



Intangible Cultural Heritage

Twenty Practitioners

Warisan Budaya Tidak Ketara
Dua Puluh Penerus Tradisi
喬治市非物質文化遺產二十案例



In the historic port city of George Town, Penang, where peoples from East and West met and mingled, settled down and specialised in different trades and occupations, where many cultures and religions co-exist and many languages are spoken, you will find a culturally diverse, layered trading history and a remarkable architectural heritage. But the city's most exciting legacy is its living heritage — the traditions commemorated, celebrated and kept alive by the ordinary people who live and work here.

We present the stories of 20 long-time inhabitants of George Town — tradition-bearers who continue their cultural practices as well as businesses that give the city its special identity as a historic trading port and multicultural society of settlers and merchants.

They reflect our history of migration and occupational specialisation: trades deeply embedded and linked to other businesses in the city's local economy, knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation, from master to pupil or parent to child.

Some of these examples of intangible heritage are thriving, but some, sadly, are endangered or kept alive by a sole practitioner.

We believe that intangible cultural heritage is the community's treasure — essential to the continued growth and sustenance of George Town's social capital and cultural wealth for present and future generations.

Table of Contents

Anchor maker.....	4
Traditional performing arts supplier.....	5
Coffee roaster.....	6
Sundry shop.....	7
Natural pigment supplier.....	8
Gold flower supplier.....	9
Family-run hotel.....	10
Coffin shop.....	11
Money-changer.....	12
Religious bookshop.....	13
Religious goods and kitchenware retailer.....	14
Printing press.....	15
Traditional healer.....	16
Paper oblation artisan.....	17
Rattan weaver.....	18
Scroll mounting specialist.....	19
Community archivist.....	20
Music composer and conductor.....	21
Martial arts master.....	22
Boria trainer.....	23



The Historic Cities of Melaka and George Town have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008. Revitalizing Intangible Cultural Heritage (RICH) George Town is an inventory and documentation project initiated in 2012 to survey the George Town World Heritage Site for traditional trades and occupations, traditional artisans, as well as traditional artists and cultural practitioners. The project is meant to inform planning processes and revitalization programmes carried out to protect the site's cultural heritage and to ensure the community's well-being.

A project of George Town World Heritage Incorporated, 2012.

Anchor maker



Teck Ban Choon
50 Armenian Street Ghaut, Penang

Teck Ban Choon is a blacksmithing workshop that makes anchors and other iron products. Teoh Huah Guan, aged 64, a Yung Ting Hakka, inherited this business from his grandfather. According to local folklore, the first blacksmith in Penang was also a Yung Ting Hakka. Although his hammer and anvil have been replaced with a hammering machine, blacksmithing is still a labour intensive process requiring a lot of skill and strength. Teck Ban Choon used to make materials for shipping, construction, plantations and households, such as nails for boats, anchors, knives, axes and metal containers. All these items are linked to Penang's history as a port and supply centre for mining and plantation equipment. Today, the main demand for Teck Ban Choon's services is for the production of iron equipment and anchors used in off-shore fishing. Of the four blacksmiths that used to make anchors near the waterfront, only two are still operating.



Traditional performing arts supplier



Li Costume
19 Keng Kwee Street, Penang

Li Costume was founded by Leong Soo, aged 78, a Soon Tuck Cantonese. The company provides costume rental and make-up services for Chinese opera and organises performances for Chinese festivals, with characters dressed in traditional Chinese costumes representing Fook, Lok, Sow (Luck, Prosperity, Longevity) as well as Choy San (God of Prosperity). The company also provides design and decoration services for procession floats. The owner is a multi-talented "one-leg kick" (*yat keok thek*) in Cantonese opera, someone who does everything – acting, singing, directing, as well as managing costumes, props, make-up, set-design, set-painting and more. He has detailed knowledge of the repertoire of the Cantonese opera and its characters, norms and rituals. In 1990, he founded the Kar Lai Cantonese opera troupe, Kar Lai Dragon and Lion Dance group and Kar Lai Chingay performance troupe. In their heyday, they had over 50 members from five Cantonese districts. He has also been a trainer for Chingay, dragon dance and lion dance for the youth groups of various Chinese community organisations in the city.



