

AUSTRALIAN MALAYSIAN
SINGAPOREAN ASSOCIATION

Passages

March 2010 Edition

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Editor's Note



Thanks to our President Dr. Bin Yap, I was appointed as the new editor of this newsletter *Passages*. I'm honoured and delighted to work with such a great team under Bin's leadership.

First of all, let me welcome you to the *Year of the Tiger*. Being born in the year of the Tiger, my horoscope tells me that exciting developments are happening to

me both personally and professionally. Financially, everything improves this year for those born under this sign and money-making thoughts and ideas should be fully explored and investigated. So fellow Tigers, this is our year! Perhaps being appointed as the editor marks the beginning of very exciting things happening to me this year.

As my first tiger roar, I have taken the liberty of making some changes to this issue. The usual *Feature Articles* section has been divided into two parts:

- *Malaysiana* – articles on Malaysia.
- *Peranakan Fest* – for it is truly Peranakan cultural fest with four excellent articles.

A new section on *Business* is added. I plan introduce more changes in the next issue and I look forward to members for their contributions. Some of the new topics to be included in the next issue are:

- *Malaysian News Update* : covering social, economic and political developments
- *Singapore News Update* : covering social, economic and political developments
- *Social Exchange* : members sharing their favorite restaurants, books, places of interest, etc so that others can benefit from their experience
- *Business Connections*: highlight our members' request for business-related information so that others could respond accordingly

I welcome your feedback to my ideas. Please feel free to suggest new ideas too. Finally, I would to thank our regular contributors, without which this March 2010 would not be possible.

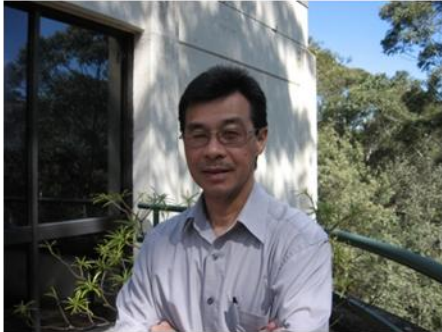
Dr. Yew Kam Keong

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President's Note



Happy New Year 2010 to everyone. May I also wish all our Chinese Malaysians and Australians of Chinese descent a very Happy and Prosperous Chinese New Year of the Tiger.

This year a new Executive Committee will be elected at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting scheduled on 10th April. This committee will take on the reins of our Association and progress its activities and profile into 2011 and beyond.

Perhaps this is also an opportune time for me to throw more light on some of the pertinent roles of the committee. Essentially the committee has a duty of care to ensure that it complies with acceptable ethical standards of behaviour. These qualities uphold the Association's profile and image in the Australian community at large. More than that the committee is responsible to the President who has the ultimate responsibility in ensuring that the committee works as a cohesive unit and that the team is not engaged in any potential conflict of interest activities. It is noteworthy that such unethical activities will inadvertently undermine the Association's highly regarded image within the Australian, Malaysian and Singaporean governments and their agencies.

In the past two years the committee has generated some very tangible and measurable outcomes for the Association. These have resulted in an increasing membership base, the continuing support by our event sponsors and the broadening of the Association's profile in Australia. In particular, our activities have ranged from intellectual culture talks, business networking seminars, cooking demonstrations and the community forum to the ever popular annual dinner. These activities have similarly created a wide range of activities and opportunities for involvement by our members.

Therefore, it gives me great pleasure in acknowledging the following people for their significant hands-on contributions to progress the Australian Malaysian Singaporean Association. They are Belinda Theng, Charlotte Ng, Evelyn Tian, Elvan Tong, Daniel Kwan, Juliana Jamal, Kam Keong Yew, Kwee Phaik Lim, Peng Lau Chan, Peter Lu, Radiah Maricar, Su Mei Lim, Teresa Lee and Wallace Wang.

I invite all of you to join us celebrate our community and elect a new Executive Committee at the upcoming Annual General Meeting on 10 April.

Dr Bin Yap
President

Letters

Congratulations to the AMSA Team

Mr President of AMSA,

Truly I rarely find an Association where the Hon. President who could go to the point short and tidy. You are ahead of the man who swayed left to right like I have too many beers sometimes. He has some good points but destroyed by too much.

And your team is so dedicated it reminds me of the time when when I was Secretary of the club in Johor; a British plantation group, all so keen and eager to serve for no pay.

Well done, orang orang dari Malaysia. Orang baik including Pak Sam.
Pak Sam pakai baju cina, songkok orang putih and badan orang melayu. Truly multicultural Australian.

Hope you understand my Melayu. Please thank your team abundantly.

Harry Lau
Harry's Singapore Chilli Crab Restaurant

Congratulations to AMSA

Dr. Bin Yap
President
AMSA

Dear Dr Yap,

I would like to thank you and the committee members of AMSA for honouring me to your annual dinner. My wife and I had an enjoyable time. Congratulations to you and AMSA for a well received and organised event.

Best wishes.

Mr. Yew Chee ONG
Malaysian Trade Commissioner
MATRADE Sydney
email: sydney@matrade.gov.my
www.matrade.gov.my

AMSA Activities

Annual Dinner 17 October 2009 : Celebrating Community

Marigold Restaurant, Sydney.



This event successfully integrated three separate celebrations. Apart from the traditional annual networking among our members, associates, guests and corporate sponsors, we also celebrated Deepavali (the Hindu Festival of Lights) and a milestone birthday of our Vice President, Mr. Elvan Tong. Our MC, Ms. Evelyn Tian (photo LHS), wasted no time in kick-starting the celebrations with her welcome speech and introduction. Our band, the Night Shift, subsequently drummed up the National Anthem.

This year, we invited the Indigenous Community Leader, Mr. Mark Spinks (photo below), to grace the occasion by officially acknowledging the traditional owners of the land



AMSA President, Dr Bin Yap (photo LHS), reminded the audience that all of us proudly form a small but significant part of the community and we need to be mindful of the common link that binds all communities. He stressed the need to focus on our common qualities, self-respect and a sense of humour.

Meanwhile, our keynote speaker, Prof. Andrew Jakubowicz (photo next page) enlightened the audience on the positive benefits of multiculturalism and the values derived from social inclusion in a multicultural society in Australia.

AMSA Activities



After the speeches the audience were treated to a 10 course Asian cuisine and entertained by the Night Shift throughout the evening. The band (co-sponsored by Phillip Au & Associates) drummed out a series of enchanting Latin-American dance music combined with some popular hits from previous years.

Thanks to the generosity of our corporate sponsors and restaurant co-sponsors (all listed on AMSA web site) who donated raffle prizes, many people in the audience received dinner vouchers, seafood packs, electrical equipment, crystal ware, paintings, MAS airline ticket and other items. The total value of the prizes was worth more than \$6500.



Photo (LHS) shows a lucky winner of the airline ticket donated by Malaysia Airlines (major event sponsor) and presented by MAS Marketing Manager, Mrs. Julia Loong.



Whilst the event was in full swing, several ladies from the AMSA Executive Committee were busy manning the reception to cater for late comers. Photo above shows (L to R) Radiah Rahman, Teresa Lee, Charlotte Ng and Eleanor Khaw.

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AMSA Activities



It was also a very special evening for Elvan Tong (photo LHS) and his wife. Elvan celebrated a milestone birthday on this special occasion. Another AMSA MC, Juliana Jamal, got on the stage to announce the birthday celebration and invited both Elvan and his wife to dance the waltz.

As in all AMSA annual dinner events, the audience never missed the opportunity to let their hair down and savour the moment on the dance floor in an atmosphere of good music. Photo (RHS) shows the crowd dancing to the catchy melody and beat drummed out by the band.



Members of the organizing committee:

Belinda Theng, Bin Yap, Charlotte Ng, Daniel Kwan, Elvan Tong, Evelyn Tian, Eleanor Khaw, Juliana Jamal, Kam Keong Yew, Radiah Rahman, Teresa Lee, Teik-Hock Lim, Wallace Wang.

Associate volunteers:

Angeline Teh, Dorothy Soh, Kwee Phaik Lim, John Voo, Peter Lu (photographer), Yu-Mei Lim.

AMSA Activities

AMSA Community Forum: Caring for you & others 7 November 2009— Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts

Report by Juliana Jamal



The main objective of the forum was to focus on the importance of physical and mental health including the impact it has on our functions in our work, relationships and other aspects of our lives. The scope of the forum is to enhance awareness in health issues both physical and mental particularly for volunteers. The concept of such a Forum began when it came into question that many people who volunteer in non-profit organizations at times suffer burn-out and leave those community organizations. The Forum focused on the wellbeing of volunteers in community organizations as well as the wider community as a whole.



The forum aims to answer the questions such as: What are the current health concerns in the community?

The main speakers were Prof. Abdul Malik and Ms Nagako Eder. Prof Malik spoke on a range of issues covering mental health in the community whilst Ms Eder concentrated on aspects of spiritual health including meditation techniques. Photo above shows (L to R) Prof. Malik, Juliana Jamal (convenor) and Ms. Nagako Eder.

Prof Malik stressed that there was a stigma attached to mental health. The example he shared with the attendees was how if a person comes back from the hospital suffering a broken arm, there is a celebration to celebrate his recovery, however when a mentally ill patient returns from hospital the opposite occurs. Mental illness is the hidden taboo illness which once upon time AIDS was to us in 1980s. The Forum wanted to further heighten the awareness of mental illness so this illness will no longer be a topic of taboo.

Photo shows (L to R) Ms. Nagako Eder, Kam Keong Yew, TH Lim, Elvan Tong, Juliana Jamal.

AMSA recognizes that its members are professional individuals managing work-life balance who also volunteer to give time to the community. AMSA focused on meditation through the speaker Nagako Eder who presented the values of practical spirituality which can be manifested through holistic counselling. She stressed that daily meditation has certain benefits for the body and mind.

Nagako shared her experience being a Japanese migrant living with her German husband in Germany. She said meditation helps many people adapt to change. Through meditating, one can achieve a grounded spirituality which combines the balance of body, mind and spirit. Through reflecting and meditating the “I” in us will be transformed to the “we” which is the foundation of a community organization. This linked greatly with AMSA members whose journey all started as migrants to Australia. Some of the AMSA members are still coping with change as their life progresses particularly in dealing with issues such as the assimilation of first generation migrants and their children who are born here. Other issues include retirement, an ageing migrant population which has to fit in to the new environment where the younger generation has different concepts of retirement and aged care.



