"Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices"

Letters of consent from community members in Singapore

The letters compiled in this document are contributed by community members who have provided written support for the nomination.

In response to **Criterion R.2**, communities have voiced their support that the inscription of *kebaya* will contribute to sustainable development goals. Please refer to the highlighted paragraphs within this document for their statements of support for this criterion.

<table>
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<th>S/N</th>
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<td>✓1.</td>
<td>Ms Christine Ong Kiat Neo</td>
<td>Peace and Social Cohesion</td>
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<td>✓2.</td>
<td>Eurasian Association</td>
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<td>✓3.</td>
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<td>✓4.</td>
<td>Ms Ow Kim Kit</td>
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<td>Peranakan Indian (Chitty Melaka) Association of Singapore</td>
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<td>✓9.</td>
<td>Textile &amp; Fashion Industry Centre, Singapore</td>
<td>Quality Education</td>
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<td>The Peranakan Association Singapore</td>
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Le 14 AVR. 2023

N° 0255
30th January 2023

To the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee:

Letter of Support for Multinational Nomination of Kebaya to UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Ms Christine Ong Kiat Neo, sole proprietor of Kris Peranakan Enterprise
UEN: 52919757W
Blk 47, #02-68 Marine Crescent, Singapore 440047
Tel: 69512776. Mobile: 97982176
Email: kristinong@ymail.com

I hereby consent and support the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to be listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Coming from a true-blue Peranakan family, my late mother and all my female members of both my maternal and paternal families wore the kebayas throughout their lives. They were so comfortable in the kebayas that they refused to wear other traditional costumes as this became their “nyonya” attire / clothing and instant identity, even though Singapore is a multiracial community.

When I was working in the corporate world I started collecting and researching the history of the kebaya and wanted to continue the legacy of wearing the kebaya. Hence, in 2011, I wrote and published my book “Nyonya Kebaya - Intricacies of the Peranakan Heritage”. This book is now being shared in all libraries in Singapore. I hope this will enlighten the younger generations to appreciate one of the many traditional clothing of our multicultural society and to wear the Kebayas.

As a present-day living heritage and continuing the tradition passed down from my ancestors to female members of my family, the wearing of kebayas is closest to my heart and gives me a sense of pride and nyonya identity. Now my female siblings and cousins are still wearing the kebayas. More than 10 years ago, I started a small retail business of kebaya and sarong as a complete outfit and have since sold large quantities not only to the Peranakan community but also other ethnic communities / races in Singapore. I recreate the vintage motifs and embroideries to widen the range of the beautiful kebayas.

My greatest hope for the multinational nomination of kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List would be to create awareness and identity of this kebaya outfit to the world. I love wearing it daily at my store.

To share personal stories, I would encourage, teach and share the various ways to achieve the beauty of wearing this outfit. Wearing the kebaya to any occasion / event / celebration / performance / social gathering is a norm now. There are varieties of elaborate embroidery on kebayas for different occasions. I am now in conjunction with an event company giving regular talks and demonstrations on wearing of kebayas.
A series of talks about my book, “Nyonya Kebaya - Intricacies of the Peranakan Heritage” which started from January 2023.

Giving a talk on Peranakan culture at Nanyang Girls High School during Racial Harmony Day 2022.

My sister with my parents during my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary in 2002
With my friend Ni Qing at MBS theatre watching a musical, “Lee Kuan Yew Story” in 2022.

With a participant at the Kebaya talk in 2023.
10 February 2023

Dear Sir/Mdm,

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF THE KEBAYA TO THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

1 The Eurasian Association (EA), Singapore was formed in 1919 as a voice for the community. In addition to being one of the four Self-Help Groups since 1994 where we assist the needy through education bursaries and family support services, EA is the only institution in Singapore that acts as a guardian of Eurasian heritage and culture.

2 Set up in 2003, the newly revamped Eurasian Heritage Gallery (EHG) has over 400 images, 130 artefacts and 10 multimedia. The objective of the EHG is to preserve and share the Eurasian history and culture to the wider society. Programmes include guided tours and other segments such as sampling of sugee cake, dance workshop of a traditional Eurasian folk song and more. Our animated docents share the origins, contributions, culture and lifestyle of the small but vibrant Eurasian community, one of the earliest settlers in Singapore.

3 We believe the kebaya is a crucial part of Singapore’s heritage and identity, and there is a section on traditional Eurasian attire which features the kebaya in the Eurasian Heritage Gallery. For the Eurasian community, the kebaya’s history dates back to 1511, when the Portuguese arrived in Malacca in search of spices. They married the local women and the offspring from these unions would later be called ‘Eurasian’, as they were a mix of European and Asian parentage. In the 1500s, the Eurasians in Indonesia and Malacca began wearing a kebaya similar to what the local Malay women wore. Eurasians could only afford simple cotton material. The blouse was a long and straight cut with a loose fit for comfort. They called it the ‘Cabaia Kumpridu’ as ‘cabaia’ means ‘blouse’, and ‘kumpridu’ means ‘long’ in Portuguese. Other communities also have riveting origins of the kebaya they wear, with different styles, material, cutting and so on.

4 It is important for traditions like this which are symbolic for numerous ethnic communities in Singapore, a melting pot of cultures, to be passed down the generations. A quote by Maya Angelou says, “You can’t really know where you are going until you know where you have been.” Knowing one’s roots and ancestry helps
one to embrace and be proud of who they are, while firmly planted as citizens of Singapore, and as part of the wider region.

5 Our EA members have been involved at various stages of the nomination preparation, from focus group discussions, to contributing photographs and information, as we believe that a successful nomination would encourage the younger generation to continue passing down this heritage to their children.

6 For these reasons, we consent to and fully support the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to be listed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Sandra Theseira
President
The Eurasian Sarong Kebaya, also known as the Cabaia Kumpridu.

Young ladies from the Eurasian community wearing kebaya in the Eurasian Heritage Gallery

Eurasian ladies wearing the sarong kebaya – commonly comprising of a European-inspired blouse of thin, translucent textile, with embroidered lace, paired with a local batik sarong.
GSA/NHB-2023/0323

4th March 2023

UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee

To whom it may concern,

LETTER OF CONSENT IN SUPPORT OF MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF KEBAYA

Gunong Sayang Association (GSA) expresses our full consent and support for the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to be listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.

GSA was founded in 1910, a non-profit organisation, focuses on the preservation of the Peranakan culture through songs, dance, pantuns, the Bahasa Baba/Nyonya and above all the Wayang Peranakan (Peranakan Theatrical Play).

Kebaya, a vital attire that is worn by all the Nyonyas during all our performances and activities inevitably makes this nomination very close to all our hearts. The kebaya embodies what the Peranakan ladies (known as nyonyas) wore for the past century. Kebayas have been passed down from generations and regarded as heritage pieces for some families. Kebaya also connects generations of women across different ethnic communities who grew to appreciate the kebaya as a marker of cultural identity.

GSA has even conducted sulam (embroidery) classes headed by kebaya maker Heath Yeo to pass down the art of embroidery on kebayas to the younger generation.

GSA is so excited that this will be a multinational nomination because kebaya have always been worn not only in Singapore by the Peranakans but also by other nationalities and races. As such, kebaya facilitates social cohesion by bridging communities and families together.

The Peranakan Federation have representatives in Southeast Asia that includes those countries that are in this nomination such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

We look forward to having this shared culture to be shared to many more for posterity.

A Pantun to share for this letter of consent:

Baju Kebaya Dari Dulu Kala  
Chantik Di Pakay Nyonya Nyonya  
Disulam Manis Berchorak Bunga  
Sapa Pandang Mesti Tak Lupa  

Kebaya from the past  
Beautiful when worn by Nyonya  
Pretty flower design that are embroidered  
Whoever sees it will never forget

Yours faithfully,

.............................................

Alvin Teo
President
Gunong Sayang Association
16 Feb 2023

To the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO

Dear Sir/Madam,

CONSENT AND SUPPORT FOR THE MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF KEBABAYA TO BE LISTED IN THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

1. I hereby consent and support the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

2. I have been a keen heritage enthusiast since a very young age and have been a two-time recipient of the Singapore National Heritage Board’s Heritage Participation Grant with which I wrote two books that record the history of Singapore’s heritage restaurants and hawkers; “Delicious Heirlooms: Storied Behind Singapore’s Oldest Family-run Restaurants”, and “Delicious Heirlooms 2: Our Hawkers, Our Heritage Heroes.”

3. I have also been a keen collector and wearer of kebaya since I started my career as a young lawyer in the late 1990s/early 2000s. My love for kebaya can be attributed both to influence and interest. Having very close peranakan relatives inculcated in me a sense of detail and design and wearing kebaya was to me, not just for appreciation but also a mission to carry on its rich heritage as a garment of our time and of generations past.

