

**AC:** I created those 3D forms as I felt that they could best showcase the ornamental nature of Peranakan beadwork.

Traditionally, nyonys used Peranakan beadwork to make shoes for themselves. So I thought it would be good to create a 3D printed shoe.

Peranakan beadwork vases are really rare. During my research, I discovered that a beaded vase is constructed using several individually beaded panels stitched together to form the vase. Mr Wong told me that beaded vases are a lost craft; no one knows how to make them anymore. I felt that 3D printing could revive the art of making such vases.

As for the jewellery, it is my interpretation of how Peranakan beadwork can be relevant to contemporary audiences. Traditional Peranakan beaded accessories can

3D printed manek shoes with holes. Size 15/0 manek beads are sewn on by hand.



look 'heavy' and very ornate at times. I imagine that some people would love to have smaller, fun pieces made using the same beading techniques.

**VCL:** What do you have up your sleeve for your modern manek pieces?

**AC:** I have been thinking about launching a jewellery line because I believe that the pieces can be easily worn on a daily basis with a contemporary wardrobe. I am currently experimenting with different 3D forms to be used as the base for beaded jewellery. It's definitely a craft worth preserving and sharing. I want to shake off the notion that Peranakan beading is difficult and old-fashioned.

**VCL:** What challenges did you face in creating the 3D forms?

**AC:** A traditional Peranakan beading canvas has always been soft and flat, or two-dimensional. The beader will only create the holes when each bead is stitched on. In making a 3D form, I had to design a rigid base that was already in its final shape and not in flat panels. I had to figure out if the pre-fabricated holes had to be square or round. The most difficult part was to design the correct size for the holes, and the gaps between them. Peranakan beading is very fine and dense. If the holes on my 3D forms are too far apart, the aesthetic would be lost. With 3D printing, everything is designed on a computer. The machine simply prints according to your specifications, so even one millimetre makes a difference!

**VCL:** How have your pieces been received by your peers and design industry professionals?

**AC:** Generally, I received positive feedback! Phew! Many people were amazed. The question I get asked the most is: "How do the beads stick on?" Most people thought that the beads themselves were 3D printed. Yes, with current technology, this would have been possible to do, but it is not what I wanted for my pieces.

Although I used modern technology to create my pieces, it was very important to me to preserve a traditional craft - Peranakan beading. So on my pieces, the size 15/0 glass beads still need to be sewn on by hand, but with a pre-fabricated 3D base, it is much easier to do than the traditional way.

Some traditionalists have criticised my work. As a designer, there is always this tension - to be very conventional or very experimental? I think I have found a good balance. I'd like to think of my 3D forms as making a traditional craft easier and more accessible to a new generation of beaders.



The first and only of its kind - a 3D printed manek vase with hand-sewn beads.

KEEN TO CUSTOMISE YOUR OWN 3D DESIGN?

AUDREY CHUA CAN BE REACHED AT BEADBYBIT@GMAIL.COM

# PERANAKAN CULTURE TAKES OFF IN STYLE

FLORA TOH REPORTS ON SINGAPORE CHANGI AIRPORT'S NEW PERANAKAN-THEMED TERMINAL | PHOTO COURTESY OF CHANGI AIRPORT GROUP



A row of stunning, full-sized shophouse facades, presenting architecture from the 1880s to 1950s, transport visitors straight from Terminal 4's transit zone to the evocative, historic streetscapes of Chinatown and Katong. Like magic, two facades suddenly begin to unfold, revealing breathtaking, life-like interiors, and the irresistible promise of a glimpse into its stories.

Terminal 4's Heritage Zone is Changi Airport's first permanent showcase of Peranakan culture. Peranakan Love Story, a six-minute digital theatre performance, is its heartfelt core - the brainchild of renowned local composer and artiste Baba Dick Lee, featuring local talents Adrian Pang, Koh Chieng Mun and Amy Cheng.

Baba Peter Lee, an independent scholar and honorary curator of the NUS Baba House provided historical consultation, including advice on costumes and props. The NUS Baba House, an impressively conserved Peranakan heritage home from the 1890s, was an important reference for the set design in Peranakan Love Story.

Presented on a striking 10m x 6m LED screen, Peranakan Love Story is a musical set in 1930s Singapore about two passionate musicians living next to each other. Local leads Benjamin Kheng and Vanessa Ann Vanderstraaten have no need for words as their music draws them to an unexpected, gratifying finale, underscored by the haunting, familiar strands of Dick Lee's Bunga Sayang and rendered in brilliant digital magic by



Baba Dick Lee conceptualised the mini-musical, *Peranakan Love Story*.

Moment Factory, a Montreal-based multimedia entertainment studio.

Lee, who was approached by Changi Airport Group to create the multi-media experience, shares, "This project is dear to me as I'm Peranakan, and am especially proud to have my song *Bunga Sayang* included.

## HOW WAS IT DONE?

The live action was filmed locally at Infinite Studios on a raised set to simulate the actual viewing angles. The shoot was produced by mm2 Entertainment, with art direction and costumes by Yang Derong. Yang sourced furniture locally and costumes were supplied by Nyonya Bebe Seet.

Once filming was done, the movie was set to music by fellow Peranakan, Dr Sydney Tan. The whole shoot took two days with post production taking another three months.

Terminal 4, which opened to the public on 31 October 2017, houses a Peranakan Gallery, which showcases Peranakan food, traditions and objects with a curated display of artefacts from the National Heritage Board.

## THE PERANAKAN GALLERY

The 150 square metre gallery in Terminal 4 may be visited by passengers who have cleared departure immigration. It introduces visitors to Peranakan material culture, and its influence on contemporary local design. Through exclusive video footage, photographs, reproductions of interiors and displays of artefacts, four

sections in the gallery explore themes such as identity and hybridity, architecture and fashion. Must-sees include a re-creation of the interior of a Peranakan home and its furnishings, displays of sarong kebaya and nyonyaware, and exclusive footage of *Emily of Emerald Hill*, a seminal play written in the 1980s by Stella Kon.

To watch the video of Dick Lee's Peranakan Love Story at Changi Terminal 4, visit the Peranakan Association's website at: [www.peranakan.org.sg](http://www.peranakan.org.sg) or scan the QR code here.



# OF PATRIARCHS, PLAYBOYS AND PARAMOURS

BABA COLIN CHEE SAVOURS THE MISCHIEF IN NYONYA LEE SU KIM'S NEWEST BOOK

This is the last of a trilogy of books the author promised, but I was left wanting more. Where oh where do we go from here, after *Kebaya Tales*, then *Sarong Secrets*, and now *Manek Mischiefs*?

Nyonya Su Kim, the adept storyteller, has done it again – weaving scintillatingly, often darkly scandalous tales of babas and nyonias in surprising twists and turns, while effortlessly and excruciatingly peeling open layer upon layer of Peranakan traditions, taboos, beliefs and rank naughtiness.

Where and how did Su Kim gather this bounteous stew of cunning, sloth, squander, mayhem, gossip, intrigue, heartbreak, surprise, and privilege to stitch together these tales about the babas after two volumes about their other halves, the nyonias? (Ladies, take note of the ratio.)

A clue may be had in the author's preface: "This book is inspired by a baba I loved very much and still do. He was my father, Mr Lee Koon Liang, a baba from Malacca." Inspiration also came from "real life stories from Penang" as told by friends, and a well of creative imaginings.

Su Kim's style is direct and clean. It carries her stories right to the heart. It makes you want to finish each story as quickly as you can. It is fast paced with action, but this does not mean that the stories are devoid of lyrical moments.

The author starts one of her tales thus: "The sea breeze is the first thing that assails your senses when you walk into Sherwood Villa. Its coolness lifts your spirits, its playfulness brings a smile to your lips as it dishevels your hair. The familiar tang of sea spray and the mewling cries of the seagulls sing to me I have come home."

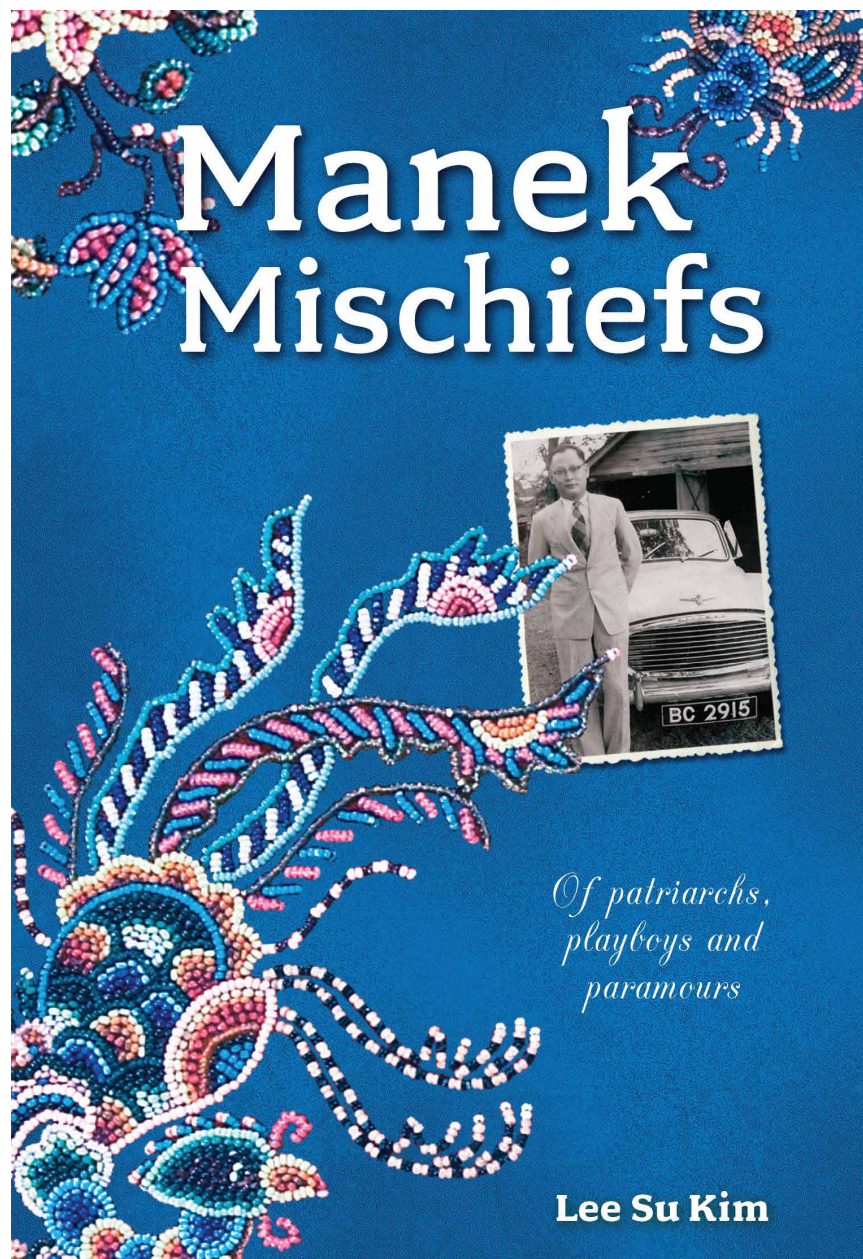
This poetic opening is juxtaposed right after an ominous title, *The Stump in the Hole under the Casuarina Tree in the Garden of the Mansion by the Sea*.