The feedback survey from the Forum’s attendees highlighted that the areas of concern in terms of care are loneliness, mental health, aged care and obesity. Many suggest that proper funding to healthcare facilities need further attention to ensure that appropriate care and service are offered to the community.

On balance, Juliana Jamal would like to grow the Forum’s attendees and speaker-circle this year to include a more aggressive platform of change within health and well-being. A report collating the information compiled from the forum attendees will be forwarded to the Department of Health, NSW Government through the President of AMSA.

AMSA Activities

AMSA High Tea 12 December at Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts

Reported by Teresa Lee



It was a very pleasant end for the last event of AMSA for 2009. The turnout was incredible and as usual, we overindulged.

A big thank you to Kwee Phaik (photo LHS) and several members who provided a beautiful array of desserts for our enjoyment.

We enjoyed pulut tai tai, kueh benggang, kueh talam, ang koo, mini sultana, cupcakes, agar-agar and a refreshing jelly drink. A display of the variety of ethnic Malaysian kuehs is presented in the photo below. Tea & coffee were also provided.



Rojak-making was demonstrated and everyone who tasted it remarked on the delicious sauce. An explanation of the different styles of rojak was very insightful and welcomed by the crowd of 40 members, guests and associates. We did not realize that rojak had so many varied styles and subtle differences of ethnic Chinese, Indian, Nyonya, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur influences.

Several guests took up AMSA membership and made new friends and contacts. All hope to continue networking with the other members at our future series of seminars and social get-together in 2010. We look forward to 2010 and a ferocious Chinese New Year of the Tiger.



The photos here show the attendees enjoying the spread of kuehs and delicacies.

Malaysiana

Raja Musang Causes Ripples in Sydney

*Contributed by Ong Yew Chee
Malaysian Trade Commission, Sydney.*

Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian customers in Australia waited with eager anticipation as the latest shipment of *Raja Musang* - the King of Durian, hit some Asian stores in Sydney late last week.

Leading importer of this product to Australia, Mr. Weng Sam, Director of Rockman Pty Ltd, one of Australia's largest Asian importers and wholesalers, is expecting great things from this deliciously succulent product. He has already started distributing it to his Asian grocery suppliers around Australia. This is his second container load of durians valued at around AUD\$60,000-70,000. His first shipment in the early part of the year consisted of D24 and Raja Musang but the more expensive Raja Musang proved to be well received and sold out within a couple of weeks.

While the *D24* durian has not been a best seller in Sydney, with leftovers still remaining after Rockman's first container load; *Raja Musang*, on the other hand has been an instant hit.

"I initially brought in more *D24* than *Raja Musang*, because it was cheaper and there was a demand for it in the market. But once buyers tasted *Raja Musang*, they said forget about it! No more *D24!*...There is no other durians that can beat the taste of *Raja Musang!*" said Mr. Weng Sam. "However the only problem of course is the price. It fluctuates."

However, that does not seem to concern Australian customers. One excited lady said her husband did not care how costly the durian was. He was just anxious to buy it as soon as it was available in stores and would even pay AUD\$100 for one durian. Another lady Elizabeth Chan remarked when she heard about the Malaysian durians in Sydney, "Malaysian durians? You light up my life". Johnny Wan, a Malaysian sent his sister to get two cartoons and he remarked "I don't care how much it cost and don't want to miss it this time" Other customers have been contacting MATRADE Sydney urgently to find out which stores stocked the fleshy *Raja Musang*.

According to Mr. Ong Yew Chee, the Malaysian Trade Commissioner in Australia, it was one fine afternoon where a phone call from Weng Sam started the Raja Musang entry into Sydney. Rockman Pty Ltd, was looking for a supplier and the Trade commissioner had arranged his meeting with Hernan Corporation in Kuala Lumpur. The next day Sam Weng immediately was on Malaysia Airlines to Kuala Lumpur. Since then, Rockman has been extremely grateful to MATRADE Sydney for the connection and has been working closely with MATRADE to get more Malaysian products into Australia. This among others, include Dewina's products, Overseas, London Biscuits and Yik Khang Frozen Foodstuffs.

Raja Musang durian is currently being sold in some Asian Supermarkets around Sydney like V Plus Supermarkets in Campsie and Liverpool and some Asian stores in Cabramatta. where it has to date met with enormous success even among the Vietnamese community. Although it has slightly been a week since this King of Durian was unloaded, already a third of the container has already been sold, with other suppliers anxiously in negotiation with Mr. Weng Sam, to get the best of the spoil. Even though durians have yet to be well accepted like the laksa, but some bloke like Nicholas Grace of Ocean Grown will never miss it.

"I think the thing with durian is that it is important to limit the product. You want that exclusivity," said Mr. Weng, explaining how the product was so successful in spite of its high price.

Story of Malacca (Part 3- Final)

Contribution by Elvan Tong

Readers might remember at the beginning of this series that Malacca was used as the focal point in the history of Malaya up to the time of the Portuguese downfall for some very good reasons. Malacca was the only Malayan state of note to warrant world attention at the time, due to its developing strategic position in the trade route between East and West. As a major entrepôt it consequently attracted many traders of diverse racial origins in a region heavily influenced by India and China before European colonisation.

The very early settlers in the Malay Peninsula, and hence Malaya itself, were the Proto and Deutero- Malays from the Yunnan province in the north. These groups came to be known as the Negrito, the Jakun and the Senoi (Sakai). The modern Malays' ancestors were from across the Straits - from Sumatra and Java, whose early ancestors in turn were also from the north.

Islam first came to Malacca (hence to the Malay Peninsula) at the beginning of the 15th century, via Indonesia where Islam and Hinduisim were introduced from India. It was during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah in the Malacca Sultanate that the legendary Hang Tuah emerged.

This final series touches on the remaining aspects of Malacca that were to have a profound influence on the rest of the country centuries later. It was during the occupation of the Portuguese that Christianity and some semblance of Western culture took hold and was to have a lasting influence under the British in subsequent centuries. There also emerged a unique class of people (collectively known as *Peranakan*) of Chinese, Indian and Eurasian origin. This class of people embraced the local Malay culture, language and dress, married the locals and developed a unique blend of culinary cuisine, culture and traditions. They were concentrated in the Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore at the time.

9. Malacca before the Portuguese

By the beginning of the 16th century Malacca had become a great cosmopolitan seaport unequal in the world. Moors came from Cairo, Mecca and Aden on the Persian Gulf; Parsees, Gujaratis, Goanese, Malabaris, Klings came from the Coromandel Coast of India; merchants came from Siam, China, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Indo-China and the Moluccas. Over 80 languages were often spoken. The wealthiest traders from Arabia and India made their headquarters in Malacca. Merchants had different parts of the city allocated to them and port officials were appointed to look after groups from Arabia, India, East Asia, Indonesia and the Moluccas. Malacca had full control of the Straits, with the Sumatran states acknowledging her supremacy and Siam was no longer a threat.

Whilst many foreign merchants made fortunes, the main beneficiaries were the ruling class, deriving great wealth from every conceivable means. These included levies on ships' cargoes, taxes on local produce of small traders, fines, licences, bribes, probates, private trading among the elite, slave ownership, tributes from dependencies and valuable gifts from China.

The Malay upper class and Bendahara ruled supreme. Ordinary traders paid heavily for the privilege; there was no middle class to engage in retail trade; the peasant class was not encouraged to work to improve their condition; land tenure was too insecure to encourage cultivation; the slaves were completely ignored. Administration of the law was brutal and oppressive. None of the wealth of the ruling class was used to provide any form of social welfare for the community.

The history of Malacca in particular and the region in general, before the arrival of the Portuguese, may be summed up by the influence of four factors: cultural influence of India leading to the rise of Indianised states; struggle for political supremacy in the region; political and economic influence of China; the rise of Islam.

That Indian culture heavily influenced the development of this region in the early years is evident. Indian ideas of

kingship and government shaped fledgling states through the ruling classes. Indian literature, art, justice and religious customs and observances permeated local traditions. However the culture of the native people endured, hence a subsequent mix of both emerged in later years.

In the struggle for political supremacy we saw the rise of the great Funan Empire in the north; the Sri Vijaya, Sailendra and Majapahit empires on the islands of Sumatra and Java; finally the great Malayan port empire of Malacca. Indian influence in kingship, government and religion was evident in all these empires.

The Chinese political and economic influence was no less immense. The early Indianised empires and their successors owed their prosperity to the Han, Tang and Yuan dynasties. Malacca's rise to power and her protection from foreign invasion was through the intervention of the Ming Dynasty. It was only due to the change in foreign policy of the Ming in the 16th century that the Europeans were able to establish a foothold in the region.

Islam, itself imported from India into the region, marked the beginning of a new culture. By the beginning of the 16th century Islam was already changing the religious outlook of the area. With the entry of the Europeans another culture was introduced.

10. Portuguese Conquest and Occupation (1511-1641)

The monopoly of sea routes on the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and across the Indian Ocean to India, S.E. Asia and China was held by Muslim powers. The Mediterranean was controlled by the Turks. In 1509 however, Portugal defeated the Egyptians and Indians at Dui, India, thus gaining command of the Indian Ocean (the 'back door to the East'). By 1512 Portugal had control of important bases at Ormuz on the Persian Gulf; Goa, Calicut and Cochin in India; Colombo in Ceylon; Malacca in Malaya. Later she had possession of Macao, China. The chief force behind this policy of capturing important seaports and building fortresses was a Portuguese nobleman by the name of Afonso d'Albuquerque. For a small country such as Portugal and with a small fleet, these conquests were nothing short of amazing. For the first time since the days of Ptolemy, Europe was able to trade once more directly with the East.

a) The Siege of Malacca

Portuguese attention to Malacca dated back to September 1509 when a small landing party of Portuguese led by Ruy d'Aruajo was captured, while the fleet got away with Diego Lopez de Sequiera. Two years had elapsed in her preoccupation with conquest of various ports before attention reverted back to Malacca by Afonso d'Albuquerque himself.

With a fleet of 18 ships and 1400 troops, d'Albuquerque sailed into Malacca harbour in July 1511 to prepare his siege. Malacca was already prepared for a long siege, with 20,000 well armed soldiers that included Malays, Javanese and Turkish mercenaries. The city itself was heavily fortified and the approach to it from the sea was very difficult. Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last of the Malacca sultan in that period, felt he could rely on the merchants, but only the Gujarati merchants provided the mercenaries.