4. Over the years, I have also been promoting kebaya within my own group of friends and also to my foreign contacts. While I have not penned my personal journey on kebaya to print just yet, I have over time been researching and jotting down anecdotes and real-life experiences with the craft and practices of kebaya. Being an integral part of our cultural fabric, kebaya is not just for practical daily wear but can also be part of a glittery affair for formal evenings and even state events. It transcends race and religion and highlights our shared heritage across various communities here in Singapore and the ASEAN region.

5. The intricacies and the art of kebaya is not something one can appreciate overnight but is a personal journey. It is also accompanied by the accessories and adornments such as the kerosang (ornate strand of
brooches that pins the garment together) and the kasut manek (beaded shoes that the older generation would hand make).

6. *Kebaya* is a living heritage and continues to be highly relevant in our community’s culture. The versatile nature of *kebaya* shows how it can be worn in both formal and casual settings such as festive occasions, social gatherings, and institutional events. It also remains a form of daily wear for some women today.

7. *Kebaya* is diverse and dynamic – one that is constantly evolving according to trends driven by the wider fashion world in the region, while also adapting to local cultural norms and preferences. Beyond just a garment, *kebaya* embodies the stories and memories that we hold dear. It sparks conversations and serves as a connection between families and generations of women who look to the mothers, grandmothers, and other women folk, and grew to appreciate the *kebaya* as a marker of cultural identity or simply as an expression of creativity and fashion.

8. I hope that the recognition of *kebaya* as an intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO Representative List will inspire discussions, encourage more people to learn about it, and further spread the knowledge and passion for *kebaya* fashion to Singaporeans and the world regardless of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

9. I believe that a successful nomination will strengthen the safeguarding of this living heritage, raise recognition to the artisans, practitioners and cultural advocates of *kebaya*, and inspire the younger generation to continue its transmission for many years to come.

Kim Kit Ow (Miss)
Author, Lawyer
PERANAKAN INDIAN (CHITTY MELAKA) ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE  
6001 Beach Road #20-06 Golden Mile Tower, Singapore, 199589

24 February 2023

Attn To: UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee

Letter of Consent

**Multinational nomination of kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

The Peranakan Indians or Chitty Melaka are probably the oldest community in Singapore and Malaysia to have evolved from mixed parentage and thus encapsulate the unique character of embracing multiracial, multicultural and multilingual realities with a high degree of comfort and pride.

Like our more familiar cousins - the Straits Chinese or Peranakan Chinese or Babas and Nonyas - the Indian Peranakans sit well in a Singapore which is also a "country of the mixed and the many" where tolerance and living with other races comfortably is given high priority. In the evolving diversity that is the Singaporean and the Peranakan experience, individuals can retain various identities several times in a lifetime.

Wearing the Kebaya features prominently in our culture and identity. It has been our go-to attire at home since the 15th century for the Indian Peranakan ladies. The Indian Peranakan or Chitty Melakans are hybrid offsprings which emerged from the inter-marriages between early South Indian settlers and local Malays, Chinese, Javanese and Batak communities in 15th century Melaka. Our assimilation with the local culture is the most unique feature of our community. Our clothing, diet, spoken language and appearance bear similar resemblance to the local indigenous (i.e. local Malay and Baba-Nonya) communities. **We trace our roots to the Chitty Village in Melaka (perhaps the earliest model of the global city-state in the Southeast Asian region) and photographs of Indian villagers or townsfolk in kebaya-clad attire always confirm for us our community's sense of integration with the local Southeast Asian culture. Such evidence showcases how kebaya is, and has been a cultural connector that builds cultural understanding and appreciation. We take pride in our DNA: an identity formed mainly from our opening our hearts and homes to our neighbours and reinforcing the sense of belonging and integration with local cultures.**

Wearing the Kebaya, for the Peranakan Indian, is about being comfortable in their own skin vis-a-vis the larger Indian community at Hindu temples and at Indian community events.

Wearing the kebaya amidst the Malay population and the Chinese Peranakan community also means we are comfortable to call this our home, living in harmony with our neighbours.

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Community's statement that inscription of kebaya supports the sustainable development goal of **peace and social cohesion** (criterion R2).
Wearing the kebaya is a powerful way to celebrate women’s strength and identity, and is our tribute to the legacy of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

On behalf of our community, the Peranakan Indian (Chitty Melaka) Association supports the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Ponno Kalastree (Mr)
President
Peranakan Indian (Chitty Melaka) Association, Singapore
6001 Beach Road #20-06 Golden Mile Tower, Singapore 199589

Photograph featuring a mother-daughter pair – great-grandmother and grandmother of Pillay Krishnan-VP Peranakan Indian (Chitty Melaka) Association.

Avirame Pillay (L) and Papathe Pillay (R)
Kamala Pillay (photo taken in 1952 when she was 5 years old)

Sharmala (taken at the In the Mood for Kebaya segment at the Peranakan Museum reopening, 17 Feb 2023)
Sharmala is the daughter of Kamala Pillay (above).
25 January 2023

Attn: UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee

Rumah Kim Choo Pte Ltd
111 East Coast Road
Singapore 428801

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF KEBAYA

I, Raymond Wong, am a 3rd Generation Singaporean. My paternal grandmother was a Singaporean Peranakan Chinese – a Nyonya. She taught my siblings and myself to appreciate and be proud of our local heritage and culture. Being deeply rooted in this Peranakan Chinese culture, Rumah Kim Choo Pte Ltd was founded in 2004. Our business’ humble beginning began with selling Peranakan Chinese-related lifestyle products including the Nyonya Sarong Kebaya. As a fashion designer specializing in kebayas, I have represented Singapore in Singapore Tourism Board tradeshows through fashion shows, parades, displays. (Refer to Appendix 1, p. 5-6)

Singapore is a multicultural port city, with links across Southeast Asia and the world. Traders brought caftan fashion from the Arabic/Islamic world into Southeast Asia via the Maritime Silk Routes. The caftan later evolved into the kebaya and every region has its own unique variant. Today, the Kebaya is still being worn by many communities across South-east Asia, including Singapore. The kebaya represents our region’s (1) shared history and heritage; and (2) common roots with our neighbouring countries – Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, & Thailand.

Rumah Kim Choo frequently conducts in-house tours/talks with groups like People’s Association, Peranakan Association Singapore, Friends of the Museum, Primary/Secondary Schools (e.g. Racial Harmony Day), and with locals and tourists alike, to share about the Nyonya kebaya and its evolution. My personal collection of antique kebayas and batik sarongs date from 1900s up to 1970s and would be displayed to the guests for them to better appreciate the range and development of the kebaya particularly in Singapore and the Straits Settlements.
During these inclusive talks and discussions, there is active and lively sharing on topics including (1) how to bring vernacular wear, in particular, the kebaya, to be fashionable and worn, not just as a novelty or as “ethnic” fashion but as daily and festive wear; (2) how to make such fashion statements relevant to the community and enhance the appreciation of the materials, craft and techniques involved in the making of a kebaya. (Refer to Appendix 2, p. 7-8)

In contrast to the fast and throwaway fashion that is so prevalent today, the good Kebaya takes time, effort and affection to produce. Thus, rendering the kebaya a one-of-its kind, decoratively beautiful, collectable and wearable piece of art.

We highlight how vintage kebayas and bespoke hand and machine embroidered kebayas are much sought after, the former for their scarcity value and the latter becoming appreciated as family heirlooms with great sentimental value. In all cases, the audience always remark on the fine workmanship and artisanal quality of these beautiful garments.

We also share that kebaya can be worn on all occasions, and explain and demonstrate ways to wear the kebaya, complete with accessories and traditionally paired with batik sarongs. (Refer to Appendix 3, p.9 -10)
We also suggest contemporary forms of the kebaya, and how trendy and updated they can be.

Our openness to share with the community and visitors to Singapore is to heighten understanding of this elegant evergreen classic, which transcended all races, and which had, from the early 1900s until today fulfilled a social and cultural bond among all Singaporean ladies, who wear them with a sense of pride and belonging, whether at home or overseas. Today, Kebayas are seen as symbols of multicultural Singapore, kebayas have inspired and been made into corporate and national gifts to other countries. (Refer to Appendix 4, p. 11-13)

Traditions can sometimes be rigid and if we insist that kebayas be worn only in the traditional manner and form, wearing a kebaya may become extraneous to the lifestyle of the younger generation. Therefore, we would share ideas on how we can wear kebayas in combination with the modern clothes. (Refer to Appendix 5, p. 14-16)

As the in-house kebaya designer for Rumah Kim Choo, I decided that just working with available materials and commissioning the embroidery was
limiting. Therefore, I decided to embark on the task of learning how to embroider the kebaya. My journey in mastering the craft has been challenging. In 2004, a retired Singapore embroiderer declined my request as this was a job which only women did, particularly between the 1950s and 1970s. Online resources were not available then unlike today, where YouTube videos showing how free-motion machine embroidery works, are easily available and prolific. The craft skills and knowledge of making kebaya is inclusive, and not limited to a certain gender. Anyone who is interested can learn and practice the craft. Community member's statement that inscription of kebaya supports the sustainable development goal of gender equality (criterion R2).