Another story ends this way: "The curiosity is killing me... That hand around Choon Neo's waist looks smooth, hairless, almost familiar. Trembling, I push the door ajar very gently by one more

inch. Just an inch more and I find out that the hand belongs to my sister, Ta Chi. Equally naked, her right leg reaches out to coil around my bride's body in a slithery embrace."

And the title to this story? *The Bride Who Refused to Strip*. Su Kim is a teaser, don't you agree?

*Manek Mischiefs* is a book of eight short stories. Each of them has a defining moment that will catch you the way a cat silently pounces on its prey. You are quietly startled. Just the way Su Kim has announced, "I'm pleased this trilogy is complete."



MANEK MISCHIEFS  
- OF PATRIACHS,  
PLAYBOYS AND  
PARAMOURS BY  
LEE SU KIM, IS  
PUBLISHED  
MARSHALL  
CAVENDISH  
EDITIONS, 2017

*Of patriarchs,  
playboys and  
paramours*

**Lee Su Kim**

# A RICH TAPESTRY OF PERANAKAN LIFE

BABA COLIN CHEE REVIEWS BABA PETER WEE'S BABA ALBUM

I had the privilege of seeing the book birthed in Baba Peter Wee's dining room in Katong Antique House on East Coast Road. It did not just happen in one day. The idea of documenting his family's rich history germinated many years ago. Afternoon teas and *kuehs* with him would inevitably lead to a huge sigh: "I have so much material to use and so many stories to tell," he would say.

Then, one day, amidst Baba Peter's family portraits, overhead *tengs* (waxed paper lanterns), books, bottles of snacks, and dusty memorabilia, Linda and I were introduced to Eddy Koh. Sitting across the dining table from Peter was this grey-haired, middle-aged gentleman. He was to be the editor of Baba Peter's new book, *A Baba Album*.

For Eddy, it must have been an ambitious project - 411 pages of dictated and edited narrative and photographs selected from amongst thousands. Baba Peter said the number of pages for the book kept increasing because there were so many stories to capture and so many photographs to present.

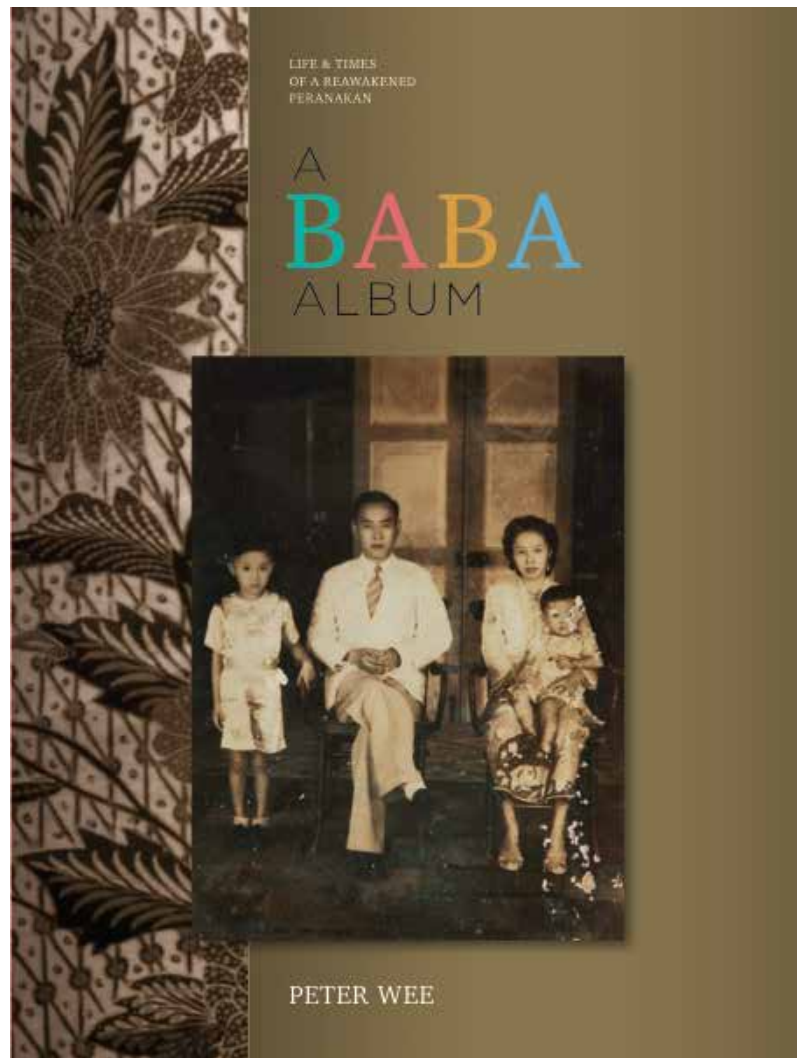
In the end, it is a prodigious story of a family spanning at least three generations. It begins with Baba Peter's paternal grandfather, Baba Wee Teng Hock, who was born in 1884 in Tanjung Pinang, the main town of Pulau Bintang, one of Indonesia's Riau islands.

Truth be told, many who own the book have said that *A Baba Album* is "heavy reading". It is, indeed. But if you savour it a bit at a time, in tasty bite-sized nuggets, there is much to be gleaned from the memoir because the book lays out Baba Peter's family story like a historical and cultural tapestry of Singapore.

Baba Peter noted, "When I revisited how we lost our family mansion in Waterloo Street after the government acquired the land in 1967 for public housing, I cannot but relive the effects of relentless urban redevelopment."

What I eventually found most visually interesting and strikingly historical is the book's frenetic spread of photographs.

Initially, quickly flipping through the pages, I thought the sheer number of them got in the way of the book's design. The photographs were largely amateurish and comprised essentially of fading snapshots of family, friends, events and places.



A BABA ALBUM - LIFE AND TIMES OF A REAWAKENED PERANAKAN IS AUTHORED BY PETER WEE AND EDITED BY EDDY KOH. SELF-PUBLISHED BY PETER WEE, 2017. AVAILABLE AT KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE.

Only after a third sweep of the photographs, I began to scrutinise a few and realised that perhaps, unwittingly, Baba Peter has in fact made historians and anthropologists a magnificent gift.

The photos in themselves visually tell a story of how members of the Peranakan community dressed for the eras they were in - their hairstyles, their favourite places and what they looked like then, the types of furniture in the homes of the period, and more.

This book is more than one man's personal album. It is a wonderful visual record of Peranakan life in days gone by.

# GRAVE WALKING MADE EASY

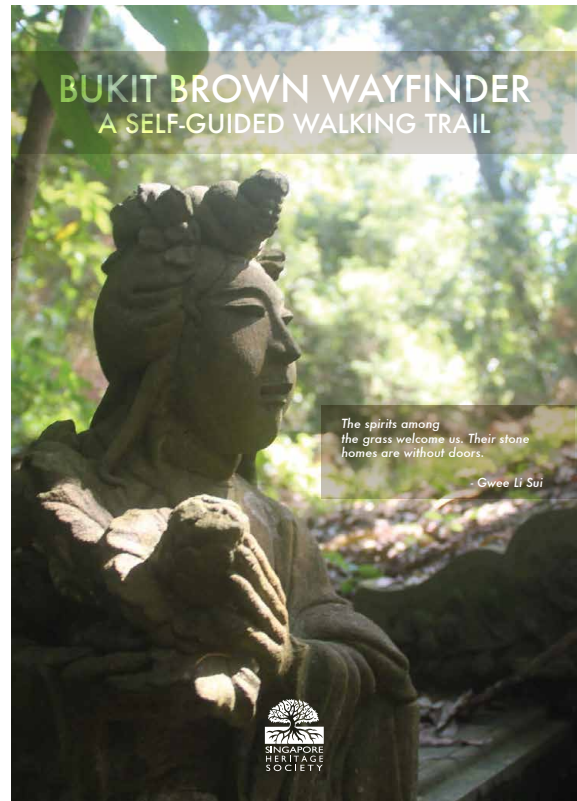
NYONYA NATALIE CHEAH REVIEWS THE BUKIT BROWN WAYFINDER GUIDE | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SINGAPORE HERITAGE SOCIETY

In November 2017, the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS) launched the *Wayfinder*, which is free and available to download online. The 115-page guide leads one on a walking trail of 25 tombs located in Blocks 1 and 3 of the Bukit Brown cemetery. It is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to tour Bukit Brown independently and learn about the lives of those interred within the historic tombs, many of whom are pioneers of Singapore. The *Wayfinder* is a gem of a guide, with a wealth of information about the cemetery, including huge family plots as well as humble tombs.

SHS President, Jack Tsen-Sa Lee writes in the forward:

“The material culture of the tombs, some bearing ornate carvings of iconic scenes from Chinese classics, hark back to time-honoured values of duty to family and country. Humbler tombs in simple brick and mortar speak of the struggles of ordinary people searching for a better life who made Singapore their home. The tomb inscriptions bear witness to tumultuous times in our regional history. More fundamentally, they are a tangible record of the origins of communities in Singapore, the lives lived by the people, and the descendants who survived them.”

For information on guided tours by Bukit Brown volunteers (Brownies), go to: <http://peatix.com/group/16067#>



## THE TOMB INSCRIPTIONS BEAR WITNESS TO TUMULTUOUS TIMES IN OUR REGIONAL HISTORY

I found the stories fascinating and enjoyed learning about the cemetery (which opened in 1922) in nuggets of information like this one about the Paupers' Section:

“No fees were charged for burial plots in this section unlike in the general section, where there was a plot fee of \$50 and burial fee of \$15. No reservations could also be made. It is estimated that tens of thousands of “ordinary” migrants are buried in the paupers' section. Unclaimed bodies and babies were also buried in this section. These sites are less desirable in terms of *fengshui* (geomancy) considerations as they are located in low-lying areas, where the land is more prone to water retention, thus leading to the corpse being inundated in water.”

### THE PERANAKAN CONNECTION

With the *Wayfinder*, the walking trail is easy to navigate with clearly marked directional signage. Detailed photos make it easy to spot the tombs.

