

The Peranakan Baba Nyonya Association of Kuala Lumpur & Selangor

On the auspicious date of 28/08/2008, the Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor (PPBNKLS) was finally granted official approval by the Registrar of Societies. It has been a long but worthwhile wait. We now proudly take our place alongside the associations of Singapore, Malacca, Penang and Phuket in an expanding network of Peranakan associations. All the sister associations have given us their full-hearted support ever since we first appeared on the scene and we are deeply grateful for your kindness and encouragement.

While the three associations in the former Straits Settlements were founded by Babas, this association was initiated by nyonias, something that would not have happened during British colonial rule, when nyonias were still very sheltered. The late Mrs. Doris Lee was instrumental in sowing the seeds of our KL Association. Doris and her husband Lee Cheng Yan both hailed from Malacca and had been active in the Peranakan Association of Malacca. The idea of forming a KL association was mooted by Doris, and enthusiastically received when they met babas and nyonias living in KL at various Peranakan events from 2003 till 2005. It was at the "World of the Peranakan Symposium" on 3rd Feb 2005 in Museum Negara that the idea took off and became a reality. At the Question & Answer session after the Panel discussion, a number of babas and nyonias stood up and proudly acknowledged their Peranakan lineage, (6 th generation, 9 th generation) before posing their questions to the Panelists. We realized then there was quite a sizeable number of babas and nyonias living in the Klang Valley, obviously very proud of their heritage which was now being showcased to the world.

From our presence and our voices there, we also indicated that we, the babas and nyonias, and our culture are very much alive and not relegated to history nor museum relics yet. Pointing out our generational lineage also affirmed that our presence in this country take us a long way back in history and that we are certainly not an overnight phenomenon, but a unique community blending the best of many worlds, that has contributed tremendously to Malaysian society.

At tea break, I had the pleasure of meeting Doris, who shared her dream of forming an association in KL. I was of course totally supportive, happy that there might finally be a space in Kuala Lumpur itself where I could touch base with the Baba Nyonya culture again. My parents and grandparents had all passed away and I missed those wonderful times when we 'balik kampung' to Malacca for weddings and formal functions where my relatives danced, dondang sayang and partied the night away. In reality, I missed my folks, the Peranakan culture as I live in KL, and yearned for an extended baba-nyonya family.

Doris mooted the idea that the association ought to be led this time by a nyonya, instead of a baba, referring to the associations of Singapore, Malacca and Penang. Again I was supportive, thinking that she'd make the perfect leader with her charisma,

knowledge of the culture and her links with Malacca. I had no idea then that she was eyeing me instead to hold that post!

To cut a long story short, a Protem committee was elected on the 25 of Feb 2005 at the Spotted Dog. Much time and many meetings were spent poring over the constitutions of the existing associations and our own Constitution was eventually drafted and finalised. At the first Inaugural Meeting at Museum Negara, the office bearers of the Protem committee were elected. I was elected as President and Datuk Yeo Hock Siew as Deputy President. Doris, I remember, was brimming with joy and excitement, and gave me a big hug after the elections of office bearers. Sadly though, she passed away suddenly just three days after this key meeting at the Musuem. Her loss was deeply felt by all of us. We are glad that her dream of a full-fledged KL chapter has been finally realized.

The logo of the PPBNKLS is the traditional Nyonya *bakul siah*, tilted at an angle to symbolize movement, its colours are in the traditional black and red with gold etchings. Our slogan is "A Golden Heritage". The objectives of the PPBNKLS are to practise, promote and to preserve the Peranakan baba nyonya culture, to create an awareness of the culture, to encourage and undertake research, and to interact with other Peranakan communities. At present, we have no funds nor premises, and we would appreciate support in any way. All we have are our hopes of seeing the association grow in strength, and in realizing our objectives. Being in the capital of KL, we hope to play a vibrant role in joining the other Peranakan associations in promoting our unique and precious heritage.

What lies ahead? We hope to conduct talks and workshops to create an awareness of the Peranakan culture in KL and Selangor. We plan to encourage, support as well as participate in research and publications, as well as create a repository of Peranakan artifacts and knowledge in the central zone. We aim to network with the larger family of Peranakan members in the S.E. Asian region, forge links and network. Last but not least, we also hope to have 'lau juak' activities, to eat drink and be merry and enjoy ourselves in the traditional baba-nyonya way. We may not move mountains but even if we create a small impact, we would have succeeded in furthering the cause of our golden heritage.

LEE SU KIM

President
Peranakan Baba Nyonya Association of Kuala Lumpur & Selangor

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Some extracts from interviews

“We are changing, evolving, adapting with the needs of the present times. It’s not wrong to look back, but we have to make sure that what we know can be passed on. We need to pass on our knowledge, cultural practices, values systems, food, before they disappear. We need archiving, artefacts. My dream for the KL association is a place where the KL Peranakan can call their own, a point of reference. We mustn’t forget that there is a large Peranakan community in KL. “

Cedric Tan, in his 40s.

“ For all we know, other Babas and Nyonyas may have tried to set up a Peranakan society in KL in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s but their plans just never took off for whatever reason. In honour of them, both living and deceased, we are now a reality and we must work together, despite our busy schedules and personal idiosyncracies, to preserve, protect and promote the Baba Nyonya heritage. To me, I salute the past Nyonyas and Babas who shared this concern and hope, and to us and the future generations, we must strive together to protect and promote what has been developing over the past several hundred years as a special culture. “

Teh Boon Beng, in his 40s.

PPBNKLS Committee

President : Dr Lee Su Kim
Deputy President: Datuk Yeo Hock Siew
Hon. Secretary: Yu Lin
Assistant Secretary: Cedric Tan
Hon. Treasurer: Helen Chen
Assistant Treasurur: PatriciaTeh,

Committee members:

Teh Beng Boon
Chua Leng Kee
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