Coffee roaster



Kun Kee Food Industries
20, Hong Kong Street, Penang

Kun Kee Food Industries, easily recognized by its sailor logo, is a maker of coffee powder established in 1952. Local coffee, sold in coffee shops as "Kopi O", consists of coffee beans roasted with sugar, margarine, salt and sesame, and is a distinctive product developed by the Penang Hainanese. The business was founded by Dato' Seri Choot Ching Khoon, who came to Penang at the age of 12, and worked at various jobs before starting his own coffee business 11 years later. He used to roast, grind and pack the coffee himself and distribute his products all over the island by bicycle. Today, Kun Kee coffee maker is the largest coffee powder maker in Penang, occupying 11 heritage shophouses as its premises. Coffee is roasted, ground and packed here through manual as well as automated processes. Even though Dato' Seri Choot Ching Khoon is now 87 years old, he still comes to his factory every morning to test the first batch of roasted coffee for quality and taste. His eldest son, Dato' Seri Choot Ewe Seng, now runs the business and has successfully diversified its products to include white coffee and milk tea. The company now exports its products internationally.



Sundry shop



Bean Guan
9, Carnarvon Street, Penang

Before the Repeal of Rent Control in 2000, there used to be a sundry shop (*chap hoay tiam*) as well as a grocery shop (*chai diam ma*) in every neighbourhood to support the large residential population of George Town. Today, Bean Guan is one of the last of the traditional sundry shops in the World Heritage Site. Neoh Cheng Guan and Soon Gim Hoon, the elderly couple who run this sundry shop, trace their ancestral origins to Lam Aun. Started by Neoh's father in 1917, Bean Guan settled five years later in its current location on Carnarvon Street, near the Campbell Street Market. The sundry shop stocks a myriad of everyday items – mostly made in Malaysia or imported from China – such as foodstuff, toiletries and household cleaning products. It also sells religious items and seasonal items linked to the annual cycle of Chinese festivals. The owners still employ traditional methods of bookkeeping and measuring. Over the last decade, the business has adapted to a changing clientele. The sundry shop is now open only in the morning to serve the shoppers who go to the market. In the afternoon, Mr. Neoh mainly carries out deliveries to restaurants and hawker stalls, which now make up an important part of his customer base.