One of the interesting highlights is the cluster of Peranakan tombs. The tomb of Baba Koh Hoon Teck (1878-1956) and his wife is the third one on the walking trail. He is a pioneer of Peranakan performing arts,

especially for composing *pantons* (quatrain poems) and for his *dondang sayang* (Baba Malay poems sung to a tune) renditions. He was one of the founders of the Gunong Sayang Association. His publishing company, Koh and Co., produced many Baba Malay titles. The guide reveals that Baba Koh had requested that the soulful strains of *dondang sayang* accompany him to his final resting place.

The Tiled Tombs, sixth on the list are also not to be missed. The pretty majolica tiles featured were also commonly found in Peranakan homes.

The guide is a must-have for anyone visiting Bukit Brown. Yet there are so many more stories to be told.

“There is more to be done to lend greater weight to the stories yet to be told by the tombstones and the landscape they rest on. For that we look to you, the community. Twenty-five stories out of some 100,000 tombs is a humble beginning.” – Jack Tsen-Sa Lee, President, Singapore Heritage Society



The Bukit Brown Wayfinder is published by the Singapore Heritage Society and is free to download. To access the guide, go to the Peranakan Association's website at: [www.peranakan.org.sg](http://www.peranakan.org.sg) or scan the QR code here.

# GENES OF MYTH AND LEGENDS

NYONYA DAWN MARIE LEE CHATS WITH PROFESSOR ROGER FOO OF THE GENOME INSTITUTE OF SINGAPORE ABOUT A GROUND-BREAKING STUDY OF PERANAKAN GENES | PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROGER FOO

**A**s a child, I was a little confused about my race in multi-racial Singapore where everyone is categorised in a racial group on their birth certs and identity cards. My father told us we were Baba, but I didn't really know what that meant. Linguistically, I became aware from a young age (in Primary One to be exact) that I wasn't quite "fully Chinese", a feeling reinforced by my consistently dismal Mandarin exam results throughout my entire school career. No one at home spoke this alien tongue, not even my grandparents on both sides, nor any of my aunts or uncles. I distinctly remember my younger brother came home from school one day and asked my mother if we were "English". (And this was in the late 1980s!)

So what exactly is a Peranakan? This is a question most of us Babas might have been asked at some point in our lives, or wondered about in moments of reflection. There is no black and white answer, but a new genetic study, the Peranakan Genome Project, hopes to blow some myths out of the water.

In the last decade, genetic ancestry testing has received wide media coverage and become increasingly popular and accessible. What could be more irresistible than uncovering hidden secrets about yourself? Not some random Facebook quiz, but a DNA test backed up by science! Genetic ancestry testing has been used to identify biological relatives, validate genealogical records, and to fill in gaps in family histories. In addition,

some genetic tests have been used in medical risk calculation, forensic investigations, and the assessment of ancestry for sociopolitical purposes.

**Dawn Marie Lee:** Given that Singapore is a multi-racial society, what made your team want to study Peranakan DNA in particular?

**Roger Foo:** There are many myths and legends surrounding the Peranakans. We felt that a study on the co-occurrence of culture and genetic mixture makes for a really inspiring piece of academic work. The suspected diversity in genetic admixture in Peranakans is specifically intriguing.

**DML:** Please tell us what the objectives of the Peranakan Genome Project are.

**RF:** First, we aim to see whether there is genetic admixture. Then if so, we would like to use it to infer history of communities. If there is anything interesting for the individual, it would be a side benefit. Our study is aimed at a population level outcome, rather than produce individual ancestral genetics studies. We would therefore not like to think of ourselves as undertaking a genetic ancestry testing project.

**DML:** What are you testing for? And what outcomes do you hope for?

**RF:** We are performing a population ancestry study, and will compare demographics to genetic history. For example, when the Chinese came to this region, what were the other non-Chinese genetics in Peranakan admixture? There will not be medical studies at this time.

THE SUSPECTED DIVERSITY IN GENETIC ADMIXTURE IN PERANAKANS IS SPECIFICALLY INTRIGUING



Professor Roger Foo (extreme right) and his team of researchers.



**DML:** What are some limitations of genetic ancestry testing?

**RF:** Dating will have error ranges. Chinese and Malay resolution may be limiting. We may easily infer population scale ancestry, and may not have precise answers for individuals. If the signals are diluted, the analysis may be more difficult to perform.

**DML:** The origins of Chinese Peranakans have long been a subject of debate. DNA testing can be used as a means of reconciling contentious issues. For simplicity, local historians often classify Chinese Peranakans as descendants of mixed Chinese-Malay ancestry; yet there are Peranakan families who cannot trace any Malay ancestors. Is this something you hope that your study will answer?

**RF:** Yes. This is possible.


**DML:** For this study, are you also collecting samples from Indian Peranakans (the Chetti Melaka), Jawi Peranakans and other groups considered Peranakan?

**RF:** Yes. We are looking for all comers.

**DML:** Will each participant be given their individual results? What can sample donors find out about their own genes or family tree from this study?

**RF:** We are working towards a way in which individual results can be safely returned to the individual, but at the current time, it is important to emphasise that this is a primarily a population study, not an individual study.

**DML:** How long will this project run and how many samples do you hope to collect? When will the earliest results be released and what will they be used for?

**RF:** The project will run until August 2018 and we aim to collect 400 samples. Earliest results could be released in late 2018. We aim to submit a publication to a peer-reviewed scientific journal. We will also engage The Peranakan Association and the Peranakan Museum, to see if they may be interested to organise events to showcase the results. We still require many more samples at this time, and hope that more Peranakans will participate. 

KEEN TO PARTICIPATE?  
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**Research Study**  
Genome sequencing for  
**Peranakans** in Singapore

**Who are we looking for?**  
Peranakan Singaporeans aged between 15 – 99, who are willing to donate a small blood sample for DNA sequencing.

**What is the purpose of the research?**  
The purpose of this research is to study the genomes of Peranakans, and to uncover the genetic history of Peranakan ancestry based on DNA evidence.

**How to be a volunteer for the research?**

- 1) Attend a research visit to our office at National University of Singapore (NUS)
- 2) Fill in a simple questionnaire about your general health
- 3) Provide a small blood sample for DNA sequencing
- 4) The research visit will last no more than 1½ hours
- 5) No further procedure and contact will be required for this study

**Your data will be kept confidential and only accessible to the study team**

**Who to contact for more information?**  
**Wilson Tan or A/Professor Roger Foo**  
66011036 or 98520618  
mdcwr@nus.edu.sg  
Centre for Translational Medicine  
5 Lower Kent Ridge Road,  
Singapore 117599

Sponsored by:



# MAKAN LAOK HARI HARI

NYONYA LINDA CHEE SPEAKS TO BABA MATT TAN ON HIS HEARTWARMING COOKBOOK OF EVERYDAY DISHES ENJOYED BY GENERATIONS OF BABAS AND NYONYAS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF LANDMARK BOOKS

**D**aily Nonya Dishes is a refresher on basic Peranakan dishes from the days of my childhood. Many cooks in my generation would probably share the same thought. I am reminded of dishes that I have not tasted for a long time. Like *Buah Paya Masak Titik*, or *Ikan Kekek Masak Nanair*, and a classic dish like *Tempura* which has variations using chicken, pork, eggplant, fish, eggs, prawns or *kiam chye* (salted vegetable).

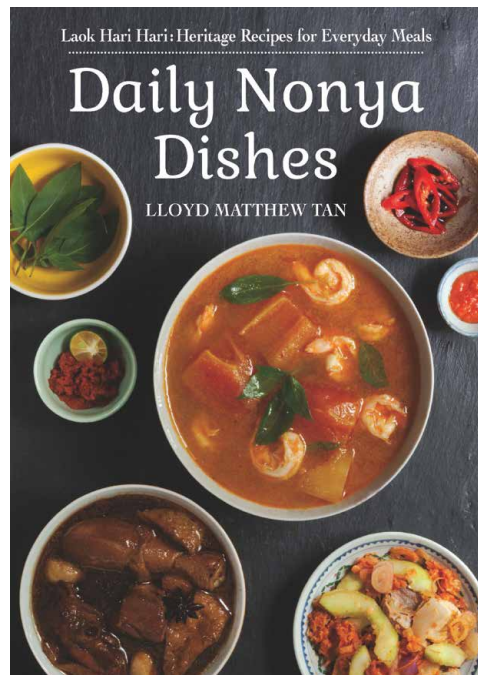
This cookbook by Lloyd Matthew Tan, better known as Baba Matt Tan, is different because the recipes are for simple home cooking. No detail is spared. It almost feels as if he wants anyone trying his recipes, even first-time cooks, to succeed in making the dishes.

In his 15-year journey to produce this handy reference, Matt was driven by a single, unwavering purpose – to ensure that the *laok hari hari* of the Peranakans did not disappear from the dining table.

## A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

The book is a tribute to his parents, Doreen Anne Ong Liang Neo and Robert Tan Choon Chye who loved to cook together. Matt's parents were like *belangkas* (horseshoe crabs) that once paired, are inseparable. He recalls: "Every Sunday lunch was a feast prepared by my parents. They would do everything together. Dad was the sweet one, who would hold Mum's hand when they were out. Mum was the shy one, easily embarrassed by his show of love for her. He would buy little treats for her, while Mum would always make sure he had proper meals."

Their enthusiasm in the kitchen rubbed off on Matt. His mother insisted on meticulous precision in cutting ingredients. She was trained by his maternal grandmother, Khoo Quee Neo, the matriarch of the family home called Bonny Grass at 12, Kim Yam Road. One of his favourite dishes in the book is *Ayam Oh*, a chicken stew with garlic, ginger and *taucheo* (fermented soya bean paste). "Mum always said that you can tell if the person is baba or nyonya if they



enjoy dishes with a *taucheo* base."

His father's intensive involvement in the kitchen held many wonderful memories. "I remember once when Dad and his friends went to catch pigeons at Victoria Theatre. He wanted to recreate his grandmother's special dish. When he came home, he was so excited to show us what he had in the sack that his hand slipped while untying the string and all the pigeons flew out!" Matt laughs.

## GOOD TO COOK, HARD TO FIND

With so much to share, he agonised over the many recipes that had to be left out of the book, like Pickled *Remis* (a small bivalve mussel), or even *Chinchalok* (fermented shrimp). As late as the 1950s people could still find *remis* in season on Katong Beach before the area was reclaimed. These ingredients

are "very hard to come by these days", says Matt. "I debated if some recipes should it be in the book just for the sake of documenting them."

