



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

# **CULTURAL PROMOTION OF PERANAKAN BABA NYONYA THROUGH VISUAL INFORMATION**

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CULTURAL PROMOTION OF PERANAKAN BABA NYONYA  
THROUGH VISUAL INFORMATION

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the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours  
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The project entitled '**Cultural Promotion of Peranakan Baba Nyonya through Visual Information**' is prepared by **Mah Phui Yan** and submitted to the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Bachelor's Degree of Applied Arts with Honours (**Design Technology**).

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## ABSTRACT

Peranakan Baba Nyonya is a unique ethnic group which combining two cultures, the Chinese and Malay. The heritage of Peranakan Baba Nyonya has published many articles and documentation in writings. This study will highlight the cultural promotions in a form of visual communication which emphasizes the visual design and history for preservation.

## ABSTRAK

Peranakan Baba Nyonya merupakan etnik unik hasil pertembungan dua budaya, Cina dan Melayu yang kemudiannya menghasilkan satu warisan baru yang sangat kaya dari pandangan kebudayaan kebangsaan. Warisan Peranakan Baba Nyonya banyak diterbitkan dalam bentuk tulisan artikel dan dokumentasi. Kajian ini pula akan mengenengahkan promosi kebudayaan Peranakan Baba Nyonya ke dalam bentuk komunikasi visual yang memberi penekanan terhadap seni reka grafik dalam memulihara warisan.

## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH BACKGROUND

#### 1.0 Introduction

There are some common terms are used to describe this community, such as the Peranakan, Straits Chinese, Baba Nyonya and Straits-born Chinese. Those terms refer to the descendant of intermarriages between foreigners and local as well as local-born. It describes the arrival of Chinese *Hokkien* traders in Melaka start from 1400s.

This hybridism of cultures had created a special lifestyle which included costumes, cuisine, Baba language, customs and rituals. The majority of south spoke is Malay and mixed with the Chinese *Hokkien* words. However, it was the reverse in Penang and is still spoken nowadays.

The Baba culture is described as “OCBC (*Orang Cina Bukan Cina*-not Chinese but it is Chinese)” from glory to wane. The main reasons are due to their categorization as Chinese, the descendants’ marriage with other ethnic group, and some has moved abroad, leading to the rapid loss of their ethnic nature. Thus, the numbers of Peranakan are getting declined, and their culture is being disappearing without actively observe or practice. Although their culture has been much written through academics, there are lacks of community issues. Thus, this study focuses on the cultural promotions through the visual communication which preserve the history.



## **1.1 Origin of Peranakan Baba Nyonya**

Chinese seafarers and traders arrived in Malay Peninsula from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Kheng, 2001). They stay in Malacca for around six months, waiting for the monsoon seasons to sail them back to home. It is because of these men did not bring their women folk along and some of them settled in region and set up trading settlements along the Straits of Malacca, intermarried with local women and eventually adopted local customs.

From this intermarriage, evolved a unique people and became known as Straits Chinese, Peranakan Chinese or Baba (men) Nyonya (women), which mean they are local-born. The early merchants brought their own culture and traditions with them which have resulted in the distinct of subculture.

Before the thirteenth century, Islam was not introduced to the region. Thus, the Babas and Nyonyas are essentially a unique balance of lifestyle between the Malay and Chinese world traditions.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

### **1.2.1 The Lack of Culture Awareness on Baba Nyonya.**

According to S. K. Lee (2008), there are some conditions to lead the culture of Peranakan Baba Nyonya not fully observed and practiced, especially in rituals and customs. It is because of the high demand of modern living and the changing role of the Nyonyas.

Nowadays, many modern Nyonyas do not know the traditional cook on Peranakan cuisine; many of the young generation cannot speak the Baba language, and not much observed rituals and customs. In addition, Peranakan Baba Nyonya prefer to wear the modern clothes, except on special occasions.

### 1.3 Research Objectives:

- I. To **identify** the problems on the culture of Peranakan Baba Nyonya in promotional visual information.
- II. To **analyse** the Peranakan Baba Nyonya culture and promotional items in visual information.
- III. To **propose** new visual information based on research.
- IV. To **validate** the effectiveness final outcome of the campaign.

### 1.4 Hypothesis

The culture of Baba Nyonya can still survive in nowadays by achieving the culture awareness. The effectiveness of promotions will keep the Peranakan culture stay alive. It will lead the public to be more understood of the Peranakan culture. Thus, the new visual information will be proposed through documented publication and print advertisements. With the visual information, the public will get more interest on knowing the culture of Baba Nyonya.

## 1.5 Scope

Target audiences are set on teenagers who start from the ages 13 above. The places to get the primer information are Heritage Houses at Melaka and Penang in which hotel, inn or museum still remain the structure of Peranakan culture. On the other hand, explore the integration of visual design and printed media or material.



Picture 1: Pinang Peranakan Mansion.

## 1.6 Limitation

This study is hardly to witness the celebrating of the Peranakan traditional ceremony and festival, for instance Thanksgiving festival, Chinese New Year and wedding ceremony.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

There are some aspects including on this chapter, for instance introduction about this research background and the origin of Peranakan Baba Nyonya. From this subject matter, some conditions which lead the culture of Peranakan are not fully observed or practised. On the following, study specified the objectives and defined the scope of this research. However, there are limit abilities on doing this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Peranakan Baba Nyonya

The word of “peranakan” comes from Malay, which describe as ‘descendents from a union between a local and a foreigner.’ (Chan Suan Choo, 2011)

According to S. K. Lee (2008), there are some conditions to lead the culture of Baba Nyonya not fully observed and practiced, especially in customs. It is because the high demand of modern living. Nowadays, there are only the history books or any other documentary type of books show the Peranakan couple look like the traditional attire. In reality, this is not always true. A Peranakan can look like practically anyone, and be anyone. It is because nyonyas are not wearing the *kebaya* and *batik sarung* except on the special occasion. Besides, the anglophile Babas not dressed in Western suit today. They wear jeans, t-shirt or skirt as usual.

Although the distinctive of Peranakan has been much publicized, it is also one of the most misunderstood between the citizens. Some of the people confused on their ethnic group. They misunderstood that Peranakan was exactly Malay and religion as Islam. However, it is the hybridism of culture that created between the foreigner and local woman. On the other words, Peranakan Baba Nyonya means the offspring of foreigner-native union.

There are issues about dying or declining community on Peranakan. The Peranakan are categorized as the endangered species by the related profession. From L.S. Kim (2008), quoting author Felix Chia, said: "The Baba, a product of an accident of history, is a time traveler. He has come and he must go." This culture can be lost in the future and dying on the young generation. (Chai Mei Ling, 2009)

The Peranakan Baba Nyonya is a unique sociological and cultural phenomenon that occurred in an era of momentous transition. They have significantly enriched the Malaysian and Singaporean cultural heritage, cuisine, fashion and the arts. If Peranakan culture cannot survive, we can only hope that the legacy of this unique culture brought out the beauty, elegance and resourcefulness to citizens as well as remain its glory for a long time.

## **2.1 Publication**

The term of publication means it is the communication of information to the public and the publishing of something, especially the printed form for sale. The terms of publication design regarded the six main needs that affect the final outcome, in which format, grid, typography, color, cover and the use of imagery (Bhaskaran, 2007).

Thus, before laying out the publication, it needs to consider using the points as the guideline so that the layout area of body text is arranged. A good layout arrangement makes audiences feel comfortable to browse through the content and clear with the information that given.