Natural pigment supplier

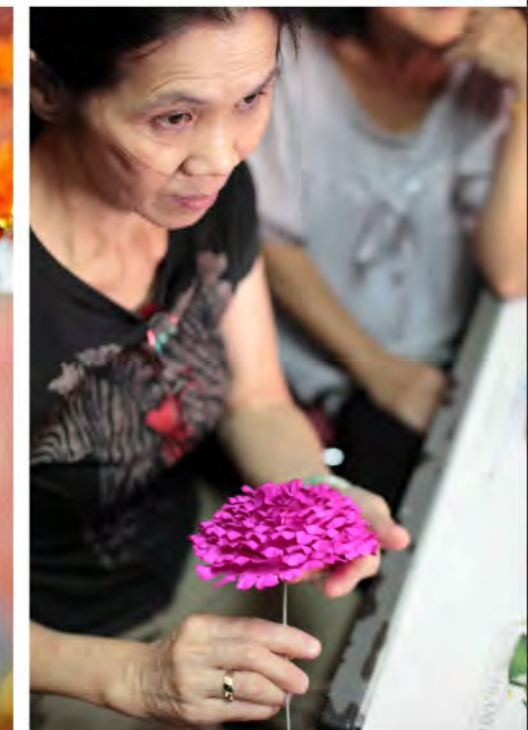


Lim Teck Lee
177, Beach Street, Penang

Lim Teck Lee is a wholesaler of a diversified range of long-established products that have been used in Penang's homes, coffee shops and cottage industries for decades. Lim Cher Meng, a Teow Aun Teochew, established the company in Singapore in 1918 and branches in Kuala Lumpur and Penang soon after. Opened around 90 years ago, this store is among the oldest of the many Teochew wholesalers along Beach Street. A few of the 20 employees have even worked there for 30 to 40 years, maintaining the shop and business in a very traditional way. The products Lim Teck Lee sells includes hardware tools, chemicals and raw materials, brushes and furniture, all distributed under the company's own brands. Its "Cock Brand" Bentwood chairs from Eastern Europe have featured in Penang coffee shops for generations. Lim Teck Lee's food colouring has been used in Penang's traditional foods such as Nyonya cakes, while its dyes have been employed for dyeing cloth and batik. The "Peacock Brand" natural dyes are the original pigments used in traditional paints: limewash for lime plaster walls and linseed oil paints for timber. These pigments have a renewed relevance as they are now required in the maintenance and restoration of George Town's heritage buildings.



Gold flower supplier



Sin Taik Wang
147, Pitt Street, Penang

Sin Taik Wang is the only producer in Penang of traditional Chinese artificial flowers used for festivals and rituals. The craft is called Kim Hua ("gold flower"), but the company produces floral bouquets made of dyed paper as well as metallic gold and silver foil. Each artificial flower is made by hand using a range of laborious and painstaking methods, from cutting and crimping using a special set of tools, to dyeing and assembly. The original company Taik Wang was established in the 1920s by Har Ah Chow, a Teochew, who learned the craft in China before coming to Malaya. The shop also sell pre-printed patterned paper and figurines used for the making of paper oblation products. Later, his widow, Soon Kim Lian, known as Kim Hua Por Por ("Gold Flower Auntie"), registered the company Sin Taik Wang. After her death in 2010, the trade was carried on by her two daughters. They produce large bouquets for temples celebrating deities' birthdays, and smaller ones for household altar decorations before the Chinese New Year, as well as floral baskets consisting of seven differently coloured flowers for the "double seventh" celebration. The sisters also make *bunga telur* ("egg flowers"), the traditional floral gifts for Malay weddings, and once supplied *bunga telur* for a lavish royal wedding.

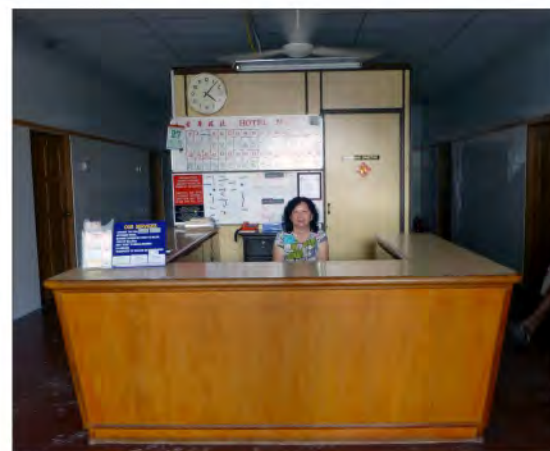


Family-run hotel



Hotel Noble
36, Market Lane, Penang

When Penang was a free port it attracted many business travellers who would stay in inns, lodging houses or hotels. The Hotel Noble is a family-run inn that provides 34 rooms in a large mid-19th century mansion in the core zone of the George Town World Heritage Site. While many of the old hotels have changed hands, Hotel Noble has been run by the same family for more than 60 years. Teow Eng Keat, a Foochow Chinese, and his wife converted the old building into a hotel in the 1940s. After his death in 1976, their son, Teow Keong Ooi, and their daughter-in-law took over operations, and have been running it ever since. The inn is simple, comfortable, reasonably priced and known for its high standards of cleanliness. For these reasons, it manages to attract business through word of mouth. Over the years, the clientele has changed, from Chinese businessmen to Western tourists. Many of them are long-staying tourists, and one family has even stayed for as long as six years. Mr and Mrs Teow still take registration by hand and offer the guests a very personalized service.