The weaknesses of Malacca originated from within. The unpopular Bendahara, Tun Mutahir, who was slain in 1510, had shown that political tension still existed. Many merchants were discontented with the treatment they received from the Malay ruling class; the Javanese hated Sultan Mahmud; Chinese merchants were disgusted with the high levies and openly favoured the Portuguese; among the foreign merchants there was considerable friction; Malacca could starve since it had to import rich and other staples from neighbouring Sumatra and Java.

The Portuguese position was even worse. They were far from their base, heavily outnumbered and surrounded by their enemies. However, after a series of failed negotiations, d'Albuquerque launched a series of determined attacks with their longer range artillery bombardment and ground movements. Finally Malacca was overthrown on 24th August 1511. Sultan Mahmud and his son, Alauddin, fled to Pahang and later to the island of Bintang off Temasek (Singapore). Portuguese chronicles indicate that Hang Tuan, then the Laksmana of Malacca, and a handful of Malays fought a futile rearguard battle against the Portuguese.

b) Settlement, Fortification and Administration

As his policy was to build a series of forts to serve as ports of call throughout the Portuguese empire, d'Albuquerque at once set about building a fortress. The fortress was built in record time under much duress, such as the transportation of bricks from elsewhere, incessant attacks on supplies and famine. The finished fortification was so formidable that it withstood constant attacks by neighbouring rulers for 130 years until the Dutch captured it in 1641.

Nearing the completion of the fortress, d'Albuquerque left Malacca for Goa. After some mishaps he arrived at Goa with two ships and a few troops. The building of the rest of the settlement was to take many more years. Administration buildings, churches, hospitals, a prison and a bell tower were walled in with the fortress like a city, but the general population was dispersed among three suburbs.

By the time the Portuguese had completed their rebuilding tasks the population of Malacca was around 30,000, of which 7400 were Christians, the rest made up of other races from the East – Malays, Javanese, Indians, Chinese, Moors and Turks. Many languages were spoken although Malay was the *lingua franca*. It was truly a cosmopolitan city controlled by a meagre but determined garrison of 300 men. It was also a place of danger, divided loyalties, treachery, intrigues, plots and counter plots, never ending fear of attacks, peril of the sea, siege and famine.

c) Trade and Missionary Activities

D'Albuquerque wanted to restore Malacca as a great emporium and to repair the damage inflicted during the siege. He treated the traders fairly and sent them back to return again to trade. Soon embassies from neighbouring states began to arrive to offer friendship.

The strategic and economic importance of Malacca and the Straits can be summed up as follows. Portuguese ships, laden with European goods and Indian cloths, would sail from Goa (its Eastern headquarters) to Malacca. There they would dispose of some of their cloths and take aboard spices for the Far East. With spices and Indian silver they would buy Chinese silks to take to Japan. In exchange for Chinese silks, European goods, spices and Indian commodities, Japan would pay in silver. The Japanese would sell lacquer cabinets, boxes and furniture, painted screens, swords, pikes and copper which were high in demand in Europe. The ships would then return to Macao where they would use the Japanese silver to buy silks, pearls, ivory and porcelain for the Malacca, Goa and European markets. On the return trip to India they would load up at Malacca with spices; in India they would use Chinese and Malacca gold which was highly priced in India to buy Indian cloths. From Goa goods destined for the European markets, such as spices, silks, porcelain and Javanese ornamental goods that fetched high prices would be sent to Lisbon.

Over this immense system the Portuguese held a monopoly until the end of the 16th century. It was a system of direct trade between Europe and China, based on the key ports of Goa in the West and Macao in the East, with Malacca in between playing a strategic role. This system of trade caused much envy and animosity among the native states and European powers.

The Portuguese were also keen to spread Christianity in the region. Missionary activities began once the Empire was founded. However, there was little hope in the South East Asian region as most were already converted to Islam. It was not until the era of St Francis Xavier that greater success was achieved. St Francis Xavier, a Basque nobleman, made three separate visits to Malacca (1545, 1550 and 1553) while on his way to the Moluccas, Japan and China. He found Malacca wanting and much to do there. He also found greed and injustice among some Portuguese officials that wrecked his plan to introduce missionary work in China. In Malacca itself he did much work and as a consequence the Church there became the leading one in S.E. Asia. He started a school, had the Commandments and several prayers translated into Malay and converted many Hindus and Muslims into Christianity.

St Francis died in September, 1553 on the way to China, on the island of Sancian. His body was brought back to Malacca with great veneration and finally taken to Goa, its final resting place. He has been compared with St Paul as a great missionary in spreading Christianity in the East.

11. Downfall of the Portuguese

The achievements of Portugal as a small nation of no more than one and a half million at that time were remarkable. She was noted for her great voyages of discovery, her success in building her eastern Empire, her missionary enterprise and her colonisation of Brazil. Brazil lasted many centuries and Malacca lasted 130 years. In the East she faced unremitting hostility from native powers and from the might of other European powers hungry for control of the region.

The Portuguese were the first to establish a European empire in the East in modern times. In the process they paved the sea route from Europe to the Far East for other European nations to follow. They also set a model for empire building for other colonial powers.

Despite her achievements, Portugal's eventual downfall could be attributed to a number of reasons:

Enmity among the native rulers, especially the ousted Malacca Sultan Mahmud Shah who fled and based himself in Bintang.

Since Islam has been entrenched in the region for a hundred years before the advent of Portuguese Christianity this caused a lot of resentment among Muslim rulers.

Local traders resented their trade monopoly being taken away by the victorious Portuguese.

The Portuguese government failed to keep their monopoly intact but allowed private trading among officials that led to widespread abuse of privileges.

Mismanagement and corruption of individual Portuguese officers and flaws in administration led to heavy drain on the treasury.

The smallness of Portugal's population was a great weakness. Her chain of small fortified trading stations could only be supported likewise by small fleets. Her army had to be filled with criminals and mercenaries of doubtful character. The only garrisons in the region were Malacca, Amboina and Tidore in the Moluccas, a poor defence for trade among Asians.

The 130 tumultuous years of Portuguese rule in Malacca were characterised by determined effort for control from two main adversaries, their native and European enemies.

Native Enemies

From 1513 to 1590 Portuguese Malacca was subjected to constant blockades, boycotts and ferocious attacks from Java, Johore and later, Aceh. The Moors from the Persian Gulf were also furious at the loss of their monopoly of the spice trade and diverted their trade to Aceh in Sumatra.

Between 1513 and 1528 the exiled Sultan Mahmud Shah, based in Bintang, made repeated attacks on Malacca but was defeated each time. He continually damaged Portuguese trade not only by fighting but also by influencing rulers of the east coast of Sumatra, whose rivers were used for transporting gold, pepper and rice to Malacca.

After Mahmud Shah died in 1528 his son, Alauddin Shah, now based in Johore, continued with attacks on Portuguese shipping. In 1533 he attacked Malacca itself but was beaten off. Malacca's fortification was constantly extended and strengthened to withstand these and subsequent attacks.

In the meantime, Aceh had become a new power base of the Muslims and was to be Malacca's most dangerous native enemy. In 1537 Aceh launched a surprise attack on Malacca in a bid to gain control of the whole of Sumatra and the region. This move put fear in Johore, Perak, Pahang and the Javanese states. They combined with the Portuguese to defeat Aceh in 1539. So for a brief period Malacca had a breathing space. However, between 1547 and 1575 Aceh made several more attacks on Malacca but was repeatedly defeated, sometimes with the aid of Johore.

For nearly 80 years the Portuguese in Malacca faced formidable odds against determined enemies. If not for her splendid fortress Malacca would have fallen long ago. She was ringed by bitter native enemies on the same land who sometimes became allies to fight against an even bigger threat from across the Straits. It would appear that the struggle among themselves would go on indefinitely until the appearance of new foes, the Dutch and English.

European Enemies

During the period up to the fall of Portuguese power in the East there were great conflicts between three great European sea-powers, Spain, Holland and England, all vying for a piece or the whole of the lucrative spice trade.

During his famous voyage of circumnavigation (1577-80), Francis Drake's first appearance in the Moluccas was to have serious consequences for Portugal. He took a cargo of spices from the Moluccas back to a very receptive audience in England. His display of sea superiority in 1587, by the capture of a large, home-bound Portuguese ship *San Filippe* laden with rich cargoes further encouraged the English to explore the lucrative spice trade. The capture was a great blow to Portuguese prestige and proved that her monopoly could be successfully challenged. From then on no Portuguese ships to and from the East were safe.

In 1580 the Spanish annexation of Portugal was also to have a profound effect on the future of the Portuguese empire in the East. Spain was the sworn enemy of the Dutch and English, so its possessions in the East were in jeopardy. The local S.E. Asian states had also welcomed the newcomers against the Portuguese.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 by Francis Drake led to a series of voyages to S.E. Asia by English ships. Subsequent English voyages by Cavendish, Fitch and Lancaster (1586-1596) led to the establishment of the East India Company in December 1600 to challenge Portuguese supremacy. However, the Dutch had already made their appearance in the region in 1595 and for a time up until 1613 were on friendly terms with the English against their common foe, Spain and hence Portugal.

By 1617 Malacca remained the last remaining outpost of Portugal in S.E. Asia. The attacks by the English and the Dutch on her bases along the sea routes in the Indian Ocean had reduced Portugal's dominance considerably. The Dutch had established Batavia in Java as their base in 1617 to by-pass Malacca and by 1630 had delivered a telling blow to Malacca as a Portuguese stronghold.

The Dutch had founded the Dutch East India Company in 1602 that not only had the power to oversee trading policies but also to act on behalf of the Netherlands Government. The Dutch then proceeded to evict Portuguese possessions in the Moluccas and Johore. By 1623, due to quarrels between them, the Dutch had driven the English almost completely from Malayan waters, the latter abandoning their factories scattered around the region. However, the English were to return much later to establish a naval base on the Malay Peninsula and to renew trade.

England's contribution to Portuguese downfall in the East was considerable. She made concerted attacks on Portuguese bases in India; she captured Ormuz on the Persian Gulf in 1622; she harassed Portuguese shipping to and from the East that prevented communications and reinforcements to Malacca and elsewhere.

Dutch Invasion

The Dutch made their first appearance on the scene in 1595. Unlike the Portuguese the Dutch had as their sole aim, trade. Spain had conquered Portugal in 1580 and had closed Lisbon to the Dutch and English. The Dutch therefore had no scruples in attacking Portuguese possessions in the East.