For instance, he left out the recipe for fried *Ikan Tamban* as it is rare to find the fish in markets these days. "This is a fingerling-size fish called *Fringescale sardinella* which is marinated in tamarind and fried to a crisp." Ironically, one week after the photo shoot for the book was done, he spotted the fish in Tekka Market!

Changing tastebuds was also another concern. Unlike well-known Peranakan dishes like *Ayam Buah Keluak* or *Babi Pong Tay*, "many have never eaten or known of dishes such as *Batang Keloh*, where the pods from the Moringa tree are cooked in a spicy gravy." Another rare dish is *Trubok Busok*, or vegetables in spicy tamarind gravy flavoured with salted fish bones. Matt laments that "as traditional recipes lose favour, it will be a loss to the community".

## A SAUCY GEM

I am heartened that he even shared one of the best-kept secrets of Peranakan cuisine. Befittingly, this is the last recipe in the book: *Bee Cheo*.

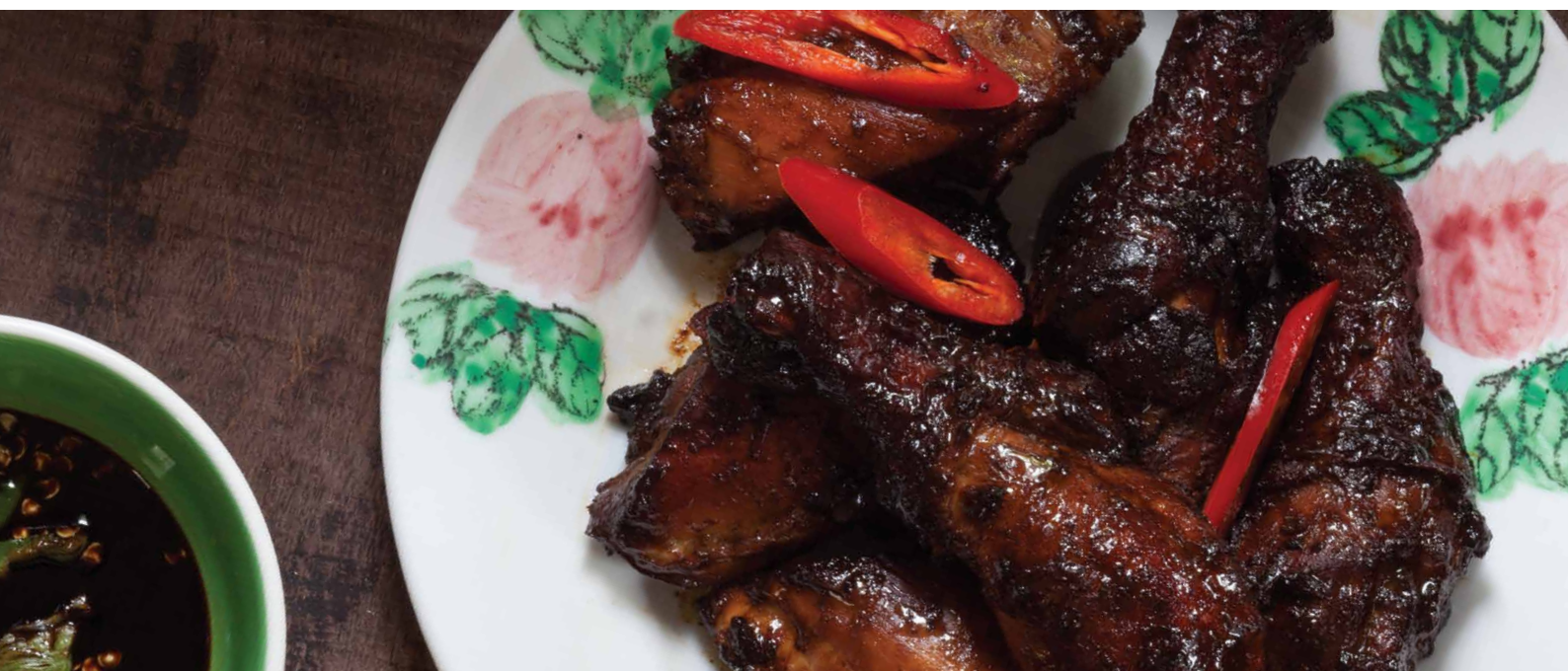
*Pechah lobang!* I do not recall any Peranakan cookbook that shows how to make this unique home-cooked sweet flour sauce. The full-bodied taste of the humble golden brown *Bee Cheo* makes the world of difference to what I consider to be the crown jewel of Peranakan dishes – the egg skin-wrapped nyonya *popiah*.

Among Peranakan families, I believe there are only

few that know or make *Bee Cheo*. Matt's recipe from his grandmother has that extra oomph spiked with brandy. The spirit is added to taste and swirled around the jar as well. *Tentu sedap*. This recipe alone is worth the price of the book!

Below is an extract from *Daily Nonya Dishes* that we share with readers through the kind courtesy of Matt and his publisher, Landmark Books.

For two delicious bonus recipes (*Bangkang Chah & Ikan Sambat Chilli*), visit the Peranakan Association's website at: [www.peranakan.org.sg](http://www.peranakan.org.sg) or scan the QR code here.



## AYAM GORENG TAUYU LADA KERING

*Dry-fried Chicken with Dark Soya Sauce and Pepper*

### Ingredients

- 1 kg (2.2 lb) chicken thighs and legs
- 2 tsp white pepper
- 3 tbsp dark soya sauce
- ½ tsp sugar
- salt
- 1 red chilli
- 150 ml (½ cup) groundnut oil

### Preparation

- 1 Trim the fat from the chicken thighs and legs. Chop each piece into two and rub them with 1 tablespoon of salt. Leave aside for 30 minutes, then rinse and drain.
- 2 Make a marinade by combining the pepper, dark soya sauce and ½ teaspoon each of sugar and ½ teaspoon salt. Marinate the chicken ensuring that each piece is well coated. Cover with cling film and refrigerate for at least two hours or overnight. Rinse the red chilli, pluck off and discard the stem and cut the chilli diagonally into thin slices. Set aside.

### Deep Frying

- 1 Remove the marinated chicken from the chiller and let it return to room temperature. Heat a wok till hot over a high flame. Pour in the oil, heat till hot then lower the flame to medium.
- 2 Drain the chicken well. Fry a few pieces at a time over low to medium heat, turning and cooking each side. Do not overcrowd the wok.
- 3 Transfer the chicken onto a serving plate and garnish with the sliced chilli.

# AMEK GAMBAR: PERANAKANS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

DOMINIC LOW GIVES US A GLIMPSE INTO THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM'S UPCOMING PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM. GIFT OF MR AND MRS LEE KIP LEE

The first commercially viable form of photography was invented in France in 1839, and it quickly made its way to Southeast Asia. Peranakans were among the first subjects captured by photographers arriving from Europe. *Amek Gambar* (taking pictures): Peranakans and Photography presents early photographs of the community, including the oldest example in Singapore's National Collection: a portrait of a Peranakan family taken in 1857 or 1858.

European photographers established the earliest commercial studios in Asia, and almost immediately enterprising Asians learned the new technology and started studios of their own. Many Peranakans were among those intrigued by this fledgling art. They

captured their own likenesses and dress; their cities and their rituals.

The exhibition includes studio and amateur photographs of Peranakans in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar. In celebration of a donation of 2,535 photographs by Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee to the Peranakan Museum, *Amek Gambar* explores the multifaceted role of photography in the lives of Peranakans.

## AMEK GAMBAR

Peranakan Museum

4 May 2018 to 24 January 2019

Daily 10am to 7pm, Fridays 10am to 9pm

Website | [peranakanmuseum.org.sg](http://peranakanmuseum.org.sg)



## Seeing Double

**TITLE**

*Tan Kim Ching and family.*

**PHOTOGRAPHER**

Fedor Jagor (1816–1900).

**REGION AND DATE**

Singapore, 1857–58.

**MATERIAL**

Albumen stereoview print.

*Fedor Jagor, a German ethnologist, naturalist, and photographer, travelled in Southeast Asia in the late 1850s. In 1857 and 1858 he took many photographs of Singapore and its people. While here, he met prominent Peranakan tycoon Tan Kim Ching. In the late 1860s, Jagor's stereoview photographs of Singapore were published in Berlin.*

*Stereoviews were popular in the 19th century. Two photographs of the same image are taken at slightly different angles and placed side-by-side on a card. When looked at through a binocular viewer, they create an illusion of depth. This stereoview is the oldest photograph on paper in Singapore's National Collection.*

*A note on the back indicates the photograph was taken in Singapore*

*and that the subject is a rich Chinese merchant from Malacca "who has Malay blood through the women". Although it does not specifically mention Tan Kim Ching, Jagor singles him out by name in his travelogue published in 1866. He also describes the Peranakan community at length, which altogether strongly suggests that the image is a portrait of Tan and his family.*



## Mobile Camera

### TITLE

*Young Man with a Camera.*

### PHOTOGRAPHER

*Unknown.*

### REGION AND DATE

*Straits Settlements or Indonesia, around 1920s.*

### MATERIAL

*Silver Gelatin Print.*

*The first camera that used a roll of film, the Kodak, was invented by the American George Eastman in 1888. It was revolutionary for being both easily portable, easy to use, and relatively inexpensive. This democratic form of picture-making heralded a new age of the amateur photographer.*

*This snapshot taken with a film camera of a Baba in chic tropical style – in a baju tutop (drill cotton closed coat) and fedora – and holding a camera, epitomises the excitement of modernity among young urbanites, including Peranakans, in Singapore and other modern Asian port cities.*



## Studio Portraits

### TITLE

*Studio Portrait of a Peranakan Couple.*

### PHOTOGRAPHER

*Keechun Studio.*

### REGION AND DATE

*Penang, 1920.*

### MATERIAL

*Silver Gelatin Print.*

*Commercial studio photography took off in Singapore and in other towns of Southeast Asia in the early 1860s with the arrival of European photographers. Soon after, many Chinese studios opened, often Cantonese from China or Hong Kong. These were quickly followed by the arrival of Japanese-owned studios.*

*Peranakans numbered among the first patrons of these commercial studios. They commissioned portraits to memorialise important moments of Peranakan family life. Weddings were particularly*

*popular themes.*

*Peranakan wedding photography evolved its own aesthetics and conventions. Modern technology was borrowed, but not its cultural influences, thus photography constitutes one remarkable aspect of modernity in otherwise traditional celebrations. From the ways the subjects are dressed and posed, to the choice of the studio settings, studio photography in Asia – despite its static structure – displays a diversity of cultural responses in image making.*

# TWO-FACED AND SO GOOD

BABA EMERIC LAU REVIEWS GUNONG SAYANG ASSOCIATION'S 2017 THEATRE PRODUCTION, *KAIN CHIK DUA MUNGKA* (DOUBLE-FACED) | PHOTOS BY SIX5 PRODUCTIONS, COURTESY OF GUNONG SAYANG ASSOCIATION



Although a sequel to *Menyesal* (Regret), staged in 1986, *Kain Chik Dua Mungka* is very much a self-contained story. When the curtain rises, we immediately join the legendary *wayang Peranakan* doyen, GT Lye, in character as Bibik Bisu in a lengthy monologue, recounting the circumstances leading up to the current state of her household. Bibik Bisu lives with her eldest son Chong Guan (Frederick Soh) and his wives Poh Geok (Cynthia Lee) and Betty (Christina Wee). Chong Guan took on Betty as his second wife to ensure an heir as Poh Geok could not conceive even after years of marriage. In this play, Cynthia Lee's Poh Geok has greatly mellowed compared to the fiery, petulant young wife she played 30 years ago.