Coffin shop



Hock Lean Seng
161, 163 Carnarvon Street, Penang

Hock Lean Seng is a coffin shop on Carnarvon Street, also known as Kua Char Kay ("Coffin Street"). There used to be several coffin shops located here because the wood to make coffins had to be brought in by boats through the nearby Prangin Canal. Related businesses such as paper oblation workshops and shops selling joss paper and mourning clothes can still be found in the vicinity. The shop is run by Yap Ah Boon, 62, the grandson of Tan Chong Thiam, who started this shop more than a hundred years ago. He often consults his aunt, Tan Chai Im, 83, the founder's daughter, on the many rituals and taboos involved in the coffin business. Currently Hock Lean Seng is one of the few active coffin shops left along this street. The traditional Chinese flower casket is the choice of wealthy Taoist clients, while Christian clients prefer a simple rectangular casket. The shop used to make coffins *in situ* until about twenty years ago. Nowadays it only sells ready-made coffins. The shop also provides garments to be worn by the deceased, and makes arrangements for funerals, hearse rental, temporary pavilions and other bereavement services such as procuring paper oblation goods or finding monks or Taoist priests to conduct the last rites.



Money-changer



M.S.K.M. Mohamed Haniffa Forex 59, Pitt Street, Penang

Mohamed Haniffa Forex is a licensed money-changer's shop. The money-changer, or shroff, earns a commission or shroffage by buying and selling currencies, and makes a marginal profit from the foreign currency exchange. Compared to a conventional bank, shroffs tend to offer better rates and are willing to change smaller amounts of money. Shroffing is a highly competitive business as there are about 60-70 licensed money-changers in George Town. The business owner, Haji M.H. Ameer Hamsa, aged 52, works with his sons and nephews. Most of the money-changers in George Town are Tamil Muslim, and about a third of them originate from Panaikulam in the Ramanathapuram district. Ameer Hamsa's father, Mohamed Haniffa, came from this small village to Penang in 1928 and learnt the money-changing trade from a friend. His father started his own business in 1940 and experienced many ups and downs until he started the present shop at 59 Pitt Street in 1967. Ameer Hamsa joined his father in Penang at the age of 11. He attended St. Xavier's Institution and Madrasah Al-Mashoor before joining his father's trade. Business started to pick up when Penang became a tourist destination in the 1970s. Today the shop does much of its business with international hotels. Mohamed Haniffa Forex also sells antique coins. Ameer Hamsa learned how to value old coins and notes from a Chinese friend and now has 30 years' experience in the trade.



Religious bookshop



Percetakan Almarif 16, Buckingham Street, Penang

This Islamic bookshop was established in 1972 and mainly carries Percetakan Almarif's own publications, but its history, however, is older. The founder, Salleh Nahdi alias Salleh bin Islam, was born in 1937 at Pasir Mas Kelantan. He is an "orang Kelantan" of Hadhrami Arab descent from Yemen. Completing secondary school at Al-Aziziyah in Makkah, he started a printing press in Penang with a small inheritance from his father. The press initially supplied books to his uncle's bookshop in Pattani. When the printing press expanded to a factory in Sungai Pinang, Salleh Nahdi also started an Islamic bookshop in Acheen Street. Acheen Street was then the centre of Hajj travel and they did a thriving business. Today, Almarif is the largest publisher of Islamic books in Malaysia, having published 500-600 titles, many of them going into multiple editions. The bookshop mainly sells reprints of classic Islamic religious tracts but the bestselling title is still the Qur'an. Customers know the shop by word of mouth and people come from far and wide to buy and resell Almarif books. Around ten years ago, the shophouses along Acheen Street were taken back by the Islamic Religious Council for renovation, and the bookshop relocated to its present, larger premises in Buckingham Street.



Religious goods and kitchenware retailer



Kanganam Trading
32, Market Street, Penang

Kanganam Trading is a retailer of Indian household wares and Hindu religious items. The previous company, H. Uttam & Sons, was established about 60 years ago and its name was changed to Kanganam Trading around 15 years ago. Today it is managed by third generation Gujarati Hindu entrepreneur, Ghirish son of Hasmukhlal, 57, who has innovated the business according to the Indian consumer market. During the free port days, they sold mainly saree textiles from Japan and Rolex watches; they then changed to ladies' accessories and brass and stainless steel kitchenware, such as Chinese steamboats, *kueh loyang* moulds, and Indian *tawa* for making *capati*. They started selling religious items in 1975, and this has become their fastest expanding line. Kanganam Trading has a highly diversified range of religious items, such as Panchaloha statuary, iconography, charms, hanging decorations, as well as items for Hindu worship (Pooja), geomancy (Vastu Shastra) and meditation, such as Yantra mystical diagrams and Tibetan singing bowls. They are also the main retailer of accessories for kavadi-bearers during the Thaipusam festival.