In 1595 a small Dutch expedition led by Cornelius van Houtman sailed to the Straits of Malacca, called at Acheh in Sumatra and then to Bantam in Java. Between 1595 and 1601, 65 Dutch ships in 22 fleets sailed for the East. Spanish reaction to this was expected and several attempts were made to drive them out but failed. With the Javanese favouring the Dutch as rivals to the Portuguese, Dutch reputation in the East was firmly established.

In 1602 a Dutch trader, Jacob van Heemskirk, visited Kedah to establish a relationship that lasted until 1824. Another Dutchman, Jacob Buizsen, visited Johore to establish a factory there. In the Moluccas the Dutch received overwhelming reception. Throughout the Spice Islands Dutch reputation took hold. Even Aceh conceded Dutch presence. In time the Dutch became the most formidable enemy of the Portuguese.

The actual siege of Malacca by the Dutch was to take many years, between 1606 and 1641. In 1606 the Dutch Admiral Matelief concluded a treaty with Johore, promising to help the Sultan recapture Malacca. However, in 1610 Johore changed sides and allied with the Portuguese after Dutch failure to capture Malacca.

Meanwhile, Aceh in northern Sumatra became a bigger threat to Malacca. By 1615 the power of Johore was broken by Aceh and made a vassal. Malacca by now was surrounded by the vassals of Aceh and at sea by Achinese fleets. Between 1627 and 1629 Aceh intensified its blockade of Malacca and in 1629 decided to lay siege to prevent the Dutch from taking Malacca but did not succeed. Against all odds the Portuguese triumphed.

It was obvious however that the days of the Portuguese in the East were numbered. They had lost their foothold in the Moluccas, had attacks on their bases in the Indian Ocean by the English and Dutch. Constant blockades of Goa made reinforcements negligible, Dutch gunboats constantly patrolled the Straits of Malacca. By 1630 Malacca's significance had been taken over by a new port the Dutch had established in Batavia. This had completely by-passed the Straits of Malacca and Malacca itself. By 1636 no trade reached Malacca at all but diverted to Batavia, Jambi and Aceh.

After the death of Mahkota Alam of Aceh in 1636, its power declined. In 1639 the Dutch again made an agreement with Johore to lay siege on Malacca. It was not until 1641, however, in the new alliance with Johore, that the Dutch made a final assault. With reinforcement of 40 ships and 1500 men aboard from Johore they embarked on a month-long bombardment and cut off supplies. The Dutch finally occupied surrounding suburbs of Malacca while the defenders took refuge in the fortress. Against formidable resistance from the Portuguese and with both sides afflicted by tropical sicknesses and famine, Malacca finally surrendered. From a total population of 20,000 only 3000 were left. Both sides suffered plague, malaria, dysentery and hunger. The siege had lasted five months and twelve days, thus ending the last stronghold of the Portuguese in the East.

The downfall of the Portuguese empire in the East was inevitable. Her small population had to support a relatively vast and widespread empire. She lost good men through shipwrecks, battles and tropical diseases. She had to recruit vagrants, mercenaries and convicts to replenish her dwindling troops. Her administration was hampered by long lines of communication and delays that also drastically affected reinforcements. Then there was the unremitting hostility of the native states, compounded later by the presence of other European powers.

Thus ends the story of Malacca up to the Portuguese downfall. For the remainder of the 17th century and into the next the Dutch and English continued to wrestle for control of the region. However, with the advent of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe late in the 18th and into the 19th century, Dutch Malacca passed into English hands. Penang was already founded in 1786 by Francis Light. Then in 1819 Stamford Raffles established Singapore as a settlement which further strengthened English influence in the region. This was formally recognised with the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824. Starting with Penang, the English ruled the Malay Peninsula for the next 171 years.

12. The Peranakan Heritage

The story of Malacca serves as a useful backdrop for explaining the origin of a rather unique class of people called the *Peranakans*. A notable period in Malacca's history was during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah. In 1459 the Chinese Emperor had sent a princess, Hang Li Po, to the Sultan to ensure his allegiance. The princess and her entourage were initially settled in Bukit China on the outskirts of Malacca. This could have been the 'official' beginning of the Chinese Peranakans in Malaya.(for more details on *Peranakan* , please proceed to Elvan's next article : *The Historical Perspective of the Peranakans*)

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Peranakan Fest

The Historical Perspective of the Peranakans

Contribution by Elvan Tong

The story of Malacca serves as a useful backdrop for explaining the origin of a rather unique class of people called the *Peranakans*. We already know that the social history of South East Asia in general and Malacca in particular rests with that vast migration of peoples from many lands over many centuries. With them came their particular cultures and characteristics, including languages, physical appearances, religions, dresses, social mores, customs, rituals, habits, ways of conducting social and business intercourse and many more. They eventually formed distinct communities that made Malacca truly a melting pot of many nationalities. From some of such communities emerged a distinct group called the *Peranakans*. One can imagine the fusion of such varieties that were to gradually enrich the social fabric of the wider Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian societies.

Peranakan Definition

The term *Peranakan* means 'descendent' in the Malay and Indonesian language. It does not by itself imply a particular ethnic descent unless accompanied by a qualifying noun such as Chinese, Indian, Indo-Chinese or European. However, through consistent usage, it now commonly refers to people of Chinese origin who embrace, partly or wholly, the local native (Malay or Indonesian) culture, in terms of language, dress and cuisine. This may be due to the predominance of Chinese who belong to this class. These Chinese Peranakans are also known as *Straits Chinese* by virtue of the fact that they had settled in sizeable numbers in the British-controlled Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and Dutch-controlled island of Java from the 18th century onwards. Their uniqueness lies in their customs and traditions, with glimpses of Chinese, Malay, Indonesian, Portuguese, Dutch and English. They had remained as distinct communities without being fully assimilated into the native population until around the mid 20th century.

There are also comparatively smaller Peranakan communities, such as Indian-Hindu Peranakans known as *Chitty* and Indian-Muslim Peranakans known as *Jawi Pekan*. Further away, in the Philippines, early Chinese immigrants (men) took native wives. Their descendants had established themselves as a separate community from the Chinese to call themselves *mestizos*. However, in the 20th century this group had come to identify themselves as either Chinese or Philipinos.

Chinese Peranakan males are called *babas*, a Malay honorific term for grandparents in Persian, but originated by Hindustani speakers who were traders at the time. The females are called *nonyas*, a Javanese honorific word from the Dutch or Portuguese meaning foreign married lady. This term came to be used for Straits Chinese women as well. From this observation one could surmise that the Peranakans might have originated from Java or even Sumatra, as Indonesian civilisation had preceded the Malayan.

Peranakan Origin

As we know, Indian traders were already present in the region from as early as the 1st century. This is evidenced by those powerful Indianised empires in Funan, Java and Sumatra that came into existence many centuries after the Proto and Deutero-Malays trekked down from the north. The Chinese made their presence in Indonesia around the 9th century. In the 10th century more Chinese came as refugees from Guandong and Fujian to settle in Java. We could therefore conclude that the Peranakans had their roots in Java and Sumatra, just as the ancestors of the 'modern' Malays had, by crossing the Straits of Malacca.

It was not until the 15th century that large scale migration of Chinese took place. Malacca was founded in 1403 by Parameswara and trade had reopened between China and the small states of the Malay Peninsula. Following several visits by the Ming Admiral, Zheng-He (or Cheng-Ho), himself a Chinese Muslim, trading flowed in earnest. So did waves of Chinese immigrants.

A notable period in Malacca's history was during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah. In 1459 the Chinese Emperor had sent a princess, Hang Li Po, to the Sultan to ensure his allegiance. The princess and her entourage were initially settled

in Bukit China on the outskirts of Malacca. This could have been the 'official' beginning of the Chinese Peranakans in Malaya. Admiral Zheng-He's ships also brought along many Chinese, including merchants, sailors, soldiers, scholars, artisans, farmers and tradesmen to settle in Malacca and elsewhere. Many of the Chinese were Muslims themselves and were therefore able to integrate easily into Muslim communities. Over time the Peranakans themselves migrated between Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia, which resulted in a high degree of similarity between them.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries under British rule in Malaya the Chinese Peranakan population continued to increase, with vast intakes of Chinese and Indians due to the beginning of local tin mining and rubber planting transported from Brazil.

Peranakan Culture

Let us now examine why this group of people are unique, by looking at some main aspects of their culture. For this purpose we would refer to the Chinese Peranakans (with no offence intended for other Peranakans) simply because they were and still are more numerous and their culture more visible, distinctive and pervasive.

Firstly, relating to marriage. In the early days, Chinese male immigrants in particular commonly took native wives, since single women were not allowed out of China until the 19th century. Indians, however, freely married Malay, Indonesian and Siamese women. Up to this day we see many notable citizens in Malaysia and Singapore of mixed ancestry whose predecessors had hailed from China, India, Thailand and Europe. Some of these people would deny this for ulterior motives.

In later years the Chinese Peranakans preferred to marry within their Peranakan community or with those of similar stature. A classic Chinese Peranakan wedding ceremony, steeped in custom and tradition that stretches over 12 days, is an event to behold. There is much singing, dancing, merry making and teasing of the bride amidst sumptuous food.

Secondly, relating to language. The language of the Chinese Peranakan (*Baba Malay*) is that of the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*) with a generous dash of the Chinese Hokkien dialect. With the advent of British and Dutch colonisation, however, most Peranakans became English or Dutch-educated, partly due to prestige and partly for economic reasons. As a consequence, most Peranakans were and still are trilingual, conversant in English, Chinese and Malay. Influence of Western culture also led many to convert to Christianity, shedding their Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian leanings.

Baba Malay is disappearing. In Singapore, the Peranakans are classified as ethnically Chinese and receive formal instruction in Chinese Mandarin as a second language. In Malaysia, the standardisation of Malay as *Bahasa Melayu* required for all ethnic groups will eventually lead to the disappearance of *Baba Malay*.

Thirdly, relating to clothing. Aside from food, clothing is a highly visible aspect of the Peranakan heritage. Although the attire of the male (*baba*) Peranakan is less distinctive, the female (*nonya*) Peranakan clothing is something else.

The traditional nonya's ensemble is usually composed of the following fineries:

Baju panjang, which literally means long dress or tunic, is a costume of the older generation, genteel nonyas, but can sometimes be seen in more evening and formal settings. It is a light and delicate transparent long overblouse made with fabric like voile, worn over a cotton blouse and ankle-length sarong.

Batik sarong is a wrap-around, ankle-length skirt printed with batik motifs. The older generation nonyas wear sarongs sewn up at one side, wrapped around the waist and tucked in front and folded down or fastened with a gold or silver belt. The younger generation nonyas wear *sarong kebaya*.

