



Philip Chia is a fourth generation Chinese Peranakan. He began his love affair with cooking from the age of six when he was taught to pound spices for *sambal belacan* using the *batu lesong* (pestle and mortar).

As a teenager, he became the youngest finalist in a nation-wide cooking competition, which was judged by the late Mrs Lee Chin Koon, herself a doyenne of Peranakan cuisine. This event spurred him on to hone his cooking skills further. Throughout his growing years, Philip picked up tips and secrets of authentic Peranakan cooking from the older generation of Peranakans. His expertise in Nyonya food has made him a celebrated chef and a stalwart in the local Peranakan scene.

Today, Philip is highly sought-after as a Peranakan chef by renowned hotels and restaurants. Apart from being featured in countless publications, he has also appeared on radio and television programmes as guest chef and food consultant. As the food consultant for the international remake of *The Little Nyonya*, Singapore's all-time highest-rating drama serial, he was also invited to play a cameo role as a chef in the show.

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“Perhaps nothing expresses better the soul of a community than its cooking. For the Peranakans, it is also perhaps one of the most expressive and engaging aspects of the living heritage... This book, comprising so many family recipes, is a wonderful addition to the large corpus of books on this unique and living aspect of Peranakan heritage.”

Lee Kip Lee Honorary Life President, The Peranakan Association Singapore



PHILIP CHIA

The Peranakan Kitchen

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Cuisine **mc**

The Peranakan Kitchen

Savouring the Best
from a Rich Culinary Legacy

The Peranakans are the descendants of early Chinese immigrants who settled in the Malay Archipelago and married local women. They are well known for their prowess in the kitchen, where they draw from Chinese and Malay culinary traditions and pepper their food with influences from the Indians, Thais, Portuguese, Dutch and British. The result of this fusion is a repertoire of dishes that are aromatic, moreish and unique.

In this collection, renowned Peranakan chef Philip Chia takes you into the kitchen and guides you in the ways of his culinary heritage. From dishes that he grew up with, to newer creations that celebrate Peranakan flavours and ingredients, Philip's recipes are equal parts exciting and soul-stirring.

PHILIP CHIA

For Review Only

The Peranakan Kitchen

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from a Rich Culinary Legacy

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For Review Only

Dedication

To my late nanny and adoptive mother, Lim Lian Neo, who doted on me and taught me how to prepare the essential *rempahs* of Peranakan cooking.

To my dearest late Auntie Alice, my *mak-ko*, who taught me how to cook. I will always remember those lessons.

To my most treasured friends, late Baba Lee Eng Liang who shared with me many old and forgotten recipes; Baba Tan Kim Guan and Auntie Rosie Gwee for sharing their cooking tips and treasured recipes, especially for *babi tohay*.

It is a great privilege to have had them in my life to share their skills and impart their knowledge, which I now share with you. May this book be a reference point and a source of inspiration for you.

Philip Chia

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Designer : Lynn Chin
Photographer: Hongde Photography

Copyright © 2012 Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited

First published 2012 as Peranakan Heritage Cooking
Reprinted 2013

This new edition 2020
Published by Marshall Cavendish Cuisine
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Name(s): Chia, Philip, 1960-.
Title: The Peranakan kitchen / Philip Chia.
Description: New edition. | Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2020. | "First published 2012 as Peranakan heritage cooking"--Title page verso.
Identifier(s): OCN 1137177296 | ISBN 978-981-48-9330-5 (paperback)
Subject(s): LCSH: Cooking, Peranakan. | Cooking, Singaporean.
Classification: DDC 641.595957--dc23

Printed in Singapore



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Foreword

Perhaps nothing expresses better the soul of a community than its cooking. For the Peranakans, it is also perhaps one of the most expressive and engaging aspects of the living heritage. Many things may have been relegated to the past, but the cooking has been kept alive and continues to evolve, mainly because of the passion and dynamism of a younger generation of chefs and food writers, and naturally also because of the interest of the community and of the general public in the flavours of Peranakan food.

Peranakan cooking expresses and celebrates the exuberant hybridity that is central to Peranakan identity. Ever since the Portuguese colonial era, the southern Chinese communities in the port towns have been exposed to the lifestyles of the Malays from all over the archipelago, as well as of Europeans, Indians and Arabs, and over the centuries, it was impossible for these communities not to be influenced by the different cooking styles and ingredients. From China came sauces, bean curds, noodles and certain vegetables; from the islands came fragrant herbs, spices and roots. From India, there was the wide range of spice blends and methods of cooking, and from Europe, there was baking and a whole range of cakes and desserts, quaint colonial and Eurasian fusion recipes and dashes of Worcester sauce too. Not surprisingly, the Baba Malay vocabulary of ingredients is peppered with words of Arab, Portuguese, English, Dutch, Malay and Hokkien origins.