Printing press



Jothee (Penang)
4, Market Street, Penang

Jothee (Penang), printers and stationers, was founded in 1935 by Dato' S. Letchumanasamy. He was born in 1916 in Mayuram, Thanjavur district, Tamilnadu, and came to Penang at the age of 10. He worked at odd jobs and as a bookbinder before starting his own printing company at the age of 19. He then became involved in politics, becoming a pioneer of the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). In the 1940s, Jothee published a newspaper and its first editor was Athi Nahappan, who later became a Malaysian deputy minister. In the 1960s the founder diversified his business to include cigar-making, a grinding mill, a sundry shop and a stationers' shop. The printing operation is now run by the founder's son, Shanmuganathan, who was born in Penang in 1955 and studied at Guru Nanak College, Madras University. Shan has seen the company undergo many changes in printing technology, from Romanised and Tamil moveable types, to linotype, to offset lithography, but the company still uses its old printing machines. Jothee was the first company to produce locally made diaries, and has continued to specialise in bookbinding and making handmade accounts ledgers.



Traditional
Trades and Occupations

Traditional healer

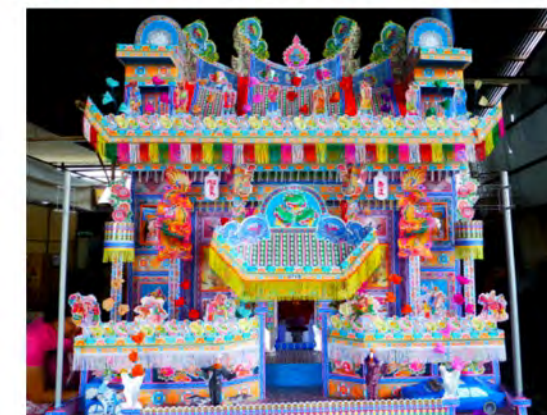


Tan Siang Chuan

Tan Siang Chuan, 74, is a traditional Chinese healer. His parents came from Eng Choon county in Hokkien province, a place well known for traditional Chinese martial arts and healing skills. Tan has an extensive knowledge of numerous medicinal herbs, folk remedies and herbal ointments, which are used to treat all kinds of skin disorders and ailments. His knowledge and skills were passed down to him by his father and he has been treating people in the same place for more than 60 years. He used to collect the herbs from the countryside, but they are now scarce and he has to source them commercially. He makes the medicinal herbs from raw ingredients, using two well-worn stone pestles and mortars that he inherited from his father. He can diagnose and treat a variety of skin ailments, which are manifested in symptoms such as rashes, blisters and sores. He is best known for his treatment of a type of shingles (*Herpes Zoster*). In Chinese folklore, the manifestation of shingles, in which painful blisters start to spread along a person's back and encircle the midriff, is likened to a snake, and hence the treatment is called "catching the snake". Tan Siang Chuan is the few remaining traditional healers in George Town who can treat shingles.



Paper oblation artisan



Loh Soo Ban

Loh Soo Ban, 57, a Lam Aun Hokkien, makes paper crafts for Chinese ritual offerings associated with funerals, deities' birthdays and festivals. His father first ran the workshop at Carnavon Street, an area well known for shops selling coffins and funeral goods. Inheriting the business from his father, he registered the Ah Ban Paper Oblation Shop. Today, Ah Ban, his wife and eight workers run the largest workshop in the George Town World Heritage Site making ritual paper crafts. When someone passes away, the deceased's family will order a 'paper house' complete with small paper replicas of bond-servants, cars and household goods. The shop has to rush out the order within one to two days as the wake usually lasts three to five days and the paper house has to be burnt on the last night before the funeral. Although some components are pre-made, the construction of the paper house with *bertam* stems, different types of paper items and home-cooked starch, still has to be done manually. Ah Ban, who has been practising this craft for more than 40 years, paints the mask faces and paper crafts by hand where required. The company is George Town's largest supplier of the Phor Thor effigy, making up to 30 giant effigies during the annual Hungry Ghost Festival.