Kebaya, normally worn with the *sarong*, is a hip-length blouse made with sheer fabric like voile and beautifully embroidered by hand. It is worn over a cotton camisole (under-bodice) that is embroidered along the top edge. Instead of buttons or press-studs, this body-hugging *kebaya* is secured at the front by a *kerongsang* (set of brooches) that usually comes in threes joined by a chain.

The *sarong* that goes with the *kebaya* is a little different to the *batik sarong*. It is hip-hugging and sewn as a fitted skirt with sewn pleats, sometimes with a slit in front. The combination of the body-hugging *kebaya* and the hip-hugging, ankle-length *sarong* had become known as “*baju nonya*” and is very popular among younger nonyas (not to mention admiring men).

Kerongsang, as mentioned above, is a set of three brooches of silver or gold (sometimes embedded with diamonds or gemstones) joined by a chain, and used to fasten the *kebaya* at the front.

Kasut manek are beaded slippers that were worn in the 1920's. They were hand-made with much skill and patience, with coloured beads strung together and sewn onto canvas. The flat beaded slippers were more akin to bedroom slippers that later developed with modern shapes and heels for street wear.

Hairpins, usually of gold, silver and sometimes studded with gemstones, are a necessary accessory as the nonya is seldom seen with her hair loose. The older generation usually wear chignons (buns) secured with hairpins.

Belts, also of gold or silver, would complete the ensemble.

The more prosperous nonyas wear striking *sarong-kebayas*, diamond studded *kerongsangs*, chunky gold belts and gold hairpins. Peranakan jewellery, like in many cultures, serves as a store of value, beauty, ornamentation and indication of wealth and status. Most of the jewellery is usually from family heirlooms or private collections and reflect a strong fusion of Chinese, Indian, Malay and European influences.

Finally, relating to cuisine. While other aspects of Peranakan culture may have disappeared or disappearing, Peranakan food, popularly known as *nonya cooking*, is the most enduring. Food, like music, is a universal language that can be appreciated by all and sundry. Why so with nonya cooking?

The subject of nonya cooking is extensive and is now a rage in some parts of the globe. Basically, it is a unique fusion of Chinese and Malay ingredients and methods of cooking. Chinese in that it uses pork and Malay in that it uses Malay styles of cooking as well as Malay spices. Add to this Indonesian, Indian, Thai, English, Portuguese and Dutch influences and you can imagine the result.

The base ingredients in nonya dishes are pork, chicken, fish, prawns, lamb and beef. However, the ‘secret’ to the exquisite flavour and taste in nonya cooking lies in the clever use and mix of spices, herbs and pungent roots. These include chillies, turmeric, tamarind, ginger, lemon grass, galangal (*lengkuas*), screwpine leaves (*pandan*), curry leaves, lime leaves, mint, shallots, and so on. Nonya curries normally use a curry paste (*rumpah*) made up of some of these ingredients and including shrimp paste (*blachan*), candlenut and top up with coconut milk for a creamy taste.

Equally renowned are *nonya kuehs*, the delicious cakes and sweets that are rich and varied. They are made from ingredients such as sweet potato, glutinous rice, sago, tapioca, yam, rice flour, coconut milk, together with palm sugar and pandan leaves (screwpine) for that exquisite flavour.

Food preparation can be quite complicated and meticulous, requiring many hours of ‘labour of love’ in cutting, chopping, skinning, pounding and grinding. Then there is the precise mix and apportionment of the right ingredients that makes or breaks a dish. The styles of cooking are *panggang* (smoke), *goreng* (fried), *tumis* (lightly fried) and *rebus* (boiled). Is it any wonder then that recipes of the most delectable of nonya dishes are never made public but stay where they belong – at home and passed from generation to generation?

Some say that the Peranakan culture as a whole is disappearing. Will the *babas* and *nonyas* become an endangered species? Remember, this class of people came into being through early globalisation, the melding of peoples and cultures many centuries ago. Will modern globalisation spell its demise? This will depend on the older generation Peranakans themselves, their determination to pass on the culture to their descendents and the latter’s continuing appreciation of its rich heritage. Perhaps we can find the answer in the interesting personal accounts by **Ms Lim Kwee Phaik**, **Dr John Khoo** and **Ms Evelyn Tian** included in this edition of *Passages*.

My Colourful Peranakan Heritage & its Mouth-watering Nonya Cuisine

Contribution by Lim Kwee Phaik

By virtue of my birth in Penang and a descendant of Chinese immigrants, I am a *Peranakan*. A Peranakan community had been defined as one that included all local born Eurasians, Indians and Chinese in the former Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore.

Paternal side:

My father, the late Dr. Lim Poh Thye (medical practitioner) was born in Penang (53rd Lim). The Lim family roots could be traced to the first Lim in China of the T'sin Dynasty (265 – 420 AD). The 19th Lim, Lim Oon, of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 906 AD) was well known in the Lim genealogy. He was the Deputy Minister of Justice who later became the Governor of Chiao Fukien, the northern province of Fukien. The Lims through the generations included Prime Ministers, Governors, scholars, Supreme Court judges. The 52nd Lim, Lim Chu H'ng, my paternal grandfather from Kean Yeang, Fukien Province, arrived in Penang in 1884. He married my grandmother, Yeap Beng Hong (4th wife), who resided in Medan, Sumatra after her family migrated to Indonesia from China. My grandmother adopted the Peranakan lifestyle although she followed Chinese traditions to the letter, and was a devout Buddhist who practised Taoist ancestral worship.

The Peranakan culture was a mixture of customs and traditions. The matriarchal culture was laced with its own creativity in the production of Nonya-ware, beaded items, intricate embroidery, delicate *kerongsang* (brooch), opulent jewellery and silverware. Houses were designed in typical Peranakan style and painted in bright Peranakan favoured colours. It could be noted that personal items were designed specifically for Nonya women. These items were handed down the generations from mother to daughter to ensure that the Peranakan heritage was preserved.



My paternal grandmother, Yeap Beng Hong (shown in picture) wore the *baju panjang*, a long tunic of fine batik or organdie embroidered with small floral motifs worn with a *batik sarong*. The over-blouse was worn over a white cotton blouse with Mandarin collar usually fastened with a gold-stud button. The *baju panjang* (see picture below) was clasped in front with a *kerongsang* (brooch) with rose-cut diamonds called *intan* set in *suasa* (a blend of gold and copper). The main big-top *kerongsang* was elaborately designed and linked to two smaller ones known as *anak* (root word for Peranakan meaning child). The main *kerongsang* was linked to the smaller ones with ornamental chains called *kerongsang rantai* (chained brooch). The sarong was fastened with a silver belt made up of linked rosettes, and attached to it was a small silver mesh purse for money. My grandmother had long grey hair that was swept up into a bun and pinned down with long hairpins fashioned in the same way as the *kerongsang*. Such was the dress mode of the older Peranakan women. The *kerongsang* pieces were embedded with a number of diamonds, depending on the economic status of their husbands or the dowry given by the parents. The younger Peranakan women wore the fitted *sarong kebaya*.



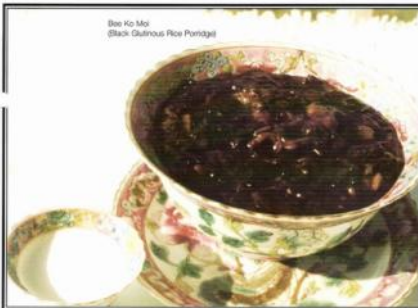
My grandmother kept busy, cooked many Nonya dishes (Nasi Lemak shown in picture), and created her own special recipes which she taught her daughters and my mother, who in turn passed them to me. Many Peranakan young women were taught cooking hands-on, as recipes were memorised and not written down. My grandmother also did beading embroidery of slippers and purses. When I was very young she tried to teach me to embroider with the tiny beads but I did not have the patience to learn. Later I had to learn how to embroider handkerchiefs. The Nonyas were known to excel in these fine arts as a signature of their fine upbringing.



Picture shows Peranakan dishes (LHS) “Bubor Cha Cha” and “ Bee Ko Moi” (bottom).

Maternal side:

My mother was the only daughter of Khaw Joo Chai, who was the only son of Khaw Sim Bee. The Khaw family who came from China to settle in Penang also adopted the Peranakan lifestyle. Khaw Soo Cheang (my great, great grandfather) came from Fukien Province, Chang Chou Prefecture, H'sia An Hamlet. He sailed to Penang (then known as “Korh Mark”) when he was 25 years old and became a farmer at Sungei Tiram after obtaining a ten-acre piece of land from the State Government. A few years later he left Penang to sail up the South-West coast of Siam (Thailand) and settled in Takuapa. He was engaged in trading activities making financial gains and later moved to Phang-nga where he prospered. He started shipping tin ore to Penang and made huge profits. While trading in Phang-nga, he married a local Sino-Thai woman (his principal wife) who bore him five sons, namely Sim Cheng, Sim Kong, Sim Chua, Sim Khim and Sim Teck. Then he moved to Ranong with his family.



In Ranong Khaw Soo Cheang also married a Siamese woman named Kim who bore him a son, Khaw Sim Bee, my great grandfather. In 1854, King Rama IV (King Mongkut) appointed Khaw Soo Cheang Governor of Ranong in recognition of his

loyal and honest performance as Royal Collector of taxes. He was given the title of “Phra Ratansethi” and in 1864 was elevated to “Phraya Ratansethi”. When he was 78 years old he was upgraded to the rank of “Phraya Damrong Sucharit Mahesorphakdi”

It was recorded in historical journals that Khaw Soo Cheang and his sons were responsible for the development and modernization of the tin-mining industry in Thailand. Included in their contributions to the progress of the states they governed, they brought law and order by establishing an efficient police force. They built modern government buildings, prisons, guest houses, schools, Buddhist temples and new market places. Khaw Sim Bee was known to have been instrumental in the construction and maintenance of excellent roads. The Khaw family brought about many reforms and became a socio-economically powerful influence that generally raised the standard of the economy and living in the states they governed. The sons became Governors of Krabi, Langsuan, Ranong and Trang.

Khaw Sim Bee (my great grandfather) was the most decorated. He was first appointed Assistant Governor of Ranong, then Governor of Krabi in 1885. In 1890, he was appointed Governor of Trang. In 1900 he became Regional Governor with jurisdiction over the west coast states that included Ranong, Satul, Tukua-Pa, Phang-nga, Phuket, Krabi and Trang. He was appointed High Commissioner of Monthon Phuket by King Chulalongkorn, the highest post he held until he died in 1913. In 1913, King Vajiravudh conferred upon him “Grand Cross of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant” for faithful services. He was given the title “Phraya Rasadanupradit Mahisornpakdi”.