Perhaps the one characteristic of Peranakan cooking that may be called unique is the almost ridiculous number of steps required to put together a dish. Some have speculated that this was a way for a manipulative household matriarch to control her daughters and daughters-in-law. Today, shortcuts are taken by many modern chefs who claim there is little effect on the final product, although conservative cooks would disagree.

When I was young, the menus for different occasions were very specific. There were so many kinds of celebrations, at which different foods were served in order to avoid ill omens or inappropriate etiquette. Nowadays, such customs are no longer observed. However, to be honest, I never paid much attention to these things when I was young. Food for me was solely focused on my favourite meal: a fried egg on steaming hot rice with generous lashings of dark soy sauce and sliced fresh green chilli.

Philip Chia is a nephew of mine who grew up in a typical Peranakan household, where cooking was an important part of daily life. During my term as president of the Peranakan Association, he voluntarily contributed his expertise towards many successful events and has been active in promoting Peranakan cooking to the public. I am heartened that he is armed with the knowledge of traditional methods and yet engaged with contemporary tastes and demands, which allow him to bridge the past with the present. This book, comprising so many family recipes, is a wonderful addition to the large corpus of books on this unique and living aspect of Peranakan heritage.

Lee Kip Lee

Honorary Life President
The Peranakan Association Singapore

Introduction

The Peranakans are a Southeast Asian community that established itself in the colonial settlements of the 16th and 17th centuries. Purists are divided as to whether the term Peranakan denotes a race or a culture, but it refers generally to the descendants of the early Chinese immigrants who settled in the Malay archipelago, invariably taking native women as wives or concubines (as Chinese women were restricted from leaving the mainland until the late 19th century) and embracing local customs, all the while retaining much of their ancestral culture.

Peranakans themselves later on migrated within Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, which resulted in a high degree of cultural similarity of the people of these countries, as well as other farther-flung outposts of the Asia-Pacific region. As the main communities lived and engaged in trade primarily within the Straits Settlements (a British colonial construct of Singapore, Malacca, and Penang constituted in 1826), the Peranakans also came to be known as the Straits Chinese.

Long before fusion cuisine captured the imagination of the world, the Peranakans were blending Chinese ingredients and cooking techniques with the spices and native ingredients used by the indigenous Malays, over time establishing a repertoire of recipes avidly followed to this day.

Peranakan food is typically aromatic and spicy and features ingredients that include coconut milk, galangal, turmeric, candlenuts, laksa leaves, pandan leaves, tamarind pulp, lemongrass, chillies, shallots, basil and coriander. *Asam gelugor*, belimbing and mangoes were often added to deliver a tangy taste. Perhaps the food component most associated with the Peranakans is the *buah keluak*, the nut of the *kepayang* (*Pangium edule*) tree, which is poisonous if unprocessed. It is used to produce a rich sauce as an accompaniment to a range of meats.

There were regional variations in Peranakan cuisine throughout the Straits Settlements. Dishes in the northern part of Malaysia had notable Thai influences, such as the liberal use of tamarind (*asam*) and other sour ingredients, whereas dishes in the south showed a greater Indonesian influence, such as the use of coconut milk. The colonialists also made contributions to the Peranakan menu, with certain Anglo-Indian dishes becoming an intrinsic part of Peranakan cuisine, including mulligatawny soup, known as *makatani* in Malacca.

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Food also had religious and symbolic significance and many dishes were originally served only on special occasions. Rice was deliberately coloured yellow in the belief that this enhanced its life-giving qualities and rice dumplings were sometimes coloured red to encourage good fortune. *Kueh lapis* was a confection made up of multiple layers that symbolised the ladder of prosperity.

Without the modern appliances of today, Peranakan cooking in past centuries required time-consuming preparation and even here, there were conventions to be observed. Food had to be in bite-size morsels when served, as there were no knives in the Peranakan place settings. Cakes, fruit and vegetables had to be sliced diagonally. Peranakan women spent much effort and time perfecting their dishes and evolving their own versions of standard recipes that were then handed down to the next generation. The large number of family recipes in this collection reflect this tradition.



Basic Recipes

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Chilli Chuka

10–12 red chillies
150 ml (5 fl oz) white vinegar
75 g (2²/₃ oz) sugar
¼ tsp sea salt

Slit chillies down the length and remove seeds. Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind chillies into a paste.

Place ground chillies in a saucepan with vinegar, sugar and salt and bring to the boil. Lower heat and simmer for about 5 minutes.

Adjust to taste with more vinegar and/or sugar. Remove from heat and leave to cool.

Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Serve as a condiment with a squeeze of calamansi lime juice.