My efforts paid off when I came across an old sewing machine manual that described the removal of certain elements in the sewing machine, which would then facilitate the execution of free motion embroidery. To better understand how to embroider with the sewing machine, I improvised by recreating the steps in hand embroidery books and magazines for application on the sewing machine. Such research and experiments have stood me in good stead as I am now conversant in many techniques and applications which has been learnt through sheer hard work and trial and error.

My love and appreciation of fabrics and embroidery manifests in my collection of antique and vintage kebayas, photographs, fashion paraphernalia, first used only as samples but have developed into valuable archival references. With these physical examples, I have been able to compile a body of information on the history and development of the kebaya.

In 2009, I was invited by LASALLE College of the Arts to be a guest practitioner and to inspire, lecture and tutor the Year 2 Fashion Textile students to prepare for a fashion show collection to mark the 2nd anniversary of the Peranakan Museum. (Refer to Appendix 6, p. 17)

In 2011, LASALLE later extended and elevated my role, by employing me as an adjunct Embroidery Lecturer for their Institute. It was a most fulfilling journey as I was able to promote greater awareness and understanding of this vernacular fashion. In addition, I was able to pass my knowledge and some skills to interested students, both male and female, and of various nationalities. My hope is that the inclusion of free-motion embroidery would inspire and personalize the students’ future fashion collections and exclusive and unique fashion wear. Over the years in teaching, during the students’ portfolio consultation, their ideas and inspirations inspires me to push personal boundaries and create new pattern drafting and embroidery textures to

Community member's statement that inscription of kebaya supports the sustainable development goal of quality education (criterion R2).
translate the kebaya to a contemporary form. Through these education courses, students have gained a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of kebaya, and they are equipped with knowledge to incorporate the kebaya and its embroidery into their future fashion designs. The kebaya will also serve as an inspiration for these students’ future careers.

The detailed and intricate embroidery on the kebaya can take between 6 to 8 weeks to complete for an elaborate kebaya. Done correctly and well, they can be very durable like the vintage kebayas. As part of the sustainability movement in Lasalle, we teach how to salvage the embroidery on used kebayas and applique them onto a new kebaya. (Refer to Appendix 7, p.18-19)

In summary, I totally support this application, as I believe that the successful multinational nomination would (1) encourage Singaporeans to appreciate and value Kebaya as a living heritage of our nation; and (2) encourage connectedness between the people of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand in the shared history and heritage of our early fashion movements. Therefore, I wholeheartedly and expressly support the multinational nomination of the Kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Wong Sin Kang
Rumah Kim Choo Pte. Ltd.
Appendix 1: Fashion Shows, Trade Shows, Parades, Displays

Fashion Show in Moscow 2014

Right: Asian Supermodel 2012
Second Right: Miss All Nations 2012
Left: Pyeongchang Olympics 2018
Singapore Tourism Board Weekend Trade Show at Hanoi 2018

Singapore Tourism Board and DBS Bank Trade Show “Singapore Festival” 2019
Appendix 2: Cultural Talks & Kebaya Appreciation

American Women’s Association Cultural Tour 2018

Cultural Tour for ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Spouses
Kebaya Appreciation for LASALLE Students in 2009
Appendix 3: Nyonyas In Kebayas in Singapore

Wearing the kebaya gives cultural identity and it is suitable to be worn for all occasions locally and overseas

- Above left: A lady wearing the kebaya, with former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon
- Above right: Former President of Singapore, Mr Tony Tan and Mrs Tan, who is dressed in a kebaya
- Below: Ms Foo Chi Hsia, High Commission of Singapore to the UK, dressed in kebaya in a group photo with Singaporeans in the UK.
Never go wrong wearing the kebaya as a cultural gown to present the community and country.
(Left: Ms Foo Chi Hsia, High Commission of Singapore to UK, meeting Queen Elizabeth II; Right: Ms Lim Hai Yen, spouse of Tampines GRC Mr Baey Yam Keng, meeting Queen Saleha binti Mohamed Alam, the current Sultana of Brunei).

Male Performing Artistes in Kebaya. Traditionally, female roles were played by men in Wayang (Theatre) Peranakan, as it was inappropriate for women to appear on public stage in the past. While there are no longer restrictions, the tradition continues to inspire contemporary theatre. Ivan Heng (Right); Francis Hogan (Right)
Appendix 4: Kebayas as Gifts

Singapore has commissioned us to give Embroidered Kebayas to Museums overseas to foster better bilateral relationships. E.g. in 2013, Singapore Government commissioned embroidered kebaya with Seoul’s national flower
the Mugunhwa – The Rose of Sharon (Hibiscus Syriacus), which symbolises eternal blossom that never fades in Korean culture.

In 2014, Singapore commissioned an Embroidered kebaya with Singapore’s national flower – Vanda Miss Joaquim, and Myanmar’s national flower – Padauk, which flowers represents youth, love and romance with its fragrant scent. The gift was for the Myanmar National Museum opening of their ASEAN corner.
In 2016, our Prime Minister’s wife commissioned a shawl with Kebaya embroideries specially for Michelle Obama, with our National Flower Vanda Miss Joaquim and the National Butterfly – The Common Rose. 

Ho Ching’s ‘uniquely Singapore’ gift to the Obamas, made by S’pore Peranakan designer - TODAY (todayonline.com)

From 2012 to 2018, the SingPost – the National Post Office, commissioned our company to design their corporate gifts with kebaya embroideries.
Appendix 5: Translation of the Kebaya to a Contemporary Form

Kebaya Fashion Show for ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (APHADA) in Kuching 2019
Kebaya Fashion Show for ASEAN Handicraft Promotion and Development Association (APHADA) in Kuching 2019
Samples of modern designer kebayas made for The Peranakan Association Virtual Dinner 2020
Appendix 6: Education Efforts

Sharing samples of vintage kebayas and teach them to appreciate the fabrics used for making the kebaya and its embroideries.

Teaching the students on how to do free-motion embroidery.
Appendix 7: Sustainability Efforts

Upcycling embroideries from old vintage kebaya and apply them onto a new kebayas as part of the sustainable efforts.
Instead of throwing away an old kebaya. Kebayas with holes can be salvage with embroidery to give it a new look.
06-February-2023

Dear Sir/Mesdames,

Letter of Consent in Support of Multinational Nomination of Kebaya

I hereby consent and support the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to be listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Sri Warisan is a performing arts company founded by renowned cultural Medallion recipient, Madam Som Said. Sri Warisan, formed in 1997, is one of the pivotal forces in Singapore’s Malay dance scene. Blending rich traditional forms with contemporary techniques is Sri Warisan’s trademark. Its performers are trained to excel in multi-disciplinary art forms such as dance, music, theatre and multi-media. Currently, Sri Warisan is led by Mr. Adel Ahmad, together with 30 performing artists and more than 200 student members committed to developing professionalism in the performing arts reaching out to children, youths and adults.

As the Artistic Director/choreographer, I choreograph dance and design costumes. Kebaya is one of the costumes for Traditional, Modern and Contemporary works in traditional and contemporary styles.

Significance of Kebaya
Casual wear at home and at work, kebaya is a symbol of identity of a Malay lady. Kebaya is worn as casual wear and a formal wear for festivities as well as for wedding.

Gender Equality
Kebaya represent femininity that signifies - grace, discipline, beauty and strength. The style and design of kebaya are symbols of identity and characters of women. Male and female designers, craftsperson, researchers and representatives of organisations share their knowledge regardless of gender.

Quality Education
Our students are exposed to ‘kebaya’ as an ‘appreciation program’ through workshop - demonstration and hands-on program, to enable them to understand the cultural significance of kebaya and its relation to the performing arts and be able to design their kebaya for dances in future. Topics include:
1. Create awareness
2. Understand ‘What is Kebaya?’
3. Involve in the design and making of Kebaya.

Yours sincerely

Som Said (Mdm)
Founder / Director

Community’s statement that inscription of kebaya supports the sustainable development goals of gender equality and quality education (criterion R2).
Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF CONSENT IN SUPPORT OF MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF KEBAYA TO THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

Sylph expresses her full support and consent for the nomination of kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (‘ICH’) of Humanity.

1 Sylph was founded in 2015 to focus on arts and in the making of bespoke personalised paper creations through a Penangite nyonya’s (a female Peranakan) aesthetic. In 2017, Sylph inquisitively created miniature origami (paper folding) accessories as wearable artworks in hopes to further enhance a woman’s grace and beauty through her artworks. Sylph’s aspiration is to spread the love of art using paper with each artwork passionately handcrafted with utmost attention to detail, love, and sincerity. Sylph is committed to being environmentally friendly, opting to have a minimal impact on the environment, and working with environmentally conscious partners. Sylph also incorporates her Peranakan culture and heritage into arts by making Peranakan batik kirie (paper cut outs) as well as miniature origami kerongsang (brooch) to pair with her kebaya, and is now planning to extend her artworks to include kasut manik (beaded shoes).