Soon after marriage, Betty promptly gave birth to a son, Ben, making her Bibik Bisu's favourite daughter-in-law. However, all is not as it seems, and the audience soon learns that Betty is having an affair with Roy (Eugene Tay), the family driver. Gunong Sayang's comedic duo of Kelvin Tan and Lee Yong Ming play *majies* (maids), while Audrey Tan completes the main cast as Bibik Rempah Curry, Poh Geok's mother.

The action largely plays out in a living room set, complete with vintage furniture and doorways leading off to the kitchen and bedrooms. Bibik Bisu wears her daughters-in-law down by ceaselessly playing one against the other. Betty steals Bisu's jewellery and attempts to elope with her lover, Roy, but is in turn cheated by him and is caught by the police.

While completely plausible, the plot dwelt much on simple narrative action. The character of Betty in particular, was not granted a moment to reveal her motivation and inner desires. As a result, Betty's sudden shocking vileness towards Bibik Bisu when caught in the act of stealing, swiftly followed by her touching repentance seems disjointed. This seems a waste as Christina Wee is a truly gifted performer who

made every bit of her stage time as nuanced as possible. This reviewer hopes she can return in a more fleshed out role in the near future.

As Bibik Bisu, GT Lye delivers a textbook portrayal of an elderly matriarch, albeit with a bitter tenacity rather than a more philosophical one, which would have been in keeping with a character that has endured much in a long life. Nonetheless, this role is a worthy one should it prove to be GT Lye's swansong. A member of the audience was heard exclaiming at the end of the show, "GT Lye has a presence that fills the stage, bringing such grand flavour to the whole play. He's truly a Peranakan treasure!"

Above all, it is heartening to see that *wayang Peranakan* has garnered many devotees in the 21st century. The Gunong Sayang Association's efforts in promoting this unique genre of performing arts which manifests local language, humour, customs and neuroses through elements of English drawing room drama, pantomime and musical must be lauded. This production has showcased the extraordinary talent and dedication of GSA's stage veterans, newer performers and production team.

TOP LEFT GT Lye as Bibik Bisu and Betty receiving guests played by Terry Lim, Lilian Chua (centre) and Agnes Ng (far right).

TOP RIGHT GT Lye as Bibik Bisu in deep soliloquy with Betty (Christina Wee) in the background cradling her infant son.

BOTTOM The two *majies* played by Kelvin Tan (left) and Lee Yong Ming (right) serving tea to Bibik Bisu (GT Lye) and her guest Bibik Rempah Curry (Audrey Tan).

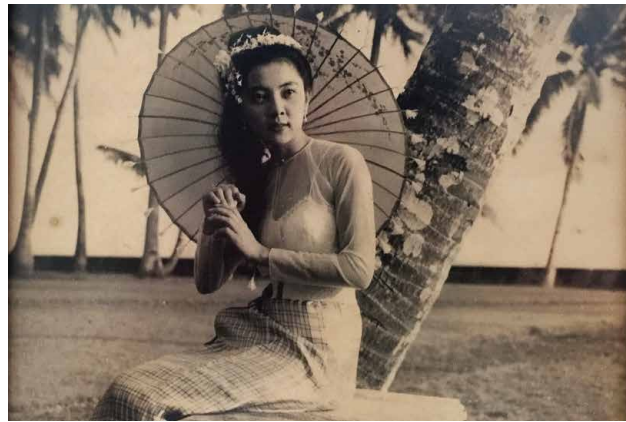


# WHEN A DOYEN VISITS A DIVA

SOON AFTER HIS CELEBRATED RETURN TO WAYANG PERANAKAN IN KAIN *CHIK DUA MUNGKA*, DOYEN GT LYE VISITED NELLIE TOH, A WELL-KNOWN DIVA FROM THE 1950S. HER NEPHEW BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG ARRANGED THIS MEETING. | PHOTO COURTESY OF BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG

GT Lye's first reaction to seeing my family pictures of Auntie Nellie was to confess his admiration of how stunning she looked back in 1950 as a fresh-faced 12 year-old when he had first heard her sing in a Talentime contest where she had won the first prize. A few years later, her father, Peranakan businessman and impresario Toh Seng Whatt, cast her as the prima donna in a *wayang Peranakan* play, *Sapu Tangan Yang Puteh*, staged in October 1955. Press reviews were mostly positive with one reviewer gushing about Auntie Nellie's heart-felt performance that had moved the audience to tears and garnered a standing ovation.

Similarly, GT Lye brought the house down in *Biji Mata Mak* in 1989 when he portrayed a mother wronged by her wayward son. His performance was so convincing



Auntie Nellie in 1955.

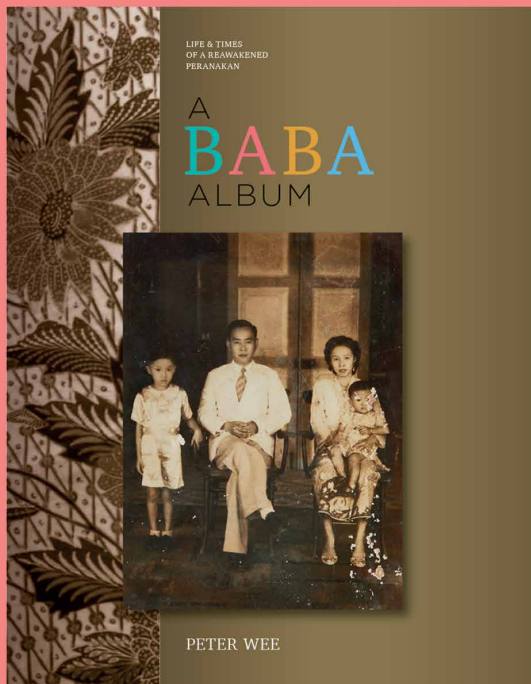
that there was hardly a dry eye in the house.

*Sapu Tangan*, the successful play that catapulted Auntie Nellie to fame was written by her uncle Tan Eng Ann, the blind baba singer who was described as having the "purest lady's voice". As a young boy, I heard him perform on Singapore television and was enthralled. *Sapu Tangan* was directed by veteran performer Yeo Joey Tee and

had a sell-out run. When I last visited Yeo's daughter Siok Choo (aka Jepun) in 2014, she related how *wayang Peranakan* had abruptly ground to a halt after her father's demise in 1958.

Meeting Auntie Nellie after so many years, GT agreed that time had indeed been kind to her. Now in her 80s, beauty and genteel demeanour had not diminished.

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# UNFORGETTABLE LOVE

BABA EMERIC LAU INDULGES IN AN EVENING OF PERANAKAN-INSPIRED NANYIN MUSIC | PHOTOS COURTESY OF SIONG LENG MUSICAL ASSOCIATION

I felt like I had unwittingly stumbled into a parallel universe. Here was everyone decked out splendidly in bold batik shirts and rainbow shades of sarong kebaya, yet the chatter was predominantly Mandarin! I attended the Siong Leng Musical Association's 2017 Multisensory Nanyin Banquet on 15 October 2017, held at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, a plush, newly-built venue with a spectacular view of the Marina Bay area.

Like Peranakan culture, Siong Leng has a rich history. It was founded in Singapore in 1941, and has been preserving and developing the ancient art of Nanyin and Liyuan Opera, which has origins



TOP Musicians performing in Peranakan-inspired attire.

LEFT A heartfelt, jazzy rendition of a Chinese love song.

BOTTOM Traditional Chinese music flavoured by Rasa Sayang.

The musical numbers proved an ambitious odyssey across both time and cultures. The performances began with *Gazing at the Moon*, a traditional Nanyin song, beautifully arranged and vocalised. *Everlasting Love* and *An Unforgettable Tune* sounded much more familiar to my ears. I later read that it had been inspired by a popular Chinese pop song, *Everlasting Love*. The arrangements recalled the stylings of vintage Shanghai jazz and had

shades of the Peranakan favourite, Dendang Irama band, with an accordion and gamelans accompanying some sections.

Still, this was a far cry from the raucous, toe-tapping fetes typical of Peranakan gatherings. The audience preserved a dignified air, listening in appreciative and respectful silence. The final piece, *Rasa Sayang*, was a robust exercise in combining Nanyang flavour, western styling and needless to say, the familiar Malay folk song at its core.

Dinner concluded with durian crisps for dessert, which was a crowd-pleaser. This edition of Siong Leng's Multisensory Banquet proved an entertaining exercise in cultural pluralism, but more importantly, as a fundraiser for the association, its members are ensuring that like the Peranakans, its practices, traditions and values continue to endure. Long may it flourish!

in Quanzhou, Fujian, China. Nanyin was recognised by UNESCO in 2009 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and is one of the oldest living musical art forms in the world.

For this feast, Siong Leng incorporated elements of Peranakan culture, most apparently in the food, which at a glance, appeared to be typical *tok panjang* fare: there was the requisite *ayam buah keluak*, *hee peow* soup and *ikan assam pedas* albeit slightly watered down for palates that might be sensitive to spice. More intriguing were the specially prepared teas to accompany the banquet. I particularly enjoyed one that had no tea leaves to speak of, but was an infusion of red dates, longan and pandan. The brewer explained that red dates symbolised Chinese culture, pandan represented the Peranakans, and the longan reflected our geographical position in the tropics or, as the Chinese would say, *Nanyang*. The piquant blend was lightly carbonated to mimic the bubblyness of champagne, so it tickled the tastebuds.





# CARRY ON POUNDING

NYONYAS KHONG SWEE LIN AND CHERYL ANN CHEW GO BACK TO SCHOOL FOR A SPECIAL COOKING CLASS

PHOTO BY NYONYA ANGELINE KONG

On 9 September 2017, 14 ladies wielding *batu lesong* (pestle-and-mortar) descended on the kitchen of the Singapore Chinese Girls' School (SCGS) to pound their way to perfection.