Note For a spicier sauce, add 1–2 red bird's eye chillies and blend together with the chillies. Chilli chuka is a very versatile sauce. Serve it with meats and other fried foods.

Roasted Prawn (Shrimp) Paste (Belacan)

Dried prawn (shrimp) paste (belacan)
as needed, broken up

Heat a dry wok and add prawn paste. Stir-fry over low to medium heat to avoid burning prawn paste. Use the back of the wok ladle to break prawn paste up further and cook until dry and crisp.

When paste is dry and no longer sticks to wok, remove from heat and allow to cool.

Grind cooled prawn paste into a powder. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Note If kept cool and dry, roasted prawn paste will keep indefinitely.

Dried Chilli Paste

Dried chillies as needed

Soak dried chillies in hot water for 30–45 minutes.

Drain well and grind finely into a paste.

Store in 2–3 Tbsp portions in an airtight plastic container in the freezer. Thaw and use as needed.

Note If you do not wish to make your own, dried chilli paste is available from wet market stalls and supermarkets. When using store-bought dried chilli paste, choose one that does not contain vinegar, as it will affect the colour and taste of the rempah it is used in. Stalls that sell freshly prepared curry pastes will usually stock dried chilli paste. Ask for pure dried chilli paste.

Sambal Belacan

6–8 red chillies
40 g (1¹/₃ oz) roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (belacan) (recipe on the left)
1 kaffir lime leaf, torn or
1 tsp calamansi lime zest
Calamansi limes to serve

Using a mortar and pestle, pound chillies a little at a time, adding roasted prawn paste and kaffir lime leaf or calamansi lime zest until chilli seeds are crushed.

Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Serve as a condiment with a squeeze of calamansi lime juice.

Note Sambal belacan is indispensable in Peranakan meals. It is typically served as a condiment to spice up the meal.

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Vegetables & Salads



14 **Achar** *To make this pickled vegetable dish involves quite a bit of effort, especially in cutting up the vegetables. But it keeps well and is worth it.*

16 **Prawn & Egg Salad** *This is a simple appetiser that can be typically found at parties because it is such excellent finger food.*

18 **Kerabu Timun Nanas** *This cucumber and pineapple salad is very versatile and quick to put together. Crunchy cucumber and sweet pineapple are cut into small cubes, then tossed with a simple but flavourful dressing.*

20 **Chap Chye** *Although the Chinese, Malays and even Indians have their own versions of this dish, only the Nyonya version features dried bean curd sticks and dried sweet bean curd.*

22 **Sambal Kangkong** *A dish of kangkong cooked in a rempah or spice paste — but some Nyonyas also add coconut milk to make the taste richer.*

24 **Sambal Bende** *This dish of stir-fried ladies fingers (bende) is simple and versatile. It makes a tasty meal with plain rice.*

26 **Tauge Cha Tau Kua Ikan Asin** *Bean sprouts (tauge) stir-fried with firm bean curd (tau kua) and salted fish (ikan asin) make a typical homestyle dish.*

Achar

It was my *mak-ko* (eldest auntie), Auntie Alice, who taught me how to make *achar*. The process involves cutting all the vegetables into strips roughly similar in size to ensure the end product is visually pleasing, then rubbing with salt or blanching them before sun-drying so they are crunchy. This also ensures that the *achar* will have a longer shelf life.

Makes about 1.6 kg (3 lb 9 oz)

- 500 g (1 lb 1½ oz) cucumbers, sliced lengthways in half, soft centres removed and cut diagonally into strips
- 2 Tbsp sea salt
- 300 g (11 oz) cabbage, cut into thick strips
- 200 g (7 oz) carrots, peeled and cut into strips
- 100 g (3½ oz) shallots, peeled
- 2 Tbsp cooking oil
- 1 Tbsp white vinegar
- 2 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 6 Tbsp sugar
- 100 g (3½ oz) peanuts, roasted, skinned and roughly ground
- 3–4 Tbsp white sesame seeds, roasted

Rub cucumbers with 1 Tbsp salt and set aside for 1 hour. Drain off any water, then wrap cucumbers with muslin cloth and place a heavy object such as a mortar on cucumbers to remove any excess liquid. Lay cucumber strips out on a tray and leave to sun-dry for 2–3 hours.

Boil a pot of water and blanch cabbage, carrots and shallots for 1 minute. Drain and sun-dry for 1–2 hours.

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind ingredients for *rempah* into a paste.

Heat oil in a wok and fry *rempah* until fragrant. Transfer to a large glass mixing bowl and allow to cool.

When *rempah* is cool, add vinegars, sugar and 1 Tbsp salt. Mix well until sugar and salt are dissolved.

Add cucumbers, cabbage, carrots and shallots, peanuts and sesame seeds. Mix well.