Traditional
Artisans



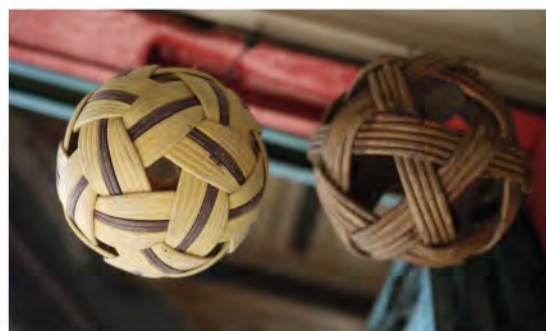
Traditional
Artisans

Rattan weaver



Ng Kuan Soon

Ng Kuan Soon, 64, is a traditional rattan weaver. He is the owner and sole artisan of Thean Seng Huat, at the corner of Beach Street and Prangin Lane. The shop was founded around 1930 by his father, Ng Poh Yong, who learnt his craft from his home village in Teochew, where most of the rattan craft makers in Penang originate. Ng Kuan Soon started weaving when he was around eight years old and is familiar with many types of weaving techniques. He used to help his father make the "China bins" (large, barrel-shaped wicker crates) which were used by travellers from Swatow, China. He also made wholesale vegetable baskets to be supplied to the Prangin Market nearby. He uses cane, bamboo and rattan sourced from Malaysia, Indonesia and China to make and repair wicker baskets, cane furniture and shoe racks. He also makes traditional paper kites and *sepak takraw* balls to sell to the neighbourhood children. As his work space is very small, he only makes large items when commissioned by customers.



Traditional
Artisans

Scroll mounting specialist



Ooi Seow Peng

Ooi Seow Peng, aged 49, a Penang-born Hui Aun Hokkien, is a traditional scroll mounting specialist, who frames Chinese calligraphy and brush paintings. These art works are executed on absorbent *shuan* paper or silk, and therefore have to be carefully mounted on materials such as coloured paper, damask, brocade, satin and silk to protect and give them form. At about 23 years old, he studied ink drawing with Liu Dayong at the Penang Chinese Town Hall, and studied calligraphy from Huang Qiyun. He also learnt the art of mounting from Cui Yaocheng and Reverend Daoshun from Taiwan. All four of his teachers were masters in their respective fields. Scroll mounting is an art form in itself, requiring a high level of skill. Many secret techniques are passed on from master to pupil. In 1987, Ooi started a home studio called Zhiyunxuan (Purple Cloud Pavilion) to help poets, scholars, collectors and calligraphers to frame paintings. As calligraphy is getting more popular in Penang, his business is steadily increasing due to this cultural revival. His reputation for quality work is known by word of mouth and he has customers coming from as far away as the neighbouring states of Kedah and Perak.



Traditional
Artisans

Community archivist



Mohamed bin Yahaya

Cikgu Mohamed bin Yahaya, aged 74, is an archivist of Jawi books and printed ephemera. He lives in the vicinity of the Acheen Street Mosque. His father was Yahaya bin Abdul Ghani, a police clerk and interpreter. After the war, he went to Sekolah Melayu Jalan Hatin, Francis Light School, and then Penang Free School. When Cikgu Mohamed learnt to read, Jawi was the standard Malay script. To this day he prefers to read Jawi rather than romanised Malay. He became a teacher and taught at many Penang schools before retiring in 1993. When his father died in 1979, he took over his father's collection of newspaper clippings, diaries, notes and photographs for safekeeping. Cikgu Mohamed himself then began collecting old photographs, books printed by the Malay press in Penang, souvenir books of Hajj travel, Hari Raya cards and other printed ephemera. This collection is especially significant because Acheen Street, where he was born and lived all his life, was the regional centre for Hajj travel and the Malay press. Specialized knowledge of local history, Malay press and literature, as well as skills in Jawi transliteration, are necessary for collecting and organizing the relevant materials. Cikgu Mohamed became committed to preserving the memory of Acheen Street in 2002, when the houses at Kampung Masjid Melayu were threatened with demolition. Being one of the oldest educated members of his clan, he has also become the family genealogist and community historian.