Led by Florence Puah, former Vice-Principal of SCGS, the ladies spent the morning learning to cook nyonya favourites *udang assam* (prawns in tamarind sauce) nyonya chicken curry and *onde-onde* (sweet potato balls filled with palm sugar) at a cooking class organised by the Peranakan Association.

To make the morning extra-special, Florence took us on a tour of the school's herb and spice garden, pointing out many of the ingredients that we would use in our class that day, such as nutmeg and lemongrass. Florence's love for cooking was evident as she patiently demonstrated the finer points of pounding *rempah* (spice paste), an art she perfected under the watchful eyes of a Peranakan mother-in-law.

**CHERYL ANN:** It was my first time using the *batu lesong* to pound spices. It looked easy, but I quickly learnt that bashing the spices only makes them fly out of the mortar like confetti at a party, and gently pressing them just doesn't get the job done. I ended up



Carry on pounding ladies!

with *rempah* stains all over my wrists and fingers. The *onde-onde* was my favourite dish to make and to eat! It was easier to prepare than I had imagined. Nothing beats the taste of this freshly made dessert rolled in grated coconut, especially when the *gula melaka* (palm sugar) filling explodes in the mouth.

We left the school with containers full of food to take home, and perhaps, with stronger biceps too after all that pounding! We were tired but satisfied with all we had learnt. Here's to many more cooking adventures (and perhaps misadventures) in the future!

# HONOURING SAFTI VETERANS

BABA CHAN ENG THAI REPORTS ON A SPECIAL CELEBRATION TO MARK 50 YEARS OF THE SAF | PHOTOS COURTESY OF NYONYA ANGELINE KONG



The Peranakan Voices with the Prime Minister (centre, with tie) and his wife (to the left of PM Lee).

The first batch of Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) officers who trained at the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) were honoured in a formal dinner in July 2017. Guest of Honour, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife, Madam Ho Ching, presided over the celebration.

The event, which had an air of a formal Mess Dinner, marked 50 years of the

founding of the SAF and the passing out of the SAF's first officer cadets in 1967. SAF veterans and their spouses were treated to a showcase of Peranakan culture presented by the Peranakan Voices. Other entertainment also included a moving performance by the SAFTI cadet band and a solo violinist from the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

It was my privilege to compose two *pantons* for the occasion. This is one I composed in honour of our Prime Minister:

*Siang pergi Tanah Merah,  
Panjing dapat ikan pasir,  
Semua ucapkan satu suara,  
Perdana Menteri terima kasih!*

*Langit di-atas ada Naga,  
Tanda itu Singapura mewah,  
Rakyat doa sehat sempurna,  
Rezeki sambot senyum ketawa!*

*Early rise to Tanah Merah,  
Sandy fish we did catch,  
Our voices here are one,  
Thanking You Prime Minister!*

*A Dragon glides in the sky,  
Symbol of prosperity for Singapore,  
Good Health be yours always,  
Good Tidings! Ever smiling!*

# PENANG CONVENTION

NYONYA LEE SU KIM REPORTS ON THE 30TH BABA NYONYA CONVENTION HELD IN PENANG | PHOTO ESSAY BY BABA COLIN CHEE



Singapore nyonnyas looking manis in their sarong kebayas blossoming with blooms of every shade.

The 30th Baba Nyonya Convention was held in Penang at the end of November 2017. The event was capably hosted by the State Chinese Penang Association (SCPA).

I have been attending every one of these conventions since 2005, when it was first held in Singapore and organised by The Peranakan Association, Singapore (TPAS). Back then there were only four Baba associations – TPAS and Gunong Sayang Association in Singapore, Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka in Malacca, and SCPA in Penang.

Now in addition to the 13 member associations in the Federation of

Peranakan Associations, there is also the newly-registered Trengganu association that currently has Observer status – definitely a keen resurgence and steely resilience of our culture!

We had a fun time, and Penang island, with its vibrant side streets and organic culture, made for a wonderful venue. However, it was also getting quite obvious that logistics will soon become more and more challenging in organising such mega events. The dominant median age factor too is a concern, but it certainly won't be for want of not trying.

Thank you SCPA, once again, for being such generous hosts!

WATCH OUT FOR DETAILS OF THE 2018 CONVENTION IN INDONESIA. TPAS HOPES TO SOON ANNOUNCE A CONVENTION PACKAGE WHICH IS BEING ORGANISED BY PERANAKAN TIONGHOA WARGA INDONESIA (PERTIWI).



LEFT Left to right: Alan Koh of TPAS, Udaya Halim of PERTIWI and Cedric Tan of PPBNKLS.

RIGHT President of SCPA, Dato' Tan Gin Soon (centre), with friends during the street procession.



**LEFT** Allison Chong (left), Secretary of the Association of Chetti Melaka enjoying a bechia ride with Lee Su Kim (right) of PPBNKLS.



**MIDDLE** A Penang nyonya dons her dazzling jewellery with a little help from her friends.



**RIGHT** Nyonyas on a float waving to the crowds during the street procession in the heart of Georgetown.



**LEFT** Darling little nyonyas all dolled up for a performance.



**RIGHT** Convention delegates were treated to a visit to the Khoo Kongsi temple.

A puppeteer continues the traditional art of Teochew Opera puppetry with a special nyonya puppet in baju panjang.



**LEFT** Traditional craftsmen such as this elderly rattan weaver can still be found in historic Georgetown.



**RIGHT** In the age of Instagram, bold murals have become a star tourist attraction in Penang's lively streets.



**BOTTOM RIGHT** A caretaker in a quiet moment and one of the many street altars around Georgetown.



# MEET THE FAMILY OF 3,000

BABA RONNEY TAN KOON SIANG REPORTS ON THE FIFTH TAN TOCK SENG FAMILY REUNION | PHOTO BY DARRELL TAN

Dressed in a long, blue silk robe with an ostrich plume fan in one hand, the bespectacled gentleman offered me his outstretched hand and smiled, "Hello, I'm Tan Tock Seng. Pleased to make your acquaintance." I couldn't believe my eyes! It was as if one of Singapore's most famous pioneers had just stepped out of his own portrait to mingle with his descendants.

In September 2017, a grand reunion of Tan Tock Seng's descendants took place in Singapore. Organised every three years by Roney Tan Kee Lian, this was the fifth reunion of the Tan clan. To date there are 3,136 individuals spread across the globe, who are registered as descendants of Tan Tock Seng, including a 91-year old and 2-year old who attended the reunion.

Spread over a week, activities included numerous lunches, teas, heritage walks and visits, including a visit to the Peranakan Museum and the Tan Tock Seng Heritage Centre at the hospital named after him. The hospital was founded in 1844 with substantial donations from the founder and his son Tan Kim Ching.

## THE KING & I

One of the highlights of the week was a talk about Tan Tock Seng's illustrious descendants. Miyata Toshiyuki of Tokyo University shared the story of Tan Tock Seng's eldest son, Tan Kim Ching, a powerful Singapore merchant who had gained favour with King Chulalongkorn of Siam and was granted ministerial status. He was also appointed the first Siamese Consul General in Singapore and the Straits Settlements. It was he who had introduced Englishwoman Anna Leonowens to the Siamese King to educate his children. The unique relationship between governess and king was made famous in the 1956 Hollywood hit film, *The King and I*.

Historian Kua Bak Lim spoke about Tan Boo Liat, the great-grandson of Tan Tock Seng. He was a merchant, community leader and *bon vivant* who owned horses. Like his grandfather, he had exemplary ties with Siam and was bestowed a ministerial rank by the Siamese king.

He also threw his support behind Sun Yat Sen who rallied the Chinese people to overthrow the decaying Qing dynasty in 1911.

Rounding off the talk was retired academic Pat Lin (daughter of Queen's Scholar, Maggie Tan)

who singled out female luminaries of the Tan clan. She regaled her relatives with witty *cherita dulu kala* (stories of yesteryear) on the evolving nyonya identity.

Lawrence Tan, the London policeman who family members have nicknamed the "English Tan" charted the Tan family tree online. His research is valuable not only to his clan, but to history and genealogy buffs like me.

The week-long reunion culminated in a grand dinner where I met "Tan Tock Seng", who was actually an actor, Henry Heng. Henry was so convincing, especially when he gave an inspiring speech to the descendants who had filled the dinner hall at the National University of Singapore Students' Union. The night's entertainment also included a sing-along session of Peranakan and evergreen songs led by Roney Tan, David Tan and Rosalind Leong, with instrumental support from Ted Ha on bass and Raphael Leong on the keyboard.

I was invited to the dinner by my cousin, Robert Lee Kim San. I am not a direct descendant of Tan Tock Seng, but my great-great-grand aunt from Melaka, Chua Seah Neo, had married Tan Kim Ching, Tan Tock Seng's eldest son. My family has had the honour of

working for two generations of Tan Tock Seng's descendants. My grandfather managed Tan Chay Yan's rubber estate, and my own father worked for his son, Tan Hoon Siang for 38 years.

The Tan clan reunion was very successful, and many went home with good memories and new connections. As many of the old Baba families are inter-related, I had the pleasure of meeting several distant cousins from Melaka and Singapore.



Tan Tock Seng descendants from Singapore, Malaysia and USA cut the cake at the grand reunion dinner. Actor Henry Heng (in the cap) played Tan Tock Seng during the event.



Portrait of Tan Tock Seng. Oil on canvas.

Editor's Note: See a photograph of Tan Kim Ching & family on page 34

# PARTNERS IN GLAMOUR: ANTARA KL DAN JAKARTA

BABA CEDRIC TAN REPORTS ON PPBNKLS HIGH-FASHION FUNDRAISING EVENT | PHOTO COURTESY OF BABA CEDRIC TAN



Models from the fashion show. In the foreground: Nyonya Vivienne Lee (extreme left) with designer Jojo Gouw and Baba Cedric Tan (extreme right) with designer Reza Darmaji.

More than 200 guests enjoyed an evening of glitz and glamour at the PPBNKLS fundraiser, *Antara KL dan Jakarta* held on 10 September 2017 at the Royal Lake Club Banquet Hall, Kuala Lumpur. Organised by the capable Nyonya Vivienne Lee and her sub-committee, this was the second major fundraiser in our association's history.