2 Sylph’s work covers both tangible and intangible cultural heritage through arts and raising awareness towards the traditional art of origami as well as the Peranakans. Sylph works closely with the Japan Creative Centre (Japan Embassy) in Singapore for the traditional art of origami, and researches in the culture and tradition of a Penangite nyonya. This is achieved through exhibitions, fund raising, guiding, social media, talks, and volunteer work.

3 As the Peranakan usually wear the kebaya to showcase their multicultural heritage and identity, the opportunity to wear it proudly as part of our daily lives would be increased as compared to wearing it during occasions such as during multicultural day. It
is also undeniable that the wearing of kebaya is slowly fading into the background as fast fashion makes its way into the younger generation.

5 The beautiful culture, heritage, history, and traditions of the Peranakan can be seen in places such as Malacca and Penang, in Malaysia, and Singapore. The intricacies of the kebaya is identifiable to the culture of a nyonya. However, that being said, the kebaya is such a rich heritage that it includes various other cultures that expands its influences in what defines a kebaya depending on where it is found, making it extremely interesting and what makes all the five different countries, namely Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, collaborate with each other in this multinational nomination of the kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List of ICH.

6 To continuously contribute to the safeguarding of this precious kebaya, Sylph plays her part by wearing them during her events, NUS Baba House guides, and workshops, whilst accompanying it with her handmade miniature origami accessories, where she believes that paper art meets textile art, the beauty of handmade crafts. The kebaya is also being worn during important celebrations such as the Emperor of Japan’s birthday celebration where Sylph is being invited as an artist, further increasing awareness and interest in arts, kebaya, and Peranakan. In addition to that, Sylph tries to research as much as possible regarding the motifs and colours in hopes to learn more about Peranakans.

7 Since October 2022, Sylph has been involved in the various stages of the nomination preparation by attending the focus group discussions where kebaya was proposed to be nominated to the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH.

8 As a Penangite who has been living in Singapore for more than 10 years, it is indeed an exciting exposure living in both countries, Malaysia and Singapore, in how the kebaya is being seen as a masterpiece of art. It also brings me good memories of being a Singapore Airlines stewardess as we proudly wore the kebaya, not only as our uniform but as a representative of Singapore. To continue wearing the kebaya and continually seeing the kebaya worn by the citizens would indeed be an amazing achievement.

9 Sylph believes that a successful nomination would encourage Bruneians, Indonesians, Malaysians, Singaporeans, and Thais to further appreciate the kebaya, its beauty, and its rich history. Wearing the kebaya is not just wearing another piece of cloth but also showcasing the artwork that a crafts person has lovingly created. As it still might be seen as a traditional clothing, it would indeed be a great encouragement to the younger generation to continue this craftsmanship as well as favouring the citizens to wear the kebaya regardless of occasion. It would be for all these reasons that Sylph expresses her consent and support for the multinational nomination of kebaya to the UNESCO Representative List of IHC.

10 Attached with this letter (below) would be Sylph’s photographs in kebaya, which is shared in hopes that it would be of importance in adding to the successful nomination of kebaya.

11 

*where imagination lives forever*
International Celebration Images

Left: Peranakan turquoise kebaya (chosen as the colour is usually associated with Penangites) worn with amah’s sarung (chosen as it is from my amah, generation heritage), kasut manik, paired with miniature origami crane earrings (chosen as it is associated with Japanese origami), and miniature origami phoenix kerongsang (chosen as the phoenix is a symbol recognised within Peranakan).

Right: Taken with Mrs Yuko Ishikawa, the wife of the Ambassador of Japan in Singapore on 23rd February 2023 in celebration of the Emperor of Japan’s 63rd Birthday Celebration in Ritz Carlton, Singapore.

Exhibition Images

Left: Wearing the kebaya during the opening of The Beauty and Diversity of Japanese Washi Paper, a collaboration with Mrs Masako Soeda, a Japanese paper doll artist, and Mino washi, a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, in Japan Creative Centre, Singapore. (Photograph together with Singapore’s ceramist, Iskandar Jalil and his wife, Ms Saleha.)

Right: Wearing the kebaya during Sylph’s solo exhibition of kirie Peranakan Batik, raising awareness towards the culture, heritage, and traditions of a Penang Peranakan nyonya, translating amah’s sarung to paper at GMBB, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

“where imagination lives forever”
Event Images

Left : Wearing the kebaya during the pop-up of iLight Marina Bay, in conjunction with Singapore Design Week.
Right : Wearing the kebaya during the Christmas Fair at Orchard Rendezvous Hotel with Japan Creative Centre Director, Ms Akiko Sugita.

Guiding Images

Top : Wearing the kebaya while guiding at the NUS Baba House, Singapore.
Workshop Images

Top: Wearing kebaya while teaching Side flower Peranakan Kirie workshop to Japanese at the Japanese Association Singapore.
Left: Wearing kebaya while conducting origami workshop during the COVID-19 pandemic in conjunction with Singapore’s 56th National Day (and the last day of the Tokyo Olympics 2020) with the Japan Creative Centre, and the People’s Association.

Thank you for your kind time in reading this letter of consent.

Yours sincerely,

Tan Shu Ying
Owner/Creative Director
Sylph Pte. Ltd.
To whom it may concern,

March 16, 2023

Dear Sir/ Mdm,

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE MULTINATIONAL NOMINATION OF KEBAYA TO UNESCO’S REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

The Textile and Fashion Industry Training Centre (TaF.tc) express our full support and consent for the multinational nomination of the Kebaya to UNESCO’s representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Textile and Fashion Industry Training Centre Pte Ltd (TaF.tc) was established in 1983 and has been a long-term partner of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) as the appointed Continuous Education Training Centre (CET) of the textile and fashion industry. TaF.tc is also EduTrust certified by the Committee for Private Education (CPE) in Singapore.

Since 2009 we have received regional recognition for providing industry training and consultancy in countries including Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, China, Laos, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Our in-depth knowledge of pre-production processes within the fashion industry enables factories to move up the supply chain through capacity development in Merchandising, Design and Product Development. Working in close collaboration with industry associations in other countries, we help identify competencies and performance gaps, and provide capacity development through our robust training programmes in our esteemed design school.

As of July 2020, TaF.tc has partnered and signed accreditation agreements with other renowned fashion schools and universities locally and overseas. To date, we have partnered with the following schools and universities:

- Atelier Chardon Savard (ACS) - Paris
- Paris College of Art (PCA) - Paris
- MDIS School of Fashion (SFD) - Singapore
- Mod’Art International Paris | Sri Lanka - Colombo/Paris
- LIM College - New York
- Academy of Art University - San Francisco
It is our belief that the Kebaya should be listed as it showcases the identity and rich history of the clothing of our region. Having taught students both locally and worldwide, it is imperative that the kebaya be recognized not just for what it represents but to be able to inspire future designers on the cultural significance of the Kebaya and how it can be translated for modern dressing. It is from my experience that when I show the Kebaya to the students, both locally and internationally, they were often enamored by the quality of work and the references it has on the world stage. From inspiration by designers like the world renowned Dries van Noten to the identity of our national carrier Singapore Airlines, the Kebaya has been see all over the world but rarely has there been a connection to it on the South-East Asian region. By providing this platform, we hope it will garner much interest and pride to the heritage of this part of the world.

In our institution, we strive to create an environment where students are constantly inspired and look at the past to create the future. This has led us to bring students to view historical clothings, environment and artifacts and challenge the students to create fashion that not only pushes the idea of spreading what is in our backyard to the commercial customers but also to the world. This is especially true when the international exchange students get to experience the heritage of our region and get them inspired and bring this piece of our history back home and create fashion that makes their designs much more special, inclusive and diverse. In fact, when students from China or France comes to Singapore during their exchange programme, they were often surprised why elements of South-East Asian culture were not as widely recognized as it should be.

For the local fashion students, having this recognition will also inspire them to look deeper to their own heritage and bring a sense of pride to present designs that is deeply rooted in their own backyard and will help in creating designs that are more intimate and tells a story that everyone in the region can relate and understand. As is, we have students/ designers from Malay...
and Peranakan descent wanting to push forth the idea of not just modernizing the Kebaya, but make it more accessible to the modern dressers of Singapore, to infuse the traditional and pride of the region into styles that make their designs and brand stand out from the crowd in a world that dresses so similarly and homogeneous.

This is also the reason why this initiative is a collaborative effort involving regional countries like Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. It will tie a connective thread to strengthen the story of our countries and bring forth references and interpretation of the Kebaya in this region to the world. And it is with this thought, TaF.tc is onboard together with our partner around the region to advocate for the multinational nomination of the Kebaya to UNESCO’s Representation List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Yours truly,

Thomas Tan
Deputy Director/ Senior Design Consultant & Trainer
Textile & Fashion Industry Training Centre, Singapore

Email address: thomas@taftc.org
Telephone: +65 9686 7329
27 February 2023

To: UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee

Letter of consent for the

Consent in Support of Multinational Nomination of Kebaya onto the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Dear Sir/Mdm,

1. The Intan was founded in 2003 with the purpose of promoting and celebrating Singapore’s unique Peranakan culture. Over the last 20 years, The Intan has hosted thousands of local and foreign visitors.