Store in clean and dry screw-top jars. Allow *achar* to sit overnight before serving. If stored properly, achar will keep refrigerated for weeks.

REMPAH

- 5 candlenuts
- 2–3 slices galangal
- 1 stalk lemon grass, ends trimmed, cut into short lengths
- 2-cm (1-in) knob turmeric, peeled
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 200 g (7 oz) shallots, peeled
- 1 Tbsp dried chilli paste (page 11)
- 2–3 tsp roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (*belacan*) (page 11)



Chap Chye

This mixed vegetable dish is an all-time favourite with both the young and old. Although the Chinese, Malays and even Indians have their own versions of this dish, only the Nyonya verison features dried bean curd sticks and dried sweet bean curd. The dish has to be simmered long enough, with the right amount of garlic and preserved soy bean paste added, to bring out the flavours of the ingredients. This dish tastes better with keeping.

Serves 6–8

- 30 g (1 oz) dried Chinese mushrooms

30 g (1 oz) dried lily buds, about 30 pieces

30 g (1 oz) dried woodear fungus

Cooking oil as needed

60 g (2¼ oz) dried bean curd sticks, cut into short lengths

Cooking oil as needed

40 g (1½ oz) dried sweet bean curd, cut into strips
- 6–8 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped

1 Tbsp preserved soy bean paste, mashed

30 g (1 oz) glass noodles, soaked to soften

300 g (11 oz) cabbage, cut into small pieces

1 carrot, peeled and sliced

Salt to taste

Rinse dried Chinese mushrooms and soak in 500 ml (16 fl oz / 2 cups) water for about 30 minutes until mushrooms are softened. Slice mushrooms in half. Strain and reserve soaking liquid.

Rinse dried lily buds and soak in water for about 30 minutes to soften buds and remove its acidity. Drain well and tie each bud into a knot.

Rinse dried woodear fungus and soak in water for about 30 minutes until fungus is expanded and softened. Cut into smaller pieces and discard any hard bits.

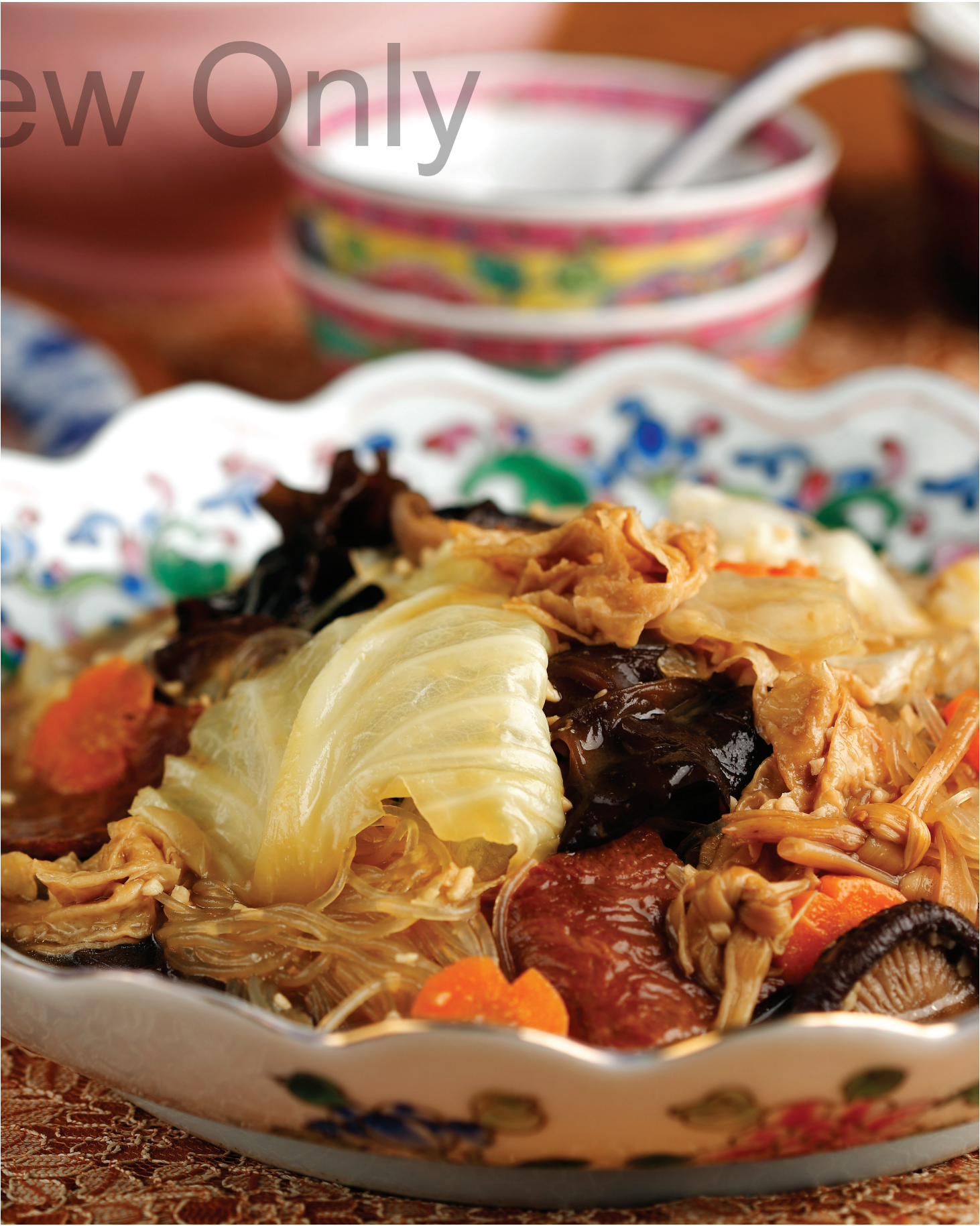
Heat some oil in a wok and fry dried bean curd sticks until lightly browned. Remove and drain well. Repeat to fry dried sweet bean curd. Remove and drain well.