A notable achievement of Khaw Sim Bee was the introduction of the bucket-dredge method of extracting tin in Phuket. The “Pinang Gazette” reported on 5th November 1907 that the dredge was to be used for recovering tin ore from the bed of Tongkah Harbour with approval that Captain Miles be given the dredging rights. The tin mining industry entered a new era with this revolutionary method of dredging. On 23rd November 1906, the Tongkah Harbour Tin Dredging Co. NL was formed and registered in Hobart, Tasmania. It was floated to raise funds for the purchase of the Bucket Dredge from Scotland to be re-assembled at the Prai Dock, opposite Penang Island.

Khaw Sim Bee also took rubber seedlings to Siam to start the cultivation of rubber in Phuket, that later contributed to its prosperity. He also made a donation to the Penang Free School. His name is listed on an engraved plaque in the Penang Museum for his initial donation of \$200.

The Khaw family founded the following companies: Koe Guan in Takuapa in 1870; Koe Guan in Penang; Koe Guan Lun, the old office of the family trust in Penang; Koe Guan Steam Ship Company in 1890; Eastern Shipping Company Ltd; Eastern Smelting Company Ltd; Eastern Finance, Eastern Tading Company Ltd; The Penang Khean Guan Insurance Company in 1885. Members of the Khaw family were involved in the local Penang newspaper “The Straits Echo”.



My mother, as shown in picture, was of Sino-Thai heritage, her biological mother was a French woman from Lyon, France. She grew up in Chakrabongse House, raised by the Straits Chinese first-wife of my maternal grandfather, Khaw Joo Chai. She was cocooned in the customs and traditions of a Straits Chinese, Peranakan household. She lived a very privileged lifestyle and was schooled at home with private English and Chinese tutors. Her father, however, insisted that she had to learn how to cook from the resident “*Hailam*” chefs to prepare her for marriage. Following the Khaw family’s tradition of having a “Lim” to be the spouse, my father was chosen from many other suitors who had vied for my mother’s hand in marriage. My grandfather insisted that my father should live in his house after they were married, following the Peranakan “*chin chuay*” custom.

The Peranakan lifestyle at that time was known to include Chinese customs, practices and religion; Chinese and European architecture; Malay language, customs and cuisine. In the Khaw household the older Straits Chinese women wore Peranakan clothes, munched betel nuts and leaves and chewed tobacco, but practised strict Chinese and Taoist customs. They spoke Penang Hokkien with a few English words. They followed the lavish British lifestyle of living in huge European style mansions. Chakrabongse House, built by Khaw Sim Bee, had collections of ‘objets d’art’, antiques, Chinese carved furniture of mahogany and rosewood inlaid with mother of pearl. The women had large collections of jewellery. My grandfather read English newspapers daily and Time Magazines.

Living within the compound of Chakrabongse House were households of servants, gardeners, cooks, drivers and carriage drivers. The sons of *the* family were sent to British schools for education, made friends and aligned themselves with British and European classmates in order to build rapport to conduct business with them later. The girls were prepared for marriage and a few were sent to British girls’ schools. Before my mother’s wedding, as part of her dowry, grandfather had obtained from China 100 pieces of each kind of big and small plates, teacups and bowls, and a complete set of Nonya-ware (also known as “Shanghai ware”). Some Peranakan artefacts are shown in the pictures below.

These were part of her dowry. The two recurrent symbolic motifs are the Peony and the Phoenix. This set of brightly coloured enamelled Nonya-ware is similar to the “*famille rose*” pink family porcelain of the Qing period. These were usually used for special occasions like the tea ceremony and serving of dishes at the “*tok panjang*” long table during weddings. Another set of Chinese blue known as “*Kitchen Qing*” with characteristic pea motif were also obtained. This type of crockery was for daily use. At my parents’ wedding dinner a “*Dondang Sayang*” troupe sang “*pantuns*” and performed dances on a raised stage. This was set up in front of the house alongside the seafront for guests seated at tables that filled the huge garden.

Nonya women would relate stories of their Peranakan heritage to their daughters. Thus a verbal record of the culture was passed to the next generation. The young Nonya of yesteryears was trained in the fine arts of embroidery, beading and cooking to keep the Nonya traditions alive. However, today the Peranakan lifestyle is not followed closely and traditional practices no longer carried on by their descendants. One possible reason could be that the older generation of Nyonya women were illiterate and followed closely the customs and traditions taught by their mothers. When the girls become educated they probably had no time for such “old fashioned” practices. Thus, the traditions gradually faded away. Peranakan artefacts are now to be found in private collections and museums. The Nonya cuisine appears to be the only part of the Peranakan heritage that has survived the changing times.

Peranakan artefacts.



Picture shows (L to R): Nyonya beadwork, Silver betel nut set, Silver purse.



Picture shows Kitchen Qing



Picture shows Nyonyaware or Shanghaiware.



Picture shows the Baju Panjang worn by an older Nyonya

Reflections of a Singapore-born Peranakan

Contribution by Dr John Khoo



I started my primary education in 1947 at Choon Guan English School in Koon Seng Road, Singapore. I lived in Joo Chiat Place, a short stroll to my school. Many of the *Straits Chinese* community (also known as the *Peranakan* community) lived in the Joo Chiat and Katong area. They were called *Straits Chinese* because they had originally settled in the three British-controlled settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore at that time. They were a friendly lot and accustomed to visiting their friends and relatives freely. The telephone was mainly used by the large commercial and banking corporations and few residential homes had one. Thus visiting was quite informal without the need for a phone call. Visitors would then be made to feel at home by the host.

The language that the *Straits Chinese* spoke was *Baba Malay*, which was predominantly Malay with English and Malay vocabulary interspersed within the sentence structure. Not far north of this Straits Chinese community was the Malay community that was concentrated in the Kampong Eunos and Kampong Batak regions. A lot of them were friends of the Straits Chinese as they spoke virtually the same language.

The Straits Chinese *Babas* (for the men) and the *Nonyas* (for the women) were a very closely knit community. After World War II new-comers from China gradually began to settle amongst the Straits Chinese community. These new-comers spoke Chinese (Mandarin or other Chinese dialects) which was not understood by the Peranakan folks who regarded them either as aliens or transients who would eventually return to China. The Peranakans therefore did not make much effort to be friendly with the new-comers (also known as *Sin Khek*, which is Chinese for new guests).

The term *Peranakan* originally referred to the Chinese people who had come to the Malay Peninsula, including Singapore, more than two hundred years ago. They settled, earned their living and had their offsprings there. As the men left their women folk behind in China, they eventually inter-married with native women. Their original Chinese culture and tradition had somewhat merged with that of the natives. This was clearly visible in some of the food items which contained exotic spices used by the Malay folks and dress fashions which had some deviations from the original types. The women folk designed their *kebaya* (blouses) as an adaptation from the original Malay *kebaya* and *baju kurong* (longer styled *kebaya*). The men had western styled suits. Later, some Indians from Goa who inter-married with Portuguese also settled in the Peninsula, notably in Malacca. These were some of the original Eurasians. There were more inter-marriages among the Straits Chinese and their descendants were also termed Peranakan. Thus the term is not exclusive to the Chinese born in the Peninsula.

Most of the Peranakans were English educated, either in Mission Schools run by the various Church denominations or in Government Schools. Those from China went to Chinese schools that were mostly privately financed. There was then a great divide between the English speaking and the Chinese speaking people. The facial features of the Peranakan were different from those of the new migrants. The latter had fairer complexion and narrow almond-shaped eyes, while many among the Peranakans had double eye lids. Even their gait was different. I recall my parents and relatives referring to the new-comers as *orang China* (or Chinese people), thus differentiating ourselves from them. As a small boy I was beginning to wonder whether I was Chinese or what?

Many of the Peranakans had English names. Being educated in English, we could speak English well and could easily socialize with the British in those days. We also spoke the creole Malay but the new migrants spoke Chinese and they would wonder why as Chinese we did not understand Chinese.

The Peranakans were very respectful towards their elders. They were also very particular in how they address their relatives. For instance, they would address their aunts and uncles from their fathers' side differently from their aunts and uncles from the mothers' side. For instance, their father's brother is addressed as *Phek* (if older than the father) or *Chek* (if younger); their mother's brother is addressed as *Ku*. They would also differentiate the order of their chronological ages, as oldest paternal uncle or second maternal uncle, and so on. This was to indicate to others the correct relationship.

There were other enclaves where the Peranakans lived. A notable one was the Emerald Hill Road district. The Singapore Chinese Girls' School started there in 1899 to cater for the English education of the Peranakan daughters. This area has been preserved as a tourist area, with architectural designs of homes, front doorways and furniture retained. There is a Peranakan Museum along Coleman Street, between the Singapore Fire Brigade and the Anglo-Chinese Primary School. This school was started by the Methodist Mission in 1886, originally to cater for the Peranakans' English education. Eventually a number of the graduates from the school became teachers there, notable of which were Rev. Goh Hood Keng and Mr Yap Pheng Gek (who both taught my father) and Rev. E. S. Lau. These names may mean more to our parents or grandparents as they would be in that era after World War II. There were also the Straits Chinese Methodist Church at Kampong Kapor Road which started in 1894 and the Straits Chinese Presbyterian Church at Prinsep Street which started in 1843. (These churches were later renamed Kampong Kapor Methodist Church and Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church.) Many of the Peranakans adopted Christianity while the migrant Chinese virtually kept their original religions from China.

Fast Forward

The political situation in China after the 1949 takeover by the Communists was not conducive to the return of Chinese migrants who had come to Peninsula Malaya and Singapore. Many of them decided to stay away, thus avoiding the turmoil in China before and after WW II. Meanwhile the political situation in Malaya and Singapore was also evolving, with the British gradually passing these territories to local leaders. The social situation was also changing. There was more intermingling amongst the *Peranakans* and the migrant Chinese. While previously the Peranakans would prefer that they should marry their own kind, romance had other ideas. Parents would ask their children "*Kerena apa ta' mau kawin sama Peranakan kita; kerena apa mau chari orang China?*" (Why not marry our own Peranakan; why choose a Chinese?). From about the mid 1950's to date the Peranakans had to accept that they are not much different from other Chinese. More Chinese parents began to send their children to English schools rather than Chinese schools, thus a common language meant a common identity.