2. Some of the key activities organised by The Intan that are related to kebaya are
   a. Kebaya set up at various local community events eg community centres, schools, associations
   b. Teaching children how to dress a kebaya as HomeTeamNS Tplay and Kidzania
   c. Presenting the Kebaya at overseas Tourism and Diplomatic events including China, Korea, UK, France and Spain

3. The Intan promotes the Peranakan kebaya by sharing with visitors how the kebaya encompasses local, Chinese and European culture. Children and visitors are encouraged to wear the kebaya for photo taking @ The Intan.

4. The kebaya has a strong identity with the Peranakan culture since 1930s. The kebaya is now a statement for Peranakan ladies who want to identify themselves as Peranakans.

5. The Intan hereby consents and support the multinational nomination of kebaya by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to be listed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Alvin Yapp

The Intan Pte Ltd (201922016D)
Alvin@busads.com.sg
93382234
69 Joo Chiat Terrace Singapore 427231
The Peranakan Association Singapore
Raffles City P.O. Box 1640
Singapore 911755

Attn: UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee

Dear Sirs/Madams,

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR NOMINATION OF THE KEBAYA FOR INSCRIPTION ON THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

BACKGROUND

The Peranakan community is a unique aspect of Southeast Asian culture. Its origins can be traced back to the 14th century when merchants from around the world travelled via the Maritime Silk Road for trade purposes. Among these merchants were southern Chinese seafarers who would settle in major ports in Southeast Asia, including Singapore. These early Chinese settlers would intermarry with non-Muslim indigenous women and their offspring were known as Peranakan Chinese.

The Peranakan Chinese recognised the importance of building trust with the local communities through cultural exchange if they wanted to make their port of call a permanent home. After many years of cultural exchange with the local people, the Peranakan Chinese learned to appreciate and embrace cultures different from their own. They readily accepted the cultural differences, which would explain why the Peranakan Chinese community has such a rich cultural
heritage, which is a primarily a fusion between Chinese, Malay and other Southeast Asian cultural influences. They have their own distinct traditions, including their own language, cuisine, music, dance, jewellery and clothing.

The kebaya is an excellent example of how the Peranakan Chinese women successfully adopted local fashion and adapted it to suit their preferences. They transformed the kebaya into a version shorter than what was traditionally favoured by the indigenous women and embellished it with intricate embroidery (sulam) and lacework. This fusion of different cultural influences not only showcases the appreciation for aesthetics by the Peranakan Chinese, but it also demonstrates the community's ability, willingness and openness to embrace and incorporate elements of other cultures into their own.

The Peranakan community's unique blend of cultural influences is a testament to the importance of cultural exchange and its role in fostering mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance. The ability of the Peranakans to appreciate and embrace other cultures while preserving their own identity and heritage is a valuable lesson for future generations and an important step towards building a more inclusive and harmonious society.

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION SINGAPORE

The history of The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) dates back to its founding as the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) on 17 August 1900. Its original objective was to provide a platform for discussions on social and moral welfare for the community. As Singapore evolved into an independent state, the SCBA changed its name to The Peranakan Association Singapore on 23 February 1966.

The association is dedicated to educating society on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Peranakan community through various initiatives. They engage with the public through their publications, such as THE PERANAKAN magazine, as well as workshops, talks, exhibitions, and by maintaining an active social media presence. The association also regularly holds events, such as dinners and dances, overseas tours, and collaborates with organisations such as the People’s Association, National Heritage Board, The Peranakan Museum, National Library Board, and Friends of the Museum. These initiatives are platforms for the community to showcase their identity by wearing the kebaya and learn more about the significance of this garment. (Refer to Appendix 1: Talks, Seminars, Workshops, Social Events)
The goal of TPAS is to create a social environment where the Peranakan community can understand their history and heritage and integrate their culture into their daily lives. The association aims to make their culture relevant and accessible to all, and they often provide opportunities for the community to showcase their heritage and practise their culture, such as by wearing their traditional kebayas with pride. Through these activities, TPAS strives to cultivate a sense of pride and appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the Peranakans.

TPAS has been publishing its magazine called "THE PERANAKAN" since June 1994, which continues to be a valuable source of information and education on the culture of the Peranakan community, including the kebaya, both within and without Singapore to this day. The magazine is produced through the efforts of dedicated volunteers on the editorial committee, writers, and advertisers, who work together to make it a unique and vibrant contribution to Singapore's cultural landscape. It not only explores traditional cultural values but also looks at how the community is evolving and advancing, promoting an exchange of ideas in the process. (Refer to Appendix 2 – Some editions of THE PERANAKAN magazine)

The magazine is an excellent way for the younger generation to learn about their culture and heritage. It also serves as a means for the 14 Peranakan associations which make up “The Federation of Peranakan Associations” to disseminate information about their activities and any significant events in their respective associations. (Refer to Appendix 3: Cultivating the Younger Generation)

With the magazine soon to be made available online, TPAS hopes to raise greater awareness of the culture by reaching an even wider audience. The association has also been gaining more attention on its social media platforms in recent years as monthly videos are released to update the public on upcoming events. (Refer to Appendix 4: Social Media).

The Federation of Peranakan Associations comprises 14 associations from various countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. The Baba Nyonya International Convention is a highly anticipated event organised by the members of the federation by rotation. The convention represents an opportunity for delegates from the member countries to come together to discuss and study the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Peranakan community. The discussions are active and lively, with a focus on both the history of the culture and finding ways to make it relevant to the community in
the present and future. *(Refer to Appendix 5: Listing of The Federation of Peranakan Associations)*

In 2021, TPAS live-streamed the 33rd Baba Nyonya International Convention due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to uphold its tradition of connecting members of the community despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. The federation provides an important platform for members to come together and share their experiences, knowledge, and ideas on preserving and promoting the Peranakan culture. *(Refer to Appendix 6 Past Conventions hosted by TPAS)*

The kebaya is a traditional attire that holds great significance in the cultural heritage and identity of Southeast Asia. Its popularity and widespread usage in countries such as Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and even some parts of Australia are a testament to its deep historical and strong cultural roots. TPAS recognises the importance of safeguarding and promoting the kebaya, and has taken various initiatives to achieve this. For instance, TPAS works closely with the Peranakan Museum in the research and promotion of the kebaya, locally and abroad. *(Refer to Appendix 7 TPAS Collaborations with the Peranakan Museum)*

**FUTURE ENDEAVOURS**

To increase the visibility and awareness of the kebaya, the association will continue to actively promote it through its publication (THE PERANAKAN magazine), as well as its online presence and social media platforms. The association will endeavour to organise workshops, talks, exhibitions, and discussions centred around the kebaya to educate people about its cultural significance and to encourage its wider use as fashionable wear, both for daily (even to the workplace) and festive occasions.

In addition, the association will give their full support when working with various government agencies such as the National Heritage Board, National Library Board, Singapore Tourism board, and Ministry of Education to raise awareness of and create sustained interest in the kebaya and its cultural importance. Being an active member of the federation, the association will continue to work with them to promote interest in the kebaya and continue to create a social environment conducive for Peranakans and non-Peranakans alike to come together to encourage each other in their cultivation of appreciation for the kebaya.
The Peranakan Association Singapore fully supports the nomination of the kebaya jointly by Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Thailand - for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The association believes this would encourage more connectedness between the people of the participating countries and also help to promote the rich cultural heritage associated with the kebaya and to entrench its place and enhance its relevance in today’s society and future generations.

Yours sincerely

Nyonya Genevieve Jeffs
President, 2022 - 2024
The Peranakan Association Singapore
10 February 2023
APPENDIX 1: TALKS, SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS, SOCIAL EVENTS

POSSIBLY THE SMALLEST LITERARY FESTIVAL IN THE WORLD

The Penang Literary Festival was held in the beautiful city of Penang, Malaysia. The festival featured a variety of events including readings, workshops, and discussions with local and international authors.

THE FESTIVAL RETURNS THIS YEAR: BIGGER & BETTER!

This year's festival featured a range of new events and activities, including a workshop on creative writing for children and a panel discussion on the role of the library in modern society.

PETONG KERTAA MERAH DEMONSTRATION

The Petong Kertaa Merah Demonstration was held on the streets of Penang to raise awareness about the plight of the local community. The demonstration was organized by a group of concerned residents who are fighting for their rights and little by little, the petitioning gathering of the demonstrators has increased. The organizers are urging the government to take action to address the community's concerns.

CHRISTMAS MALAM JOLLY

The Christmas Malam Jolly celebration was held in the city of Penang. The event featured a range of activities including traditional carol singing, a tree lighting ceremony, and a festive market.