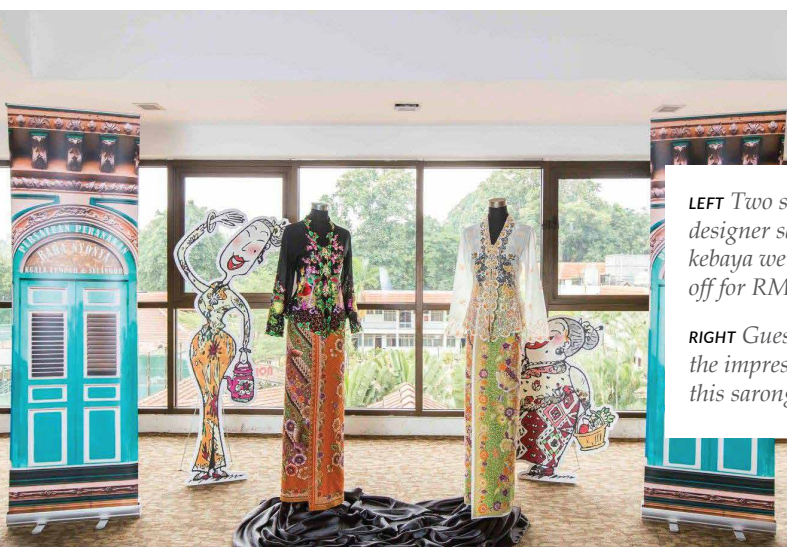
Among the distinguished guests were corporate leaders Dato' M Krishnan and Sharan Valiram, banker Datin Amy Ooi, former ambassador Dato' Nor Farida Ariffin, consort to the President of Commonwealth Games Federation YM Che Ungku Puan Sri Mahirah Abdullah, member of G25 Malaysia, Datuk Faridah Khalid and activists Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir. Television personality and Miss Malaysia Universe 2003, Datin Nyonya Elaine Daly was the elegant host for the evening.

14 models, comprising PPBNKLS members and friends, sashayed down the red carpet showcasing both

vintage and contemporary sarong kebaya by young Indonesian kebaya fashion designers Jojo Gouw and Reza Darmaji. Creative menswear was also on show - a bold alternative to batik shirts!

Later in the evening, two sets of exquisite sarong kebaya produced by the designers were auctioned off for RM14,000 in total. Jojo designed a black kebaya with flower basket *sulam* (embroidery), while Reza produced a white kebaya with intricate *keranchang* (cutwork). The winning bids came from Datin Hean Ong who took home the black kebaya, while Nyonya Nancy Khong won the bid for the white one.

The Best Dressed Award went to Nyonya Irene Ong from Singapore, who wore a kebaya richly embroidered with flying phoenixes. Runner-up, Nyonya Doreen Wong's kebaya featured rabbits in a pumpkin patch. The evening ended with guests dancing late into the night with live music by the Sweet Memories band from Melaka.



LEFT Two sets of designer sarong kebaya were auctioned off for RM14,000.

RIGHT Guests admiring the impressive train of this sarong.





A Malam Jolly must-have: joget!

# LET'S TWIST AGAIN!

NYONYA JOSEPHINE CHIA GETS IN ON THE ACTION AT MALAM JOLLY 2017 | PHOTOS BY BABA EDMOND WONG & NYONYA ANGELINE KONG

The Peranakan Association's Malam Jolly was held at Copthorne King's Hotel on 29 Sept 2017. Many of the 220 guests were silver seniors, but that didn't deter them from making merry in joyful abundance. Their *joie de vivre* was so infectious that the younger Peranakans too joined in the dancing. It was particularly heart-warming to see so many youngsters present as they are the ones who will be carrying our culture into the future.

The Association's band, the Merrilads, played lively music, with a focus on 1960s pop hits. They got many feet tapping, even those too shy to take to the dance floor. Then Elvis Presley impersonator, Jimmy Preslee, dressed in a black jump-suit, belted out some of The King's greatest hits while twisting and gyrating on stage. Many were surprised when he revealed that he was 70 years old!

The Peranakan Voices, beautifully dressed in sarong kebaya and flowers in their hair, entertained with favourite Peranakan tunes. Host for the night, Baba Chan Eng Thai, delighted the crowd with his playful sense of humour and many jokes.

Everyone enjoyed a sumptuous Peranakan buffet and picked up pretty items at the mini boutique fair. It was a truly memorable, fun-filled evening!



TOP Smiles all around for these prize winners.

MIDDLE Baba Alvin Yapp clowning around with his nephew.

BOTTOM Wayang Peranakan veteran, Nyonya Jessie Chiang (in blue kebaya) enjoying the evening with siblings Susan, Dolly & Richard Tan.



# REMEMBERING AUNTIE SALLY

SHE WAS THE LIFE OF THE PARTY. BABA ALAN KOH SHARES HIS MEMORIES | PHOTO COURTESY OF BABA BENJAMIN SECK

I met Nyonya Sally Chan (Auntie Sally) some 30 years ago, when we both served as Committee Members of the Peranakan Association Singapore during Dr. George Tay's time as President.

Auntie Sally was always the 'life and beauty' of social occasions. She loved attending Peranakan events and especially the charity balls with her lovely bevvy of ladies. Her sincere and bubbly personality made her much loved by those around her. To me, she had brilliant public relations skills and was a natural bridge builder between people. In her professional life, she had spent two decades with Singapore Airlines and was the Head of Priority Passengers. Later in her career she was a dealer with Lim & Tan Securities. Ever the people person, Auntie Sally had a knack for maintaining good relations with those she came in contact with.



Auntie Sally (far right) with friends at a Peranakan event.

Even after her time as a Committee Member, she would often speak with me about the Association and generously offer her help.

In September 2017, she called me regarding the succession programme that we were discussing. Auntie Sally had been helping to find appropriate persons who would be able and willing to serve in the Association. The last time I met her was at our Malam Jolly soiree at the end of September. She introduced me to her friends as usual and we spent some time together.

It came as a shock to hear of her sudden passing. Auntie Sally always thought and spoke well of the Association and would not hesitate to call me if she felt there was anything amiss.

The Peranakan Association Singapore will certainly remember and miss Auntie Sally. ❶

# FAREWELL UNCLE JOLLY

BABA RICHARD TAN REMEMBERS PERANAKAN CHEF EXTRAORDINAIRE, BABA JOLLY WEE | PHOTO COURTESY OF NYONYA CHRISTINE ONG

Baba Jolly Wee's name has been synonymous with Peranakan food since the 1960s. He was a truly prolific Peranakan chef who popularised heritage cuisine. For many years, he was associated with Chili Padi Restaurant at Joo Chiat Place where he is fondly remembered as the chef who always mingled with diners, getting feedback or generously sharing his secret recipes.

Baba Jolly grew up in Joo Chiat. Little did he know that his childhood games of *masak masak* (make believe cooking) would one day make him a famous chef. As a young lad of 10, he built a makeshift brick stove in alley behind his family's terrace house. He foraged dry coconut leaves for kindling and cooked rice in an old cigarette tin. His 'special dish' quickly became popular with his neighbourhood playmates! Baba Jolly's mother encouraged him to pursue his growing interest with her heirloom recipes.

Baba Jolly began his career as a steward on board a passenger ship. Later, he ran a canteen on an oil-rig. In the 1970s and early 1980s, he supplied Western and local food to

factory cafeterias in Singapore. He promoted Peranakan cuisine to far flung places such as San Francisco, Abu Dhabi and Bali.

I knew Uncle Jolly in the later part of his life. We sang and danced at numerous food festivals and birthdays celebrations. In my last meeting with him, he said, "Always stay true to your passion. Never give up. We must continue to promote our Peranakan culture in the best possible way and inspire the younger generation." Rest in peace Uncle Jolly! ❷



Uncle Jolly (in the hat) with his daughter Sylvia and their friends at Casa Del Rio in Melaka where he was a chef.

# The Federation of Peranakan Associations

## SINGAPORE

The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS)  
Address: Raffles City PO Box 1640, Singapore 911755  
Contact: Mr Peter Wee (President)  
Email: president@peranakan.org.sg  
Phone: +65 6345 8544  
Website: peranakan.org.sg

Gunong Sayang Association (GSA)  
Address: 80 Joo Chiat Place, Singapore 427797  
Contact: Mr Alvin Teo (President)  
Email: info@gsa.org.sg  
Facebook: Gunong Sayang Association

Association of Chetti Melaka (Peranakan Indians) Singapore  
Address: 5001 Beach Road #08-09 Golden Mile Complex, Singapore 199588  
Contact: Mr Pono Kalastree (President)  
Email: p.kalastree@mainguard-intl.com.sg  
Phone: +65 6297 1229 / +65 9678 1767  
Facebook: Chetti Melaka of Singapore.Official FB

## MALAYSIA

### MELAKA

Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM)  
Address: 149 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (Heeren Street), 75200 Melaka, Malaysia  
Contact: Ms Chin Siok Hoon, PJK (Hon. Secretary)  
Phone: +60 12 6218 909 / +60 6 2837 215

Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Malaysia (PERANAKAN)  
Address: 243 Jalan Tengker, 75200 Melaka, Malaysia  
Contact: Mr Lee Yuen Thien (Hon. Secretary)  
Email: yuenthien@gmail.com  
Phone: +60 196081558  
Facebook: Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Malaysia(PERANAKAN)

### PENANG

State Chinese (Penang) Association / Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang  
Address: 13 Jalan Perak Road, 10150 Penang, Malaysia  
Phone: +60 604 2269 560  
Email: ginsoon@hotmail.com

### KUALA LUMPUR & SELANGOR

Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor (PPBNKLS)  
Address: Unit B-8-3A, Block B, Menara KIP, No.1, Jalan Seri Utara, off Jalan Ipoh, 68100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Contact: Mr Wong Mun Yee (Hon. Secretary)  
Email: peranakan\_kl@yahoo.com.my  
Phone: +60 12 3151 451

Website: www.peranakan-kl.org  
To contact President, Baba Cedric Tan, please email cedric\_cctan@yahoo.com

## THAILAND

### PHUKET

Thai Peranakan Association  
Address: 124 Yaowarat Road, Taladyai, Muang, Phuket 83000, Thailand  
Contact: Dr Kosol Tanguthai / kt13784005@gmail.com / +66 818927014  
Ms Pranee Sakulpipatana / pranee81@yahoo.com / +66 816933576  
Ms Piyarat Kulvanich / kpiyarat2000@gmail.com / +66 817190967  
Ms Orasiri / orasiri@hotmail.com / +66 816911935  
Website: phuketbaba.com

## INDONESIA

Association of Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia (Aspertina)  
Address: Hero Building II Suite 902, Jl. Jend Gatot Subroto 177A, Kav. 64 Jakarta 12870, Indonesia.  
Contact: Mr Andrew Susanto (President) / Mr Hendi Handadi (International Liason Officer)  
Email: info@aspertina.org  
Phone: +6221 8317751  
Website: aspertina.org