With the existence of the Housing Development Board apartments in Singapore, the old enclaves of the various races had been broken down. The idea was to create a Singaporean identity with the various races living in closely-knit community style, unlike the previous communal style. The Peranakan communities were then dispersed all over the urban areas. Inter-marriages amongst the various races had become inevitable. Understandably the older generation Peranakans are now concerned that they are a dying entity. In the past two or three decades there had been moves to preserve their culture, tradition and the creole language. In Singapore and Malaysia a number of Associations have been formed with activities to inform later generations about their heritage. There is the Peranakan Museum already mentioned, plus a few others with different names in Katong and Neil Road. There are also Peranakan restaurants, *nonya kueh* (cakes), boutique, music, video and other shops. Occasionally, there are Peranakan Variety Concerts that attracted

audience to full capacity. These would show aspects of their lifestyle before the 1950's; attires worn by the Babas and Nonyas; colourful *sarong kebayas* beautifully and tediously embroidered by the women folks in those days. Many are still in the wardrobes of the daughters and granddaughters of these women folks, treasured and brought out and worn only on special occasions such as these concerts.

The Peranakans are concerned that their original culture and tradition are gradually disappearing. With globalization lots of things are changing. When the original Chinese settled in the Malay Peninsula in the early centuries, it was a globalization on a minor scale, and gradually from 1960's the original Peranakan way of life started to evolve. Now with globalization on a larger scale, some kind of evolvement is happening amongst the Chinese in Malaysia, Singapore and indeed in many countries around the world. The term Peranakan in Singapore and Malaysia may be replaced by a new term in due course. As a comparison, after World War II hordes of migrants from all over the world came to settle in Australia. In the 1940's and 1950's the Australian born Anglo-Saxons used to call themselves *Fair Dinkum Aussies*. In subsequent decades, children of these migrants were also Australian born and there were also inter-marriages. Is the term *Fair Dinkum Aussies*, that is not heard very much nowadays, getting a new definition and be replaced by another term eventually?

Am I a Chinese, Malay, Nonya or a Peranakan?

Contribution by Evelyn Tian

When I was very young I asked my mother why was I called a *Nonya* or known as a *Peranakan*. It was a real mystery to me at that time. At home my Mum used to speak to us in the Malay language and my Dad in English. Who were we and what were our culture and heritage? I could never understand at that young age why we were called by different names, e.g. *Nonyas*, *Babas* and *Peranakans*. To me it was quite overwhelming that I was all in one! Was I a Chinese or Malay, and what was a Straits-born Chinese?

My mother, Ong Chwee Lian, was a beautiful lady, born in Malacca and a second generation Peranakan. My grandparents came from Malacca also and so were their parents, my great grandparents. Mum said we were Peranakans and that the Peranakans were unique and rich in an ancient culture. Her Chinese ancestors had migrated from China hundreds of years ago to Southeast Asia and some of her relatives had settled in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Babas, Straits-born Chinese and Peranakans all referred to the same people. The women were known as Nonyas and the older ones were also known as *Bibiks*. To this day we have some relatives left who we call *Bibiks*, *Chem-pohs* or *Teo-teo* aunties and uncles, depending on which side of the family they came from.

I remember my mother used to have her hair up, the '*sanggol*' (or 'bun' I called it) held together with a beautiful intricate gold pin through it. She was always dressed in her beautifully embroidered *kebaya* and her *sarong lepas* that she gracefully folded around her waistline with a silvery, intricate belt.

Mum's parents believed that the nonyas were home-bound and so she and her sisters were taught cooking (of delicious Peranakan food), embroidering *kebayas* and sewing beaded sandals. She was very artistic and had specialised in the '*tok pajang*' food for auspicious occasions. She said nonyas like her often dedicated their time to beadwork and embroidery. They produced beaded sandals - normally known as *kasut manek* - to go with their embroidered *kebaya*, *kayin lepas* or *kayin halus* (very fine sarong). These were intricate and exquisite items.

(Pics of ET - Kayin Lepas; ET - Kebaya Sulum; ET - Kasut Manek)



My grandparents, grand-aunts, uncles and the Babas used to chew *sireh* – a kind of leave with betel nut, and *kapor* (lime paste) wrapped in it. I used to see them chewing this stuff and spitting it out in a little spittoon.

(Pics of ET – Kerongsang; ET -Basket and Teapot)

I have included photos of some of my mother's keepsakes. I treasure her *kerongsang* and pendant of Peranakan design. Mum also used to put some nice Chinese New Year cakes, e.g. *kueh bolu*, *kueh belanda* (love letters) and many more in her favorite nonya basket. She also played her favourite '*Chung-ka*' game with the kids after school. Sometimes we played 5-stones, like all other kids.



Business

Employment Law and the Fair Work Act 2009

Contribution by Jeffrey Lee

The Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) was introduced by the Rudd Labor Government (implemented by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard) to replace the Workplace Relations Act 1996, and in particular “Work Choices”.

The Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) aims to consolidate state legislation on employment law, including the areas of dismissal, award schemes and minimum employment conditions. Fair Work Australia is the independent body set up by the Federal Government to oversee the implementation of the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) .

As of 1 January 2010, the Fair Work system came into full effect, pursuant to the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (“Fair Work Act”).

Private sector employers and employees in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania who were covered by State workplace relations systems, will now be covered by the Fair Work system.

National Employment Standards (“NES”)

The previous “Work Choices” system provided five basic entitlements for employees, being annual leave, personal /carers leave, parental leave, maximum ordinary hours of work and basic rates of pay and casual loadings. The new Fair Work system intends to create a “safety net” for employees in two ways, the first through the introduction of National Employment Standards, and the second by way of consolidation of various award schemes.

The National Employment Standards (“NES”) consist of 10 minimum standards of employment. In summary, they are as follows:

- Annual Leave (remains at four weeks, with leave accrued as and when ordinary hours are worked)
- Community service leave (entitlement to be paid for up to 10 days for jury service / duty, and unpaid leave for voluntary emergency services)
- Long service leave (continue to be regulated by State legislation, pending the development of a uniform national long service leave standard)
- Maximum weekly hours of work (38 hours for fulltime employees, additional hours can be requested by employer if reasonable)
- Notice of termination and redundancy pay (up to five weeks notice of termination and 16 weeks severance pay on redundancy, but generally not applicable to small businesses and for those employed less than one year)
- Parental leave and related entitlements (12 months unpaid leave per employee, plus a right to request an additional 12 months unpaid leave - this will also apply to same sex de facto partners)
- Personal / carers leave and compassionate leave (10 days paid personal / carers leave per year, able to be accrued)
- Provision of Fair Work Information Statement (must be provided to all new employees)
- Public holidays (eight working days per year to be paid to the employee)
- Requests for flexible working arrangements (parents or carers of children under school age can request in writing a change in working arrangements if they have worked with the one employer for at least a period of one year)

The NES apply to all employees (except casual employees in some circumstances) under the national workplace relations system.

2. Modern Awards

The second aspect of the “safety net” for employees which the Fair Work system has implemented is known as “Modern Awards”. Existing awards have been consolidated by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) into industry or occupation based awards. Modern awards will apply to employees and employers under the national workplace relations system. Managers or high income earners [employees with guaranteed annual earning of more than \$100,000.00 (pro rata for part-time employees)] need not be covered by a modern award. High income earners are free to negotiate terms with their employer to supplement the NES without reference to an award.

A review of each award will be undertaken by Fair Work Australia every four years, with the first review set to take place in 2014.

Modern Awards would include terms and conditions on minimum wages, rest breaks, overtime and penalty rates, leave and allowances.

The introduction of Modern Awards means that many people’s minimum entitlements have been changed.

For more information on modern awards, visit:

www.airc.gov.au/awardmod/about.htm.

3. Termination of Employment

The Fair Work system has also established new laws in relation to the unfair dismissal of employees.

Unfair dismissal will occur if Fair Work Australia is satisfied that a person has been dismissed harshly, unjustly or unreasonably, provided that the dismissal was not a case of genuine redundancy.

Employees can make an unfair dismissal application if they are covered by the national workplace relations system. If not, remedies may be sought under State legislation.

Casual employees will be unable to make an unfair dismissal claim, unless they are engaged regularly and systematically by the employer, and hold a reasonable expectation that their employment would be ongoing. Unfair dismissal claims should generally be lodged with Fair Work Australia within 14 days of the dismissal.

4. Small Business and Unfair Dismissal

Currently, “small business” is defined as businesses with fewer than 15 fulltime employees. From 1 January 2011, a small business will be defined as a business employing fewer than 15 employees using a headcount (not based on fulltime status).

Employees will only be able to make an unfair dismissal claim if they have been employed for a minimum period of 12 months by a small business owner (as opposed to only 6 months for larger businesses).

For small businesses, unfair dismissal can occur if the dismissal is not consistent with the Small Business Fair Dismissal Code (“the Code”). The Code sets out circumstances in which a dismissal without notice is allowed (in cases of theft, fraud and violence). The Code also sets out the actions that should be taken by a small business owner when dismissing underperforming employees. Reasons of why the employee is at risk

of being dismissed must be provided, followed by giving the employee a reasonable chance to rectify their underperformance. The warning does not necessarily have to be made in writing but it would be preferable. Multiple warnings are not necessary.

5. Unlawful Termination

Unlawful termination occurs when an employee is dismissed for reasons including: race, colour, sex, sexual preference, age, marital status, religion and political opinion. It is also unlawful for an employer to terminate employment of an employee owing to temporary absence from work because of illness or injury.

An employee who believes they have been unlawfully terminated needs to apply to Fair Work Australia within 60 days of the termination.

6. Transition towards the Fair Work system

During the transition period of the implementation of the new Fair Work system, the *Fair Work (Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) Act 2009 (Cth)* seeks to address the following issues:

- NES apply to all national system employees from 1 January 2010 (including those covered by Work Choices);
- All employees will receive the minimum rate of pay (eg. in an applicable award) from 1 January 2010;
- Agreements made lawfully under previous legislation can continue to operate unless terminated or replaced; and
- Industrial arrangements (eg. unmodernized awards) to cease to operate once they are replaced by modern awards.

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How To Inject Infectious Creativity Into Your Meetings

Contribution by Kam Keong Yew (Dr.YKK)

Introduction

According to a Wall Street Journal survey, meeting account for the greatest amount of unproductive time topping telephone calls, e-mails, paperwork, travels and office gossips.