The story of the Penang Literary Festival, which is a popular annual literary event in Penang, Malaysia, is presented in this edition of the Penang Literary Festival Report. The festival, which is held in the beautiful city of Penang, features a wide range of events including readings, workshops, and discussions with local and international authors. This year's festival featured a range of new events and activities, including a workshop on creative writing for children and a panel discussion on the role of the library in modern society. The Petong Kertaa Merah Demonstration was held on the streets of Penang to raise awareness about the plight of the local community. The demonstration was organized by a group of concerned residents who are fighting for their rights and little by little, the petitioning gathering of the demonstrators has increased. The organizers are urging the government to take action to address the community's concerns. The Christmas Malam Jolly celebration was held in the city of Penang. The event featured a range of activities including traditional carol singing, a tree lighting ceremony, and a festive market.
APPENDIX 2: SOME EDITIONS OF THE PERANAKAN MAGAZINE
Tales of a Peranakan Heritage

NYONYA JOY QUEK KOOS LIAN, A LONG-TIME TEACHER AND FORMER STUDENT OF SCGS, SPELLS OUT AN ANNUAL TRADITION OF THE SCHOOL

Every year, all the Secondary One pupils of Singapore Chinese Girls’ School (SCGS) make a three-day pilgrimage to Malacca. Their mission: to acquaint themselves with the historical town of their institution’s heritage as a Peranakan school.

Mrs Florence Phua, previously a student and a retired vice-principal of SCGS, shared that when the school became independent in 1989, it sought a holistic range of enrichment programmes to boost the curriculum and make learning interesting. Lessons would go beyond the classroom, “so we started local and overseas heritage tours, social etiquette, camps, and so on.”

Malacca afforded the young ladies a chance to be away from home, out of their comfort zone, to learn culture, heritage and history. This, revealed Mrs Phua, “was when we built and capitalised on the story of SCGS, its Peranakan roots and created the kengkoh image.” Tan Tock Seng was one of the earliest Peranakans who came to Singapore from Malacca. His descendant, Tan Hoong Siang, was the SCGS Board chairman for many years. His son, Tan Jiew Hoe, remains a member of the Board.

This annual tradition to bring SCGS kengkoh out of Singapore has carried on since 1991, long before it was fashionable for schools to do so. At the end of term one in early March, some eight classes of students – about 240 girls in all – troop up north to visit the stronghold of Peranakan culture.

Programmes vary, depending on whether the English or History Departments are leading the visits. The girls could be visiting the museums, the Stadhuys, tasting the cuisine, attending cooking lessons, or even meeting up with the Indian Malakan community Indian Peranakans who speak Malay but practice Hinduism and don the kebaya.

“Kengkoh gold and jade in Hokkien: An accomplished young maiden of good character is like jade encased in gold. Every piece of jade is unique. The SCGS philosophy, started by former Principal Mrs Rosebud Heng, is to instil in the best qualities of each and every kengkoh entrapped in their care.”

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The kei kei touch
After the trip to Melaka, the students would document the history of customs, festivals and architecture, or even research on topics such as special foods for pregnancy. I recently discovered some former students' works that are precious to the school. Their project was to rewrite fairy tales with a Peranakan twist.
And so we have Cinderella as a nyonya learning to cook and bearing slippers, a modern-day nyonya who goes through a time warp to her grandmother's era, the sufferings of an infertile first wife in a Peranakan household and other tales, captured in charming illustrations and even hand-stitched felt fabric (top right).
YOUNG PERANAKAN

BRINGING UP NYONYAS
By Linda Chee

More than a century after it was opened by Baba Song Ong Siang for young nyonyas to be educated, the Singapore Chinese Girls’ School continues to keep traditions alive by cleverly weaving them into the curriculum.

From the garden...
The Singapore Chinese Girls’ School has preserved an important aspect of the Peranakan household – the garden – with its own green courtyard featuring plants the Peranakans consider both beautiful and functional.

“I chose them based on the pre-1935 Malay garden. The list of plants came from the Botanic Gardens Bulletin in 1933 by Professor R E Holtum,” said Mr Tan Jiew Hoe, President of the Singapore Gardening Society and a Board Director of the school. He personally supervised the design and planting for the Peranakan Courtyard.

SCGS’ Courtyard has plants commonly found in Peranakan gardens and are used for a variety of purposes. Some for aesthetic value, but mostly for other reasons such as their usefulness in cooking, for medicine, as food or cosmetic dyes, as natural air fresheners for the house or at family altars.

“This tradition is used to convey values and as a vibrant learning venue where students research on the use of various plants that also relates to aspects of science at the same time,” said Mrs Julie Lee, SCGS Registrar.

...to the kitchen
Home Economics as taught in SCGS reflects the cooking tradition so valued by the community for one of the most revered aspects of the culture – its unique cuisine. Peranakan condiments are used, some proudly from the school’s own garden, to cook up a storm of mouth-watering dishes and desserts.

Mrs Dora Fernandez and her domestic science students.

SCGS’ own Peranakan courtyard.
Next Generation Nyonyas

BABA EMBER LAU DISCOVERS HOW TWO YOUNG LADIES WITH A PASSION FOR TEXTILES ARE INFUSING THEIR WORK WITH PERANAKAN-DERIVED TECHNIQUES

CHERYL TEO, 22

Fashion graduate Cheryl Teo was a student of Nanyang Junior College, but she eschewed taking the typical route into one of Singapore’s universities. Instead, buoyed by her passion for textile and design (and thankfully with the blessing of her family), she enrolled in LASALLE College of the Arts, where she graduated with a B.A. specialising in Fashion Textiles in May 2016.

Her expertise includes textile print designs, surface manipulation and embroidery. She loves bright and bold motifs, and cites European designer Mary Katrantzou as one of her inspirations. However, she isn’t one to merely ape others. “I love relatively new techniques like digital printing and laser cutting, because they open up fresh possibilities for fabrication. I combine these processes with traditional methods which require handcrafting – and it’s in that where you will see elements of salom and other artisanal methods at play.” Her experiments with techniques include thread sketching, eyelet making, satin stitches, ribbon and kerawang or cutwork embroidery.

The fabric samples she totes along for her interview with The Peranakan reveal a love for intense, vibrant colour much like those seen on song kebayas. A closer inspection reveals the inclusion of refined traditional techniques – evidence of a budding couturier at work. Cheryl continues to experiment and refine her craft. She acknowledges certain parameters. “For digital printing colours are best reproduced on 100% polyester, and there are width restrictions owing to the size of the printing press we can feed the fabric through. Still, I love how
creating fashion textile designs allow me to express myself and tell a story through the work I produce.”

For her graduate collection, she collaborated with her classmate, pattern cutter Agnes Cito, and created a brand called ARYL CITO. The collection features motifs derived by pixelating traditional batik patterns such as the Japanese "paring" motif. The pieces were well received both in Singapore and at the London Graduate Fashion Week, and can be viewed and pre-ordered at http://aryltoowissite.com/fashion. The duo’s pieces were even selected for a TANGS department store pop-up retail concept.

“If things go well, I may take the brand further and do it full-time. Alternatively, I would love to work as a fashion textile designer in an established firm to gain more insight and experience.”

An example of Devi’s intricate handwork.

Devi experiments with silkmul and beading techniques and is proficient at handwork, making elaborate A-line, hand-crafted, hangul dresses, taking no longer than a couple of days to complete each item. She even managed to complete beading one handsewn slipper face in just eight hours. She likes floral motifs, in particular those on batik cachin, but is content to work on a neutral white palette for the moment, refining her stitching skills as she wishes to become an excellent embroiderer and healer first of all.

Devi eventually hopes to work with a designer like Peggy Hartanto, whose strong, clean lines and almost architectural construction of her garments belies the fact that the pieces employ traditional techniques and design inspirations. She shares, “I want to get adequate work experience and familiarize myself with the business side of things as well. It is my dream to one day start my own clothing brand in Jakarta.”
APPENDIX 4: SOCIAL MEDIA

http://www.peranakan.org.sg
The Peranakan Association Singapore Facebook

Regular Chakap-Chakap Sessions (Monthly updates)

Let's Chakap Chakap with the President (Jan 2023)

Dear Nyonyas and Babas,

Selamat Tahun Baru! Happy Lunar New Year to all!