Reheat wok with 2 Tbsp oil. Add garlic and stir-fry until lightly browned.

Add preserved soy bean paste and stir-fry for 30 seconds, then quickly add mushroom soaking liquid and bring to the boil.

Add fried bean curd sticks, fried sweet bean curd, softened woodear fungus, lily bulbs and glass noodles. Simmer until fried bean curd sticks are softened, then add cabbage and continue to cook until cabbage is tender. Add carrot and mix well. Season to taste.

Dish out and serve hot with rice and *sambal belacan* (page 11) on the side.



For Review Only

Meat & Poultry



30 **Babi Roast** *Many Peranakan families have their own unique family recipes that are passed down from generation to generation. This dish of roast pork was my mother's favourite recipe which was taught to her by her mother.*

32 **Babi Tohay** *The unique ingredient in this dish is the red yeast rice or ang kak, a fermented rice, which gives this dish its distinctive red colour.*

34 **Babi Goreng Tauyu Lada** *Slices of pork are marinated in dark and light soy sauces and pepper, then stir-fried and sweetened with a sprinkling of sugar.*

36 **Satay Babi Goreng** *To cook this dish well, one must add an adequate amount of spices for the rempah and compliment it with the right amount of lemon grass and kaffir lime leaves.*

38 **Babi Ayam Pongteh** *This is one of the basic dishes that a Nyonya must learn how to cook well.*

40 **Babi Asam** *Flavoured with tamarind juice and asam gelugor, this dish of stir-fried pork has a sourish taste that makes it very moreish and satisfying.*

42 **Ngoh Hiang** *These meat rolls are typically served as part of a meal with rice and other side dishes.*

44 **Chicken Curry** *In the olden days, the Nyonyas ground their own spices for curry powder to ensure that they had the right balance and mix of spices for dishes like this one.*

46 **Ayam Buah Keluak** *This chicken and pork stew has come to be one of the defining dishes of Peranakan cooking. The buah keluak (Indonesian black nut) is the key ingredient in this dish.*

48 **Ayam Pedas Siam** *My great grandmother was from Siam (former name of Thailand). This spicy chicken curry is one of her creations.*

50 **Itek Sio** *To ensure you get the best flavour from this dish, try roasting your own coriander seeds to make ground coriander. This is typically served at family gatherings.*

52 **Ayam Goreng Rempah** *My friend Shinta, who is Indonesian Peranakan, shared this recipe for marinated deep-fried chicken wings with me.*

54 **Ayam Goreng Kunyit Halia** *Deep-fried chicken flavoured with turmeric and ginger is a simple but tasty dish that will appeal to the taste buds of both the young and old.*

56 **Beef Curry Dulukala** *This recipe uses both fresh and dried spices in the rempah to produce a highly flavourful and tasty dish that goes very well with rice.*

58 **Dendeng Belado** *This is almost like jerky except that the beef is gently simmered with spices, then deep-fried to obtain its tender yet crisp texture.*

60 **Gulai Kambeng** *This lamb curry is a sour and spicy dish with a thick gravy unlike typical curry dishes which are usually prepared with a thinner gravy.*

Babi Tohay

This is a very old recipe that many have forgotten. I learnt it from two very good friends, Uncle Tan Kim Guan and Auntie Rosie Gwee, both excellent cooks. We used to meet up at Katong Antique House on East Coast Road to chat and share cooking tips and recipes. The unique ingredient in this dish is the red yeast rice or *ang kak*, a fermented rice, which gives this dish its distinctive red colour. Today, red yeast rice extract is used in health supplements as a natural statin to help lower cholesterol.