Music composer and conductor



檳州人民文化協會慶祝20周年會慶 主辦
檳城音藝文化協會 協辦
藝演華樂團

雅韻真情

蘇照雄作品音樂會

Chorus And Huayue Orchestra Concert
featuring Compositions of
Saw Yeong Chin

Organised by : Penang People's Cultural Society
Co-organised by : Penang Arts & Cultural Society
Penang Proart Huayue Orchestra

日期: 2008年8月23日 (星期六)
時間: 晚上8時正
地點: 檳州大會堂

Date : 23rd August 2008 (Saturday)
Time : 8 pm
Venue : Auditorium Dewan Sri Pinang

Saw Yeong Chin

Saw Yeong Chin, aged 72, is a well-known music conductor and composer of Teo Aun Teochew origin. He has composed dozens of songs and arranged hundreds of pieces according to Western, Chinese and Malaysian style arrangements and under different aliases. Saw Yeong Chin learnt to sing and play the harmonica and drums during his school days from Tham Mun Kwong. Later he learned music theory, vocalization, counterpoint and other techniques from Khaw Guan Liang, a foreign-trained music graduate. Throughout his musical career, he has been involved in many community music groups, mostly in the World Heritage Site. He was conductor for the Ching Kong Harmonica Club and Choir, Tai Pu Harmonica Club and Ching Chun Harmonica Club, as well as co-founder and deputy conductor of the memorable "Hundred People's Chorus" of the Penang Philharmonic Society. He co-founded and is currently conductor of the famous Ai Yue Chorus of the Penang People's Cultural Society, which has been invited to perform in Singapore, Indonesia and China. An album of Saw Yeong Chin's music compositions was published in conjunction with his 2008 solo retrospective concert, which was performed with a full chorus and Chinese orchestra. He is often invited to compose, conduct and arrange music for other choirs and institutions.



Martial arts master



Chew Ah Bee

Master Chew Ah Bee, 81, is a Shaolin master and coach. He is the last master directly trained by the internationally renowned Shaolin master and monk Seh Koh Sum from China, who introduced southern-style Shaolin martial arts to Southeast Asia and Penang when he lived here from 1955 to 1960. The master set up the Penang Sao Lim Athletic Association at 42 Muntri Street in 1956 and the late Dato' P'ng Chye Khim and Chew Ah Bee were among his first and most successful pupils. Master Chew lives in the Chew Jetty settlement and as a young man he worked in the Penang port as a waterfront worker. As a result of his martial arts skills, he then became a bodyguard for a prominent Penang businessman, continuing this job for almost 50 years. For years he practiced a combination of tough physical training and meditation, expanding and perfecting his techniques. He has mastered the Shaolin technique of Plum Blossom Fist and also knows other "hard fist" techniques such as the Lohan Fist. He used to perform annually during National Day and, as a coach, accompanied his students to participate in international competitions. For many years he taught at the Penang Sao Lim Athletic Association, which attracts many international as well as local students. He also founded the Seo Hoon Sua in Butterworth in 1972, where most of his students take classes to keep fit.