In this month’s video, I am joined by Director of Asian... See more
APPENDIX 5: LISTING OF THE FEDERATION OF PERANAKAN ASSOCIATIONS

SINGAPORE

The Peranakan Association Singapore
Raffles City P.O. Box 1640
Singapore 911755

Gunong Sayang Association
205 Marine Parade Road
Singapore 449530

Peranakan Indian Association Singapore (Chitty Melaka)
5001 Beach Road #08-09, Golden Mile Complex
Singapore 199588

INDONESIA

Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia
Hero Building II Suite 902, Jl.
Jend Gatot Subroto 177A, KAV. 64
Jarkarta 12870, Indonesia

Peranakan Tionghoa Warga Indonesia (PERTIWI)
Yayasan PERTIWI c/o King’s EEC,
Jalan Baharudin No. 8,
Tangerang 15111, Banten, Indonesia

MALAYSIA

Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka (PPCM)
149 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock (Heeren Street)
Melaka 75200, Malaysia

Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Malaysia
243 Jalan Tangkera
Melaka 75200, Malaysia
State Chinese (Penang) Association
a.k.a Persatuan Peranakan Cina Pulau Pinang
13 Jalan Perak Road, Penang 10150, Malaysia

Persatuan Peranakan Baba Nyonya Kuala Lumpur & Selangor
Persatuan Peranakan Cina Kelantan
Unit B-8-3A, Block B, Menara KIP,
No.1 Jalan Seri, Utara, off Jalan Ipoh
Kuala Lumpur 68100, Malaysia

Persatuan Peranakan Cina Kelantan
B-234, Jalan Wan Ahmad,
17500 Tanah Merah, Kelantan, Malaysia

THAILAND

Thai Peranakan Association
124 Yaowarat Road, Taladyai Muang
Phuket 83000, Thailand

AUSTRALIA

Peranakan Association Australia Inc. (Melbourne)
PO Box 1278, Hawksburn, Victoria, Australia 3142

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APPENDIX 6: PAST CONVENTIONS HOSTED BY TPAS

2015: 28th Baba Nyonya Convention & Peranakan Arts Festival

What a Grand Affair!
NYONYA DAHNY MARIE LEE COVERS THE 29TH Baba Nyonya Convention AND INAUGURAL PERANAKAN ARTS FESTIVAL 2015

The colourfull cast of Bilikis Behind Bars, Kena Again!

TPAS President Baba Peter Wee sounds the opening gong.

The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) was honoured to host the 28th Baba Nyonya Convention in Singapore. A record 300 overseas delegates from 11 Peranakan associations attended the event that ran from 4 to 8 November 2015. The Convention rotates among various host countries. The last convention in Singapore was five years ago.

Welcoming Peranakans from Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand, Convention Chairman Raymond Wong invited participants to “collectively make a grand toast to our future”. A series of interactive seminars about Revisiting Peranakan Possibilities explored language and identity, the business of being Peranakan, and the Peranakan Wish List, where participants shared their hopes for the future of our community.

A teh tarik drink saw babas and nyonyas dressed in their best batik and kebaya excitedly meeting old friends and making new ones. Australian Merilyn Pacey who hails from Penang, a small farming town with a population just a fraction of Katong’s, said that she felt so warmly welcomed. “When my friend Lynne Cartagene and I arrived at the Convention, we were surprised at how many people wanted to take photos with us. Maybe they were amazed that we had embraced Peranakan culture and came all the way to Singapore to be a part of this event.”

The first Peranakan Arts Festival

For the first time, a Peranakan Arts Festival was also held in conjunction with the Convention in and around the historic Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall. A collaboration between TPAS and GenerAsia, the exciting event line-up included four exhibitions, numerous live performances, cooking demonstrations, fashion shows, a bustling bazaar and two world premier theatre plays.

The two plays, Baba Richard Tan’s Bilikis Behind Bars, Kena Again! and Baba Desmond Sun’s Ponta Pugur, enthralled audiences with much humour, drama and colour.

In Baba Richard’s musical comedy, the bilikis of Katong were up to mischief and unwittingly run foul of the law. “I had laughed so much in a long time!” said Nyonya Roselind Lee who watched it with her daughter. “The cast was really talented and I loved all the Baba Malay jokes which are so seldom heard these days,” she added.

In contrast, the romantic drama Ponta Pugur left audiences in a reflective mood. Set in the colonial days, it is a poignant tale of two lovers who swing by at close quarters but never quite connect. Their 40-year love affair was heartwarming to watch. Written in English, the play made Peranakan theatre accessible to those not fluent in Baba Malay.

There was something for everyone at the Festival. From Peranakan tile painting to woodblock printing, jazz and janger, batik painting and handbell performances. Even the most jaded palates were tickled with innovative hokkien ice cream!
Laughter all around as the masterful moderator Baha Fuad Meng heats up the lively discussions during the seminars.

Delegates from the region, including Melbourne and Phuket, in a bonding moment.

From left: Seminar panellists Zain Ho, Lim Wee and Thomas Kwok.

A grand finale shot for the KJ delegation against the backdrops of Sir Stamford Raffles statue and the Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall.
The Melbourne Perankees performing their versions of classic Boba tunes

Singers from the New South Wales Peranakan Association

Delegates from Australia

Lovely to have Life President, Robert Lee Kip Lee, (second from left) joining us.

Our counterparts from Indonesia

A lighter moment

Joyful pajet of the 8th panjung dinner.

Partying the night away with jazz and pajet.
APPENDIX 7 TPAS COLLABORATIONS WITH THE PERANAKAN MUSEUM

2011 – Baba Bling in Paris, France

EVENTS

TAKING PARIS WITH PANACHE
Baba Emeric Lau gets happily wed in the City of Romance – five times over!

This was an opportunity like no other. For Peranaks, the traditional wedding procession with serenades, lanterns, umbrellas, chilli and bridal couple, sangtek um, pak chinnick plus family members in tow is a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle, mounted to trumpet a new union and display their families’ finery.

There is no other image more emblematic of the 12-day wedding than the procession. For contemporary lovebirds, nothing says “you’re the ONE” more than taking off together for a holiday in Paris, the City of Romance.

How about combining the two? A Peranakan wedding procession in Paris – what a dream! And it certainly was no less than a dream come true for me to have the honour of playing the groom in a wedding procession staged at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, smack beside the Eiffel Tower.

It all came about through a desire to further strengthen relations between Singapore and France. The two countries decided to mount the Singapore Festivals in Paris to showcase Singapore culture to the French. Several government bodies, led by the Singapore Ministry of Information, Culture and the Arts, requested that The Peranakan Association Singapore (TPAS) organise an entertainment item to add drama to the various opening events for the Musée du Quai Branly’s Baba Bling exhibition.
which was to be mounted over there, along with selected star pieces from Singapore’s Peranakan Museum.

Needless to say, we were completely enthralled from the outset. Peranakan culture was going truly international. We can say for certain that this is the first time the culture has been shown off on such a scale outside Southeast Asia.

Moreover, our stage would be Paris—a city widely recognised as the Cultural Capital of the World!

Preparations began in early 2010 via the remarkable liaising and organising skills of Nonya Bebe Seet. Happily, it all proved more than worthwhile.

The Straits Times, 10 Oct 2007

Our shawl bearers had to watch out for low ceiling!

Lang Lang plays the samba

The 23 representatives from TPAS, which included dora G T Lee in the role of sang kek am, flew direct to Paris on 30 September. For the next five days, we lived in a whirlwind wonderland of rehearsals, performances and taking in the sights, sounds and (but of course) fine cuisine that the city readily yielded. For me, this experience will remain unforgettable.

Sadly, Mdm Kwa Geok Choo, the mother of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, passed away, necessitating his abrupt return to Singapore while on tour in Europe. The PM would otherwise have been guest of honour at the official opening of the exhibition. Minister for MICA, Lui Tuck Yew, stepped in, while the French were represented by Culture Minister Frederic Mitterrand. Other familiar figures in attendance included Professor Tommy Koh and our very own Baba Dick Lee.

The wedding procession, tea ceremony and Singapore medley sung by The Peranakan Voces (TPV) were greeted with enthusiastic applause. Many guests openly expressed admiration for the high level of detailing on the Peranakan costumes and artefacts. Such was the delight expressed that even the oldest amongst us forgot all about the one feet and aching jaws from standing and smiling for the countless cameras pointed our way.

We enacted the wedding procession and tea ceremony a total of five times for various audiences—friends and supporters of the museum, the French and international media at the official opening and a VIP dinner reception.

Other activities included cooking demonstrations by Violet Oon and Bebe’s beadmaking sessions.

For myself, this trip also proved a perfect chance to bond with other TPAS members.
I managed to learn much from the older members, and forge stronger friendships with those from my generation. Helping one another out backstage, trooping out late after the evening performance to look for a promising makan place to try out, cracking jokes and laughing till our sides ached – these treasured moments are really the intangible elements that will anchor and buoy our culture not just across the globe, but across time. We make it ours, and with panache. ☜

Left: The enthusiastic French media were literally in our faces!

Right: The Penangian Voices at the Batu Kling exhibition.

The exhibition, including the millenium-head tambulok, is realised ahead of schedule.

The creative team made large inflatable versions of our porcelainware. Vendors selling in the museum grounds took much delight in christening upon them.
2011-2012 Sarong Kebaya, Peranakan Fashion and its International Sources
FRUGALITY, OPULENCE OR MAGIC?

Baba Peter Lee wanders across time and continents to muse on patchwork and applique in artefacts from Sarong Kebaya, an exhibition at the Peranakan Museum (1 April 2011 to February 2012)

Patchwork is commonly associated with frugality, the assemblage of remnant fabrics stitched together for something practical or utilitarian. For Peranakans, this was called tampul or tampur, and was used to not only describe patching cloth together, but mending, even of teeth ( tampur gigi filling a tooth). Patchwork cloths (kaian tampul) were used for very specific purposes for the traditional child’s bib or stomacher (kaian), blanket (kaian selamat), a wrap for shoes (kaian bungkus kain) and even for a cloth to dry the hands (kaian lap tangen).