Serves 4–6

- 500 g (1 lb 1½ oz) pork belly, boiled and sliced into 1-cm (½-in) thick slices
Cooking oil as needed
4 stalks lemon grass, ends trimmed, finely sliced
20 shallots, peeled and finely sliced
20 cloves garlic, peeled and finely sliced + 1 Tbsp minced garlic
15 kaffir lime leaves
2 red chillies, sliced
2 green chillies, sliced

TOHAY PASTE
50 g (1⅔ oz) uncooked rice
25 g (⅔ oz) sea salt
20 g (¾ oz) red yeast rice
250 g (9 oz) fermented prawns (shrimps) (*cincalok*)
3 tsp brandy
1 tsp sugar

Prepare *tohay* paste at least 5 days ahead. Heat a wok and dry-fry uncooked rice and salt separately until lightly browned. Remove and set aside to cool. Reheat wok and dry-fry red yeast rice for 1 minute. Remove and set aside to cool.

Separately pound roasted rice, sea salt, red yeast rice and fermented prawns, then pour into a glass mixing bowl and mix well. Add brandy and sugar and mix well.

Pour *tohay* paste into a glass bottle with a lid. Cover and leave to ferment for 5 days before using, shaking the bottle 3 times daily, once in the morning, once in the afternoon and once at night.

On the day of cooking, boil a small pot of water and cook pork belly lightly. Drain pork belly and reserve stock. Cut pork belly into 1-cm (½-in) thick slices.

Heat some oil in a wok and deep-fry lemon grass until crisp and golden. Drain and set aside. Repeat to fry sliced shallots and sliced garlic. Drain well.

Leave 2 Tbsp oil in wok and reheat. Add minced garlic and stir-fry for 1–2 minutes, then add 2 Tbsp *tohay* paste and kaffir lime leaves. Stir-fry to mix well.

Add sliced pork belly and some reserved stock. Add half the fried lemon grass, shallots and garlic slices and simmer for 5 minutes until fragrant. Add chillies and dish out.

Garnish with balance of fried lemon grass, shallots and garlic.

Note

For a less fatty dish, replace some of the pork belly with lean pork. The excess *tohay* paste can be stored in the refrigerator for future use.



Babi Ayam Pongteh

This is one of the basic dishes that a Nyonya must learn how to cook well. As with most Peranakan dishes, it is important to use an adequate amount of ingredients, in this case, shallots, and caramelise them well, or the flavour of the dish will not come through. For everyday cooking, simplify the dish and use just one of these ingredients—mushrooms, bamboo shoots or potatoes. Include all three ingredients for special occasions.

Serves 6–8

- | | |
|---|--|
| 60 g (2¼ oz) dried Chinese mushrooms | 100 g (3½ oz) canned bamboo shoot, cut into wedges |
| 750 ml (24 fl oz / 3 cups) water | ½ Tbsp dark soy sauce |
| 300 g (11 oz) shallots, peeled | 30 g (1 oz) rock sugar |
| 3 cloves garlic, peeled | 200 g (7 oz) potatoes, about 3, peeled and cut into quarters |
| 2 Tbsp cooking oil | 3 green chillies, sliced |
| 2½ Tbsp preserved soy bean paste, mashed | |
| 600 g (1 lb 5⅓ oz) pork ribs or pork belly, cut into pieces of desired size | |
| 600 g (1 lb 5⅓ oz) chicken, cut into pieces of desired size | |

Rinse dried Chinese mushrooms and soak in 750 ml (24 fl oz / 3 cups) water for about 30 minutes until mushrooms are softened. Slice mushrooms in half. Strain and reserve soaking liquid.

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind shallots and garlic into a paste.

Heat oil in a pot and add shallot and garlic paste. Stir-fry until dry and fragrant, then add preserved soy bean paste. Mix well and stir-fry for 1 minute.

Add pork and chicken and stir-fry to sear meat. Remove chicken and set aside. Leave pork in pot.

Add mushroom soaking liquid, mushrooms, bamboo shoot, dark soy sauce and rock sugar. Simmer until pork is tender, then return chicken to pot and continue to simmer until chicken is almost done. Add potatoes and cook until tender.

Taste and adjust seasoning with more rock sugar if necessary. The stew should have a subtle sweetness.

Dish out and garnish with green chillies. Serve hot with rice or toasted French loaves and a side dish of *sambal belacan* (page 11) if desired.

Note This recipe does not require additional salt as the preserved soy bean paste is salty.