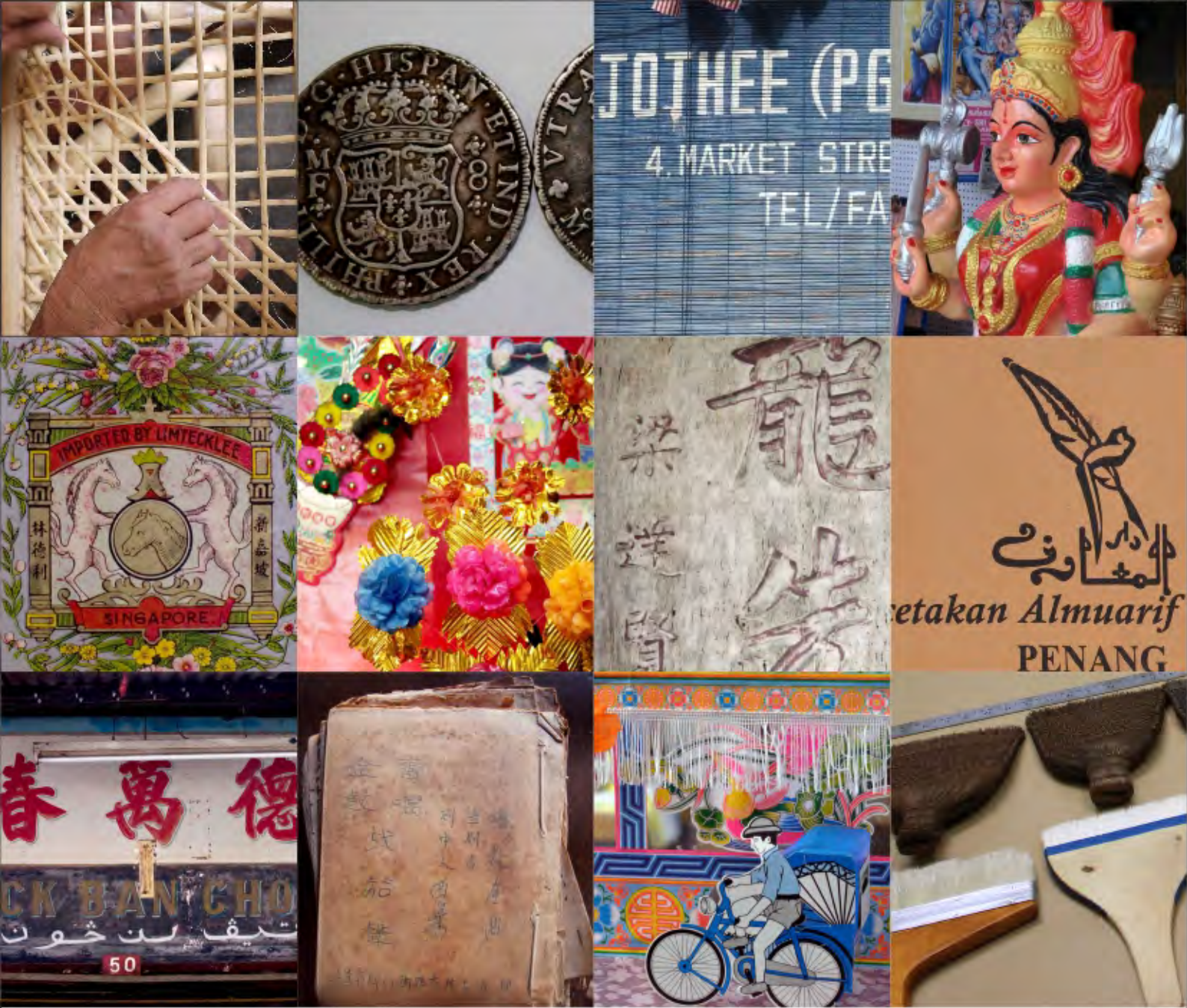
Boria trainer



Mohd. Jailani bin Syed Abdul Rahman

Mohd. Jailani, aged 62, is a trainer in Boria singing and dancing. Boria is a unique Penang performing art form that evolved from the song and dance routines of the East India Company regiments. Before television became popular, most Malay and Muslim youth in Penang were Boria fans and almost every Malay kampung would have its own Boria troupe participating in processions. Mohd. Jailani was born in Kampung Rawana, Perak Road. He first saw Boria as a child when it was performed at a fair in Padang Tambun at Lorong Kulit, and as a teenager he joined the renowned Sungai Pinang Boria troupe. In the early 1980s he decided to help revive the Kampung Rawana Boria troupe and trained the Tukang Karang, or troupe leader, as well as the chorus, called "sailors", to sing and dance. In 1985, the troupe joined a national competition for Malay performing arts; Penang had 50 Boria troupes at the time, and the Kampung Rawana Boria troupe managed to trump the Sungai Pinang troupe. The finals were telecast live in a show called "Dendang Rakyat". Mohd. Jailani used to work for the Penang Island Municipal Council. Now retired, he is keen to teach the younger generation to continue the Penang Boria tradition.





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Melaka and George Town,
 Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca (Malaysia)
 inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2008