Despite the advent of advanced telecommunications technology, there is still no escape from meeting. Meetings are essential for the conduct of my business. The problem is how to make meetings more efficient, productive and effective.

There are many kinds of meetings briefings, presentations, problem-solving and idea generation. This article will only provide tips for meetings devoted to problem-solving and idea generation. They are based on successful practices of innovative companies.

Meetings should be fun. Your people should look forward to it rather than dreading it. Practice some of the tips below and you will have a creative, fun and productive meeting!

Is It Necessary?

The most efficient meeting is not to have a formal meeting at all. Determine whether the meeting is really necessary. Could the issue be resolved through telephone conversation or face-to-face meeting between two or perhaps three people? If it could be done, then there is no need for meeting in the first place.

Supposed that the discussion resolves that a meeting is necessary, then at least, some thoughts have already been invested in the subject. A meeting without some preliminary work generally wastes everyone's time.

Laughter

Start your meetings with outrageous roaring laughter, the louder the better. Laughter will set a happy mood for the meeting. Besides, it will open the minds to ideas and creativity. It inspires and is great for building esprit de corps or team spirit. Laughter is probably the best method for relieving stress, improving health and opening up the mind.

Make laughter the first item of the agenda. The chairman assigns a member to use his/her imagination to plan a special laughter session. If planned properly, people will look forward to the meeting. There's nothing like a good laughter for your people to relieve stress and tensions. In fact, it would be fantastic to have a regular competition to create the best laughter session. Studies have confirmed that a few laughs preceding a meeting will render it more productive in generating ideas. The five to ten minutes spent on warming up and opening up the mind is really worthwhile.

The number of ways to induce laughter is only limited by your imagination. Among the ways to introduce laughter in a meeting are:

Doing something funny that is totally unexpected

A joke session where attendees have to take turns in telling hilarious jokes.

Watching comedy shows on TV such as Mr. Bean and the others mentioned above.

Games that create laughter.

Telling funny stories.

In fact, you don't even need to have humour to laugh. You can just laugh for no reason as in laughter yoga, created by the founder of laughter clubs, Dr. Kataria , which has spread all over the world.

Stimulate Your Five Senses

Place items in the room to stimulate some or all of your five senses. Fragrances, freshly baked pies, funny songs or music, dancing (chicken dance comes to mind). It provides a chance for your people to use their creativity in setting up the room. Whatever you do, make it unconventional.

If the purpose of your meeting is to come out with ideas for new designs or products, then props are great for stimulating creativity. Place props relevant to meeting around the meeting room. Give time for the attendees to hold them, feel them, smell them and to play with them. There are nothing like a sensual experience to great the creative juices flowing!

For example, if the meeting is to design a new toy, then place different toys in the meeting room. Let the attendees play with them and encourage them to behave like kids again.

If the objective of your meeting is to plan a sales campaign, form teams and let each team to make light-hearted presentations. Just allow ideas to flow uninhibited. First of all, routine sales presentations are extremely boring. If you are bored, your customers will also be bored

Make it An Open Meeting

Have you ever heard complaints that there were too many meetings to attend. On the other hand, there are people who are curious to know what happens in a meeting.

Why not then have an open meeting? An open meeting is one where the meeting agenda is publicly announced in your organization and every one who is interested is free to attend. It works the other way too. Those who feel that they could not contribute or gain anything from the meeting need not attend.

Frequently meetings are confined to those who are directly involved with the specific agenda of the meeting. For instance, if the meeting is about production, most likely, only the production people are called to attend the meeting. The result is tunnel vision or thinking inside the box.

An effective way to counter this is to invite people from other departments to attend the meeting. They could include sales, marketing, administration and frontline workers. You may even invite your customers to the meeting.

The principle is simple. If you are part of the forest, you will see only other trees within the forest and not the forest itself. It needs an outsider to give a better perspective of your operation. That is why even giant global corporations with all its in-house expertise still need external consultants. When such companies are in trouble, they usually source for a new CEO who is in a different line of business so that he or she will have a new perspective to the problem.

Outsiders may not have the knowledge and experience. But they can ask so-called "naïve" questions that will trigger off thinking in a new direction.

Different venues

The venue for meetings is very important. If meetings are always held at the same place, there is a tendency to say the same thing and think the same way. One way to get off this situation is to hold meetings at different venues.

There are many possibilities:

- Changing meeting rooms within the company itself. It will also provide an opportunity for the people from various departments to get to know each others' work better.
- Meeting in the suppliers or customers premises and inviting them to join in the meeting.
- Holding meeting in an outlying holiday resort where the attendees are casually dressed
- Having outdoor meetings to tie in with some games the possibilities are endless. It is up to you to create the right environment. You may even occasionally surprise them such as holding a meeting in the jungle, by the beach or on a cruise ship. You need not spend a lot of money. All you need is some creativity in selecting the venue.

Post-It Notes

Post-It notes add a flexibility dimension in recording ideas. Only one idea should be recorded on each sheet. They can be plastered on any surface where they stick. Be creative about this. It may be much more fun sticking them in places that are not meant to be.

With Post-It notes, you can re-arrange your ideas, categorize them, steal them, improve on them, share them, etc. Isn't much more fun with these sticky little notes around. By the way, please don't stick to only one color. You can even combine Post-It Notes with strings, pins, modeling clay, etc. Use your imagination!

Meetingless Day

Whenever I called up someone either in the government or the private sector, the likely response was that, the person concerned was attending a meeting. The amount of time spent in meetings is truly incredible. The more senior the person is, the greater is the time devoted to meetings. This leaves us with the perplexing question – how do these people ever find time to think, plan or reflect on their work?

I would like to suggest that one day a week be designated as a *Meetingless Day*. On this day, in-house meetings within the company's premises are absolutely forbidden. It may be difficult to implement this initially but once the system sets in, it will become part of the corporate culture. When, I first proposed this in one of my talks, it was met with a resounding applause. Why don't you try it out?

Celebrate!

Celebration is one of the most powerful ways to anchor the enjoyment of success achieved since the last meeting. The celebration experience could be simple and may yet long lasting feeling of joy and achievement that will motivate the attendees to strive toward future success. It could be as simple as a thunderous applause and handshakes all round to a special dinner after the meeting. Whatever it may be, never forget to celebrate!

Conclusion

The above are just a sampling of the way in which innovative companies conduct their meetings to generate new ideas to fuel their phenomenal growth. Is your company ready to conduct its meetings differently? I hope this article will provide you with some food for thought.

Overall, meetings should be fun and enjoyable. Those attending the meeting should be imbued with infectious enthusiasm. Your company will then become known as a fun company and creative people will flock to work for you. These are the gold-collar workers who will propel your company to a path of sustainable prosperity.

Humour

What Makes A Malaysian A Malaysian

Contribution by Yeewah Choong

You can name all the players from the English Premier League, but ask you to name one football player from Malaysia, one name also cannot come out.

When Streamyx come, you complain Streamyx too slow. When Maxis Broadband come, you complain Maxis Broadband always disconnects. When WiMax come, you complain Wimax too expensive. In the end, you say Streamyx still the best lah.

When toll price increase, you complain. When petrol price increase, you complain. When you go Starbucks buy RM10 coffee, NO COMPLAINTS.

When you cannot find parking in a shopping mall and have to walk very far, you complain. When you go inside the shopping mall and there's SALE, run from one end of 1 Utama to the other also NO COMPLAINTS.

You are always late. And the excuse you give when you're late is always either: (a) traffic jam (b) no transport or (c) cannot find parking.

You have a parent who force you to take science stream in high school, study engineering in Uni, then when you graduate, they ask you to forget everything you learnt in Uni and do commerce.

You know someone who can specially develop an angmoh accent when speaking to a American / British / Australian.

You complain against the government in kopitiam, you talk loud loud. Leave anonymous comments on blogs, you also talk loud loud. Attend ceramah by DAP, you shout loud loud. Then when Opposition organise a protest and ask you to go, you dun wan. Scared later kena tangkap by ISA. Come the GE you still vote for B..... After that, you start all over again in Kopitiam.

Every year on the 30th April, you are one of the people below queueing up last minute to submit your tax return at the IRB.

When you pay RM10 for something that costs RM1, you blame the Chinese.

When a government service is too slow, you blame the Malays.

When a building is not good and collapsed, you blame the Indonesians!

When a Chinese student won a scholarship , you say, "Wah! Very clever hor?" When a Malay student won a scholarship you say "Aiyah! Of course lah. He Malay mah!".

When an angmoh stranger kiss you on the cheek to say hello, you very happy. When a Malaysian guy kiss you on the cheek to say hello, you slap him - so 'humsup' one!

Old Buddies

Contribution by Harry Lau

A group of 40-year-old buddies argue over where to meet for dinner. Finally, they decide to go to the Gausthof zum Lowen restaurant because the waitresses there wear low cut blouses and short skirts.

10 years later, that same group of now 50-year-old buddies argue over where to meet for dinner. Finally, they decide to go to the Gausthof zum Lowen restaurant because the food is very good and the wine list is superb.

10 years later, that same group of now 60-year-old buddies argue over where to meet for dinner. Finally, they decide to go to the Gausthof zum Lowen restaurant because they can eat there in peace and quiet and the restaurant is smoke free.

10 years later, that same group of now 70-year-old buddies argue over where to meet for dinner. Finally, they decide to go to the Gausthof zum Lowen because the restaurant has free parking and is wheel chair accessible.

10 years later, that same group of now 80-year-old buddies argue over where to meet for dinner. Finally, they decide to go to the Gausthof zum Lowen because they had never been there before.

Getting a Haircut

Contribution by E. Tong

A guy stuck his head into a barber shop and asked, *"How long before I can get a haircut?"*

The barber looked around the shop full of customers and said, *"About two hours."*

The guy left.

A few days later the same guy stuck his head in the door and asked, *"How long before I can get a haircut?"*

The barber looked around in the shop and said, *"About three hours."*

The guy left.

A week later the same guy stuck his head in the shop and asked, *"How long before I can get a haircut?"*

The barber looked around the shop and said, *"About an hour and a half."*

The guy left.

The barber turned to a friend and said, *"Hey, Bill, do me a favor. Follow that guy and see where he goes."*

He keeps asking how long he has to wait for a haircut, but then he doesn't ever come back."

A little while later Bill returned to the shop, laughing hysterically.

The barber asked, *"So where does that guy go when he leaves?"*

Bill looked up, tears in his eyes from laughter and said, *"Your house."*

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