For Review Only

Fish & Seafood



64 **Ikan Tempura** *Enjoy the sweetness and soft texture of the cooked onions and the sweet, sour and salty flavours of the clear sauce that coats these fish steaks.*

66 **Ikan Goreng Rempah Kari** *Lightly marinated with curry powder and light soy sauce, this pan-fried fish can be quickly and easily prepared and served with rice for a tasty and satisfying home-cooked meal.*

68 **Ikan Gerang Asam** *My father enjoyed eating this dish, so I learnt how to cook it for him from my auntie.*

70 **Sambal Ikan Selar** *This is a simple dish of fried fish stuffed with chilli paste. I remember it fondly as a dish my nanny prepared regularly.*

72 **Ikan Chincharu Bakar Daun Pandan** *This is horse mackerel simply seasoned with salt, then grilled or baked and enjoyed with a sweet, sour and spicy dip.*

74 **Ikan Kurau Pandan** *Baked simply and topped with a sweet, sour sauce and plenty of crispy fried shallots and garlic, this dish is one I enjoy very much.*

76 **Ikan Pari Kuah Lada** *This dish of stingray and aubergines relies on ground pepper for its flavour.*

78 **Otak-Otak Belanga** *These are fishcakes cooked in a wide-mouthed earthenware pot (belanga).*

80 **Otak-Otak Panggang** *These fragrant fish parcels are flavoured using the basic Peranakan rempah.*

82 **Udang Goreng Asam** *This tasty dish of deep-fried tamarind prawns is popular with adults and children.*

84 **Sambal Udang Belimbing** *The sour fruit bilimbi is key to the flavour of this dish. It has to be cooked until soft, so that its tartness blends well with the spices.*

86 **Udang Masak Pedas Nanas** *Prawns are cooked with Sarawak pineapple in this dish for it is a sweeter variety that is also less acidic.*

88 **Udang Goreng Chilli Garang** *In this dish, the prawns are coated with a chilli paste made from freshly ground red chillies and flavoured with kaffir limes leaves and calamansi lime juice.*

90 **Sotong Masak Asam** *Sliced squid gets cooked in squid ink and mixed with red and green chillies, making a colourful dish.*

Ikan Gerang Asam

This is the first dish that my Auntie Alice taught me. I still can recall the day vividly even though it was more than 30 years ago. My father enjoyed eating this dish and when my aunt came to visit us at our flat in Geylang Serai one weekend, he asked me to learn how to cook this from her so I could prepare it for him whenever he felt like eating it.

Serves 4–6

- 4 Tbsp cooking oil
- 120 g (4¼ oz) tamarind pulp, mixed with 1 litre (32 fl oz / 4 cups) water and strained
- 300 g (11 oz) salted vegetable (*kiam chye*), rinsed, cut into small pieces and soaked for at least 30 minutes to remove excess salt
- 4 steaks firm white-flesh fish, each about 1-cm (¼-in) thick
- 4 tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 1 Tbsp sugar

- REMPAH**
- 10 candlenuts
 - 10 slices galangal
 - 2 stalks lemon grass, ends trimmed, cut into short lengths
 - 300 g (11 oz) shallots, peeled
 - 6 slices turmeric
 - 2 tsp roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (*belacan*) (page 11)
 - 2 Tbsp dried chilli paste (page 11)

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind ingredients for *rempah* into a paste. Heat oil in a pot and add *rempah*. Stir-fry until fragrant. Add tamarind juice and salted vegetable. Bring to the boil, then lower heat and simmer for about 10 minutes. Add fish steaks and tomatoes. Once fish changes colour and is cooked, add sugar to taste. Dish out and garnish as desired. Serve hot with rice.



Ikan Pari Kuah Lada

This dish of stingray and aubergines relies on the ground pepper for its flavour, hence it is important to use pure pepper when preparing this dish. Whenever we prepared this dish at home, my Auntie Alice would advise me to "*gaul, makan sama tangan sama sambal belacan*" (mix with *sambal belacan* and eat with your fingers), which is really the best way to enjoy eating this dish!