Peranakan Tionghoa Warga Indonesia (Pertiwi)  
Address: Yayasan PERTIWI c/o KING'S EEC, Jalan Baharudin No.8, Tangerang 15111, Banten, Indonesia  
Contact: Mr Udaya Halim (President)  
Email: info@pertiwi.org / info@bentengheritage.com  
Phone: +6221 5523880 / +6221 5526748

## AUSTRALIA

### MELBOURNE

Peranakan Association Australia Inc. (PAA Melbourne)  
Address: PO Box 1278 Hawksburn, Victoria, Australia 3142  
Contact: Mr Joseph Then (Vice-President)  
Email: j.then@bigpond.com / gekkiml@yahoo.co.uk  
Website: http://peranakan.org.au/  
Facebook: Melbourne Peranakans/Peranakan Association Australia Inc

### SYDNEY

Peranakan Association Australia Inc. (PAA NSW)  
Address: PO Box 3810 Marsfield, NSW, 2122 Australia  
Contact: Ms Evelyn Tan (President)  
Email: enquiries@peranakanaustralia.org  
Website: peranakanaustralia.org

## PERTH

The Peranakan Community of Western Australia Inc.  
Address: PO Box 385, Bullcreek, Western Australia 6149, Australia  
Contact: Mr Kenneth Lim (President)  
Email: bcfernand@outlook.com (Christine Fernandez, Secretary)  
perthperanakans@gmail.com  
Facebook: The Peranakan Community of Western Australia, INC

## Gentle Reminder to Overseas Members

We would like to gently remind all overseas members to email to our Asst Hon Secretary, Koh Hwei Ling at secretariat@peranakan.org.sg, your local (Singapore) postal address for us to mail your copy of the magazine. Posting overseas is too huge a cost for your Association to bear as we do not collect subscriptions as income. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## CALLING ALL CREATIVES

We are looking for writers, photographers and illustrators with a passion for Peranakan culture. If you would like to contribute to The Peranakan Magazine, please write to Dawn Marie Lee at editor@peranakan.org.sg

## Welcome

A warm welcome to our new members!

Ang Lay Chan, Christine Akkermans Johanna Chan Cheng Keow Chan Kim Soon, Charles Chia Lionel Choong Pei Lin Kang Sui Heng, Adrian Lie Lian Sin, Patricia Lim Jia Xing, Dominic Ng Wai Hong Ong Lee Wha	Ong Lian Wha Ong Soon Hwa Poh Eng Cheng, Sylvia Schricke Bruno Pierre Seah Bee Lee, Esther Seet Wei Chung, Luther Tan Jan Neo, Claire Tan Koon Kee, Kenny Teo Ai Chin, Adeline Yeoh Kim Suan, Jeannie
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## Obituary

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

Jolly Wee  
Sally Chan



# CLASH OF THE SANGGULS

BABA BRYAN TAN DISCOVERS THE POWER OF AN IRON-FISTED PERANAKAN MATRIARCH | ILLUSTRATION BY EILEEN CHAN

The eyes on the walls seemed almost real to Molly. Ten generations of Tay family elders seemed to glare balefully, disapprovingly at her from the oil paintings in which they hung. Her mind was playing tricks on her. She wiped off a bead of sweat straying down her temple, folding both hands in prayer over her woven handkerchief. She thought, "*Jangan marah gua ya, tolong* (Don't be angry with me please), I'm only trying to continue the family's line, just not in the way that you like." Molly closed her eyes for a brief moment, inhaling the incense that wafted from the joss sticks and silently implored her ancestors to look favourably on her daughter and new grandson.

The sound of someone's throat clearing made her spin around abruptly. It was Ah Wong, the sour-faced housekeeper that oversaw *Kohpoh Chik's* (grand aunty's) household...the right hand of Satan. The deep lines around the emaciated servant's face tightened as if she were sucking on a lemon. A bony finger beckoned Molly to follow her. The gaunt housekeeper made her skin crawl. With hollow cheeks and perpetually downturned thin lips, Ah Wong, clad in deep sable satin, resembled the Grim Reaper leading souls down a deep abyss.

Molly straightened her back and trailed in the housekeeper's wake. Silent and brooding, Ah Wong glided ahead, not once looking back to see if Molly was following. They stopped in an antechamber. "Madam will see you now," intoned Ah Wong, without looking at Molly. The adjoining hall was abuzz with murmuring, which stopped abruptly when Molly walked in. *Kohpoh Chik* Soh Bee Neo had one of the largest houses on Heeren Street. Its interior was designed to intimidate and awe guests. An enormous Ceylon ebony wood piece, intricately carved and trimmed in gold, stretched across the opposite walls and interlocked in the middle of the room. Behind it towered a traditional latticed panel that segregated the first half of the house from the rest. A huge pastel pink porcelain plate dominated the room, a phoenix in mid-flight emblazoned in its centre.

Bee Neo's family gathered around her. Jimmy the eldest, perhaps the kindest, inclined his head towards Molly and smiled apologetically. Florence chattered nervously, lifting her handkerchief to her mouth and refused to greet Molly, staring defiantly at her. Sophie was perched on a stool by her mother's feet, chewing vigorously on something, completely oblivious to the mounting tension in the room. Grand Uncle Thiam Hin sat inconspicuously in a chair by the side of the room, half in shadow;



the only indication of his presence was smoke rising from the tobacco pipe in his mouth.

Soh Bee Neo sat on a royal yellow marble dais, its inlaid mother-of-pearl gleaming in the light. Her silver grey hair was sleeked into a towering bun affixed by a solid gold dragon hairpin with a blood red ruby in its mouth. Molly looked at her and gave a start. There was someone standing by her shoulder that only ever appeared on important and dire occasions. In an impeccably tailored three-piece suit was Uncle Roland, the family's unctuous lawyer. "The gloves have come off", thought Molly. Bee Neo's piercing voice cut through her thoughts, "*Gua panggil lu datang, kenapa tau tak?* (Do you know why I called you here)?"

Molly nodded. "*Ya Kohpoh Chik, gua tau* (Yes grand aunty, I know). But before you say what you need to say, *ada seorang yang gua mau lu jumpa* (there is someone I want you to meet)."

Before Bee Neo could retort, a tall bespectacled man strode into the room, pausing at Molly's side. Bee Neo's eyes widened in shock, and she rose shakily from her seat.

"*Ah Ko* (older brother) Peter! *Gua ingat lu* (I thought you were) overseas! When did you come home?"

The tall, elegant man adjusted his tortoiseshell glasses with a forefinger.

"I came at Molly's behest, when I heard that you were going to insist that you name her grandson. I called in some favours in the UK and you'll want to know what I found out about Molly's son-in-law, Daniel."

*\*In the next issue, find out what earth-shattering discovery was made about Molly's son-in-law Daniel!*

# 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 Melaka, Penang and Singapore, and traces its links as far as Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

**Address:** 39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941

**Website:** [www.peranakanmuseum.sg](http://www.peranakanmuseum.sg)

**Email:** [nhb\\_pm\\_vs@nhb.gov.sg](mailto:nhb_pm_vs@nhb.gov.sg)

**Tel:** 6332 7591

### Amek Gambar: Peranakans and Photography Exhibition

4 May 2018 to 24 January 2019

Peranakan Museum

Daily: 10am to 7pm, Fridays 10am to 9pm



This exhibition explores the multifaceted role of photography in the lives of Peranakans.

It presents early photographs of Peranakans, including the oldest example in Singapore's National

Collection: a portrait of a Peranakan family taken in the mid-1800s. Many Peranakans were intrigued by the fledgling art of photography and captured their own likenesses and dress; their cities and their rituals. The exhibition includes studio and amateur photographs of Peranakans in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar.

### 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 siren sets, as well as the magnificent carved wood hearse of Tan Jiak Kim, which is considered one of the treasures of the National Museum.

**Address:** 93 Stamford Road

**Website:** [www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg)

**Tel:** 6332 3659

**Opening Hours:** 10am to 6pm Daily (Singapore History Gallery), Admission: \$10 (Adults), \$5 (Senior Citizens above 60), \$5 (Students & NSmen), 10am to 9pm Daily (Singapore Living Galleries), Free Admissions to the Singapore Living Galleries



### 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.



**Address:** 157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883

**Tel:** 6227 5731

**Website:**

[www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba/index.html](http://www.nus.edu.sg/museum/baba/index.html)

Visits are by

guided tours.

Please call the

house for details.

### Asian Civilisation 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, siren boxes and some paraphernalia, some encrusted with diamonds, and fine batik textiles from the north coast of Java, all made from the Peranakan market.

**Address:** 1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555

**Tel:** 6332 2982

**Website:** [www.acm.org.sg](http://www.acm.org.sg)

**Opening Hours:** 9am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 1pm - 7pm (Mondays)

**Admission:** \$8 (Adults), \$4 (Senior Citizens & Students)

### Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

The old Sun Yat Sen Villa reopened in October 2011 after extensive renovations with a new name. Fitting tribute is

given to the former

owners of the house

especially Teo Eng Hock, a son of Teo Lee, one of the pioneer Teochew merchants in Singapore, together with his nephew Lim Nee Soon, were among the loyal supporters of Sun Yat Sen's bid to overthrow the Qing government. The exhibition shows how Singapore and the Chinese community here played an important part in this pivotal moment of world history. Intimate photos of the 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.

**Address:** 12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874

**Website:** [www.wanqingyuan.org.sg](http://www.wanqingyuan.org.sg)

**Tel:** 6256 7377

**Opening Hours:** 10am to 5pm Daily



## LANDMARKS

### Emerald Hill Road

Another interesting residential district showcasing the best of eclectic Peranakan residential architecture, just off Orchard Road.

### 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.

**Website:**

[www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/design\\_studio/dd\\_s2b/blair/study/blair.html](http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/SOA/design_studio/dd_s2b/blair/study/blair.html)

### Katong and Joo Chiat

Once the nerve centre of Peranakan Life in Singapore. In its heyday it was the side 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), **Rumah Kim Choo** (109 East Coast Road) and **Rumah Bebe** (113 East Coast Road) as well as the great

variety of Peranakan restaurants in the neighbourhood.

**Website:** [www.myjoochiat.com](http://www.myjoochiat.com)

[www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what\\_to\\_see/suburban\\_living/katong.html](http://www.visitsingapore.com/publish/stbportal/en/home/what_to_see/suburban_living/katong.html)

### Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street

One of the first Peranakan enclaves, now occupied by restaurants and offices. Many Peranakans from Melaka moved to this area as soon as the East India Company began to lease out land for sale. Visit the **Aster by Kyra Peranakan Tile Gallery** at 168 Telok Ayer Street for the widest selection of both antique and new Peranakan tiles.

### 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.

**Address:** 158 Telok Ayer Street

Singapore 068613

**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 Bee 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.

**Address:** 15 Magazine Road Singapore 059568





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