Yet can patchwork really be an expression of frugality? The meticulous and time-consuming craft of cutting various types of cloth, planning a coherent pattern or arrangement out of the variences, and carefully stitching them altogether, should be regarded as a rather elaborate art form. In many Peranakan households, the fragments used for patchwork were not salvaged rags, but remnants of expensive cloth. A darned hole in a skirt or jacket would be more fitting expression of frugality. In the case of protective leather elbow patches on tweed jackets, which were originally worn in Scotland for hunting, they have evolved to become a fashion statement.

The same can be said of the Buddhist monk’s kasaya, or patchwork robe. It may have had its origins in the idea of frugality, but clearly by the Tang dynasty, high-ranking monks wore patchwork kasayas made from very expensive silk brocades. One example in the British Museum found in China’s Dunhuang caves and dating to the 8th or 9th century even has patches of purple silk, a colour that could only be worn with imperial sanction. The Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term kasaya is j joyful, and interestingly another variant meaning of this word is ‘muslin’, which must have come from the old Indian trade word for gauze, which is still used in Baba Malay in the term kaian gelap (organdi)

But this was hardly the earliest example of patchwork. In the collection of Cairo’s Egyptian Museum is a royal patchwork funerary canopy (much like the Peranakan kantong) made of multi-coloured gauze dating to 960 BC, and is said to belong to Queen Ismikhef of the Twenty First Dynasty. As for Christendom, it has been suggested Joseph’s multi-coloured coat may have been made of patchwork. In Protestant England, Catholic priests in the 17th and 18th centuries apparently avoided detection by disguising their cassocks as patchwork quilts. An excellent example of a patchwork cassock is preserved in the Chapel of All Saints, Waddour Castle in Wiltshire.

Patchwork o, to left’s bib made of machine woven kaian chintz (plain white), early 20th century, collection of Ms. Helen Fise, New York.

All other photographs courtesy of the Peranakan Museum.

Photograph collection of the Peranakan Museum and Asian Civilisation Museum, gifts of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Looi, Ceremonial cloth and headdress collection of Mr & Mrs Lee Kip Looi.
FEATURE

Umar (c. 586-644), the second Caliph in Islam, lived an ascetic life and possessed only a patchwork shirt and mantle. Islamic rulers in Java, such as the sultan of Jogjakarta, also wore patchwork jackets in the 19th century, although this had more to do with their talismanic qualities and with the similar kind of jackets worn by traditional shamans in remote areas such as the Tengger in east Java. Indian textiles and specific patterns even were considered to possess magical qualities.

In the Javanese royal courts the patchwork pattern was called antekosma and the jackets were known as kuiw antekosma ("the venerable many-flowered"). An 18th-century patchwork coat from Lampung in the exhibition, made from a breathtaking array of fine Indian, European, Chinese and Japanese cloths for a local chief may have been influenced by the Javanese court of Banten, and therefore may have had a talismanic function. In the 18th century, control of the pepper trade in the area was a prime concern of not only the kingdom of Banten, but also of Palembang, as well as the Dutch East India Company. Then again, with patchwork and quilts being so popular in Holland and its American colonies at that time as well, it may have even been commissioned by a Dutch agent as a lavish gift for a Lampung chief.

Another kind of patchwork technique—appliqué—was also used on lace kebaya worn by European women. Kebayas with lace borders were worn by women in the Dutch colonies at least since the early 18th century. By the late 19th century, it had become a standard fashion. The exhibition displays kebaya from this period made of cotton, linen and silk, and decorated with motifs using a wide array of intricate needlework techniques, including fine appliqué floral patterns. In this technique, a piece of cloth is cut into a decorative shape and sewn onto or under another cloth to create a pattern. In contrast, the kebaya today is only made of voile and ornamented solely with sewing machine embroidery.

Patchwork designs, known in Java as tembahan, were potent symbols (curiously, shamans in the Philippine Islands are also known as tembahan). Drawn and painted imitations of patchwork patterns were made in India in the 18th century for the Malay archipelago. This pattern survived in batiks made a century later, and tembahan became part of the classical Javanese repertoire of court patterns,
and was also a motif favoured by European, Eurasian and Chinese entrepreneurs in Pekalongan on Java’s north coast in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Each draped tambalan pattern is different, the arrangements of an array of intricate and finely executed patterns create designs that are dynamic and complex.

Against this historical backdrop, can Peranakan patchwork be nothing more than just frugality turned to craft? The child’s bib or 9 to (which in Malay is known as a barse), comes from a Chinese prototype that is usually embroidered.

Children who were not toilet-trained were often naked except for their 9 to. The patchwork variant was worn throughout Java, and even by European children in Batavia in the 18th century, and by Peranakan children up to the early 20th century. Even the 18th century Christian missionary Jan Brandes dressed his young son in a patchwork 9 to, and was happy that the boy was usually ‘walking around naked’. Could this design also have been inspired by a Javanese belief in the talismanic and protective powers of patchwork cloth? Children were so vulnerable to fatal illnesses that it is somehow impossible to believe that Peranakans made their precious offspring wear just meaningless scraps of cloth. Accordingly, could a patchwork 9 to mark tangas or handcloth therefore be some way to bring away bad luck? A patchwork selimut or blanket would have equally protective powers.

Underlying even the most mundane or utilitarian artefact from the past could be a universe of imagination, belief and history. However, centuries from now, what would historians think of our present-day bajes, blankets and bibs? *

2  http://www.flickr.com/photos/37567833@N00/4714793655/in/photoroom
3  Ali Veldhuizen-Djassoebrata, Bloemen van het Hedel, Rotterdam, 1984, p-76-78.
4  Cornellis de Bruyn, Reizen naar Mokongie, door Eerste en Tweede Maleis, Amsterdam, 1711, p. 356.

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Sarong Kebaya - Peranakan Fashion and its International Sources

Now on till 26 February 2012
The Peranakan Museum
39 Armenian Street
Tel: 6332 7591
Prevailing admission rates apply
2013 – Peranakan Exhibition in Seoul

CROSSING OVER TO KOREA

Koreans were introduced to Singapore’s Peranakan culture recently at a travelling exhibition at their National Museum of Korea.

The Asian Civilisations Museum’s Peranakan exhibition called “The Peranakan World: Cross-cultural Art from Singapore and the Straits” was successfully launched on 19 March 2013 and ended on 19 May.

It was to give Koreans a glimpse of Singapore’s multi-racial communities, how they evolved and how they form the core of Singapore’s identity.

With 230 objects from the Peranakan Museum, supplemented by loans from local collectors, the exhibition tells the fascinating story of how Chinese immigrants created an unique culture when they settled in their new homes in the Straits Settlements.

Visitors were able to explore this fusion culture that flourished during the golden age of the Peranakans from the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

The exhibition in Korea marks a significant milestone for Singapore as it is the first time that its Peranakan collection has travelled to East Asia. The exhibition had previously travelled once to Paris in 2010 where it was shown at the Museum du Quai Branly.

Dr Alan Chong, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum and Peranakan Museum said, “We are proud to present Peranakan art and culture to audiences in Korea. Peranakan art is an important example of multicultural contact, which reveals Singapore as a multicultural state, formed by centuries of trade, immigration and colonial networks.”

The exhibition included a weekend programme allowing visitors to gain an appreciation of the colourful and fusion culture of the Peranakans through engaging workshops on Peranakan headring, cuisine and fashions.

It was jointly curated by Dr Pedro Moura Carvalho, Chief Curator, Asian Civilisations Museum.
2016 Kebaya Exhibition in Shoto Museum in Tokyo
Nyonya Fashion goes to Japan
PERANAKAN MUSEUM CURATOR JACKIE YOONG REPORTS FROM FUKUOKA

The Peranakan Museum's first travelling exhibition focusing on Peranakan fashion opened in Fukuoka on 17 April as part of S.J50, celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Japan.

Co-organised with the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM), the showcase is inspired by an earlier exhibition held in Singapore in 2011 called Sarong Kebaya: Peranakan Fashion in an Interconnected World. Art historian Baba Peter Lee guest curated the exhibition, which features approximately 40 combinations of sarongs and kebayas exploring the evolution of the style over 200 years.

FAM Chief Curator Etsuko Iwamiga carefully tailored parts of the exhibition to target the Japanese audience. The display included a rare kimono under-robe made of batik fabric identified to that found in nyonya baju panjang from the collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee; and a Satai Hokokai batik originating from the time of the Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia, with Japanese-inspired designs from the Eiko Kusumisa collection at FAM.

Renowned singer-composer Dick Lee represented the Lee family at the Fukuoka opening. The exhibition travels to the Shoto Museum of Art, Tokyo, on 26 July. An exhibition catalogue in Japanese was produced. The exhibition was made possible by generous donations of sarongs and kebayas by Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee to both museums.