Serves 4–6

- 4 Tbsp cooking oil
- 4 tsp ground white pepper
- 150 g (5⅓ oz) tamarind pulp, mixed with 1 litre (32 fl oz / 4 cups) water and strained
- 2–3 pieces stingray (*ikan pari*), about 600 g (1 lb 5⅓ oz), cut into smaller pieces
- 2 aubergines (eggplants/brinjals), halved, sliced and soaked in salted water, then drained before use
- 1 Tbsp sugar, or to taste
- ½ tsp sea salt, or to taste

- REMPAH**
- 15 slices galangal
 - 1 stalk lemon grass, ends trimmed, cut into short lengths
 - 8 slices turmeric
 - 4 cloves garlic, peeled
 - 300 g (11 oz) shallots, peeled
 - 2 tsp roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (*belacan*) (page 11)

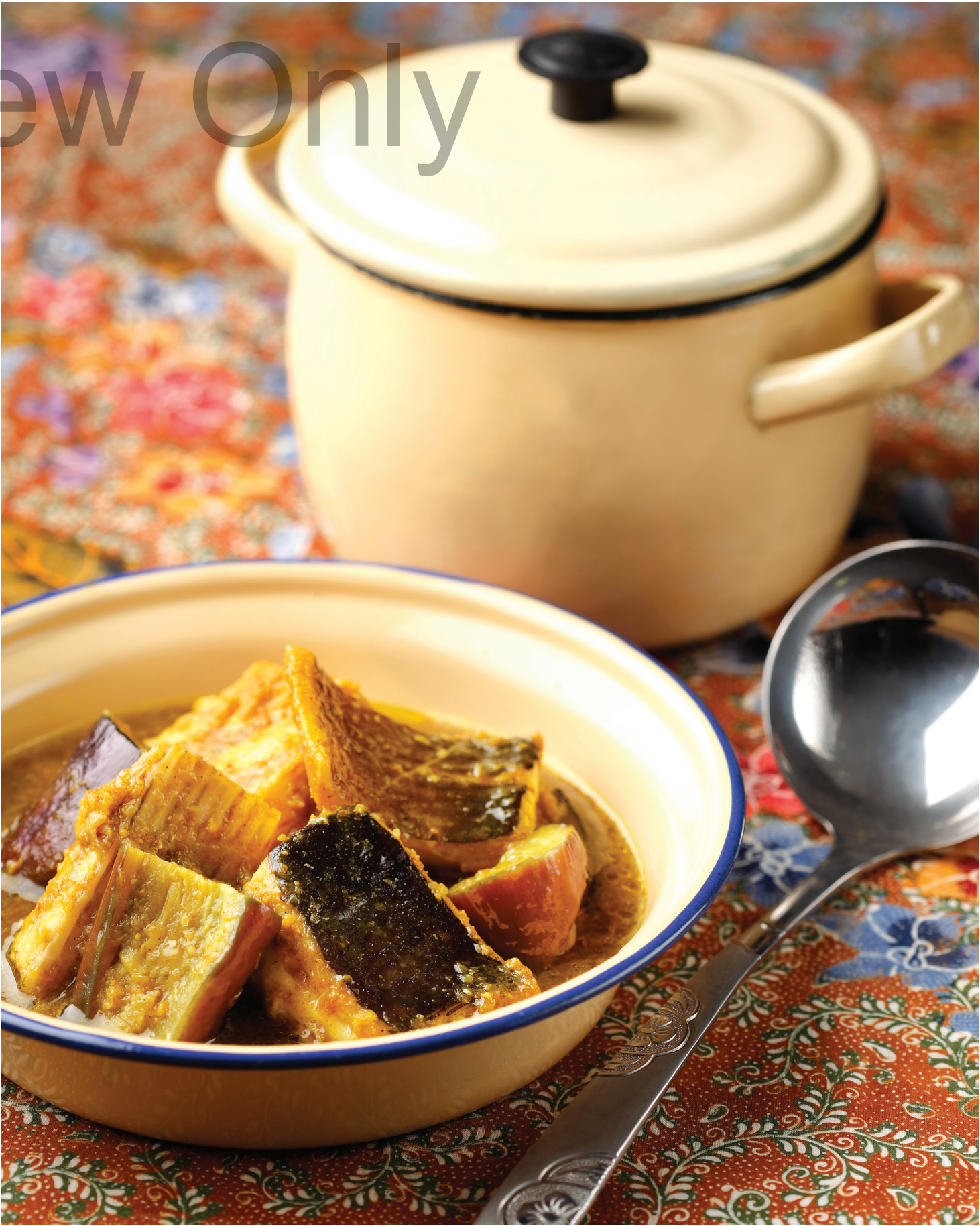
Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind ingredients for *rempah* into a paste.

Heat oil in a pot and add *rempah*. Stir-fry until fragrant and immediately add pepper. Mix well and add tamarind juice. Bring to the boil.

Add stingray and aubergines and lower heat to a simmer. When fish is cooked and aubergines are tender, season to taste with sugar and salt.

Dish out and serve hot with rice.

Note For the best results, prepare this dish with pure pepper. Commercially prepared ground pepper may not be pure, so the best way to obtain pure pepper is to roast white peppercorns and grind finely into a powder.



Sambal Udang Belimbing

A key ingredient in this dish is the bilimbi (*belimbing*). While the plant used to grow wild in kampongs and home gardens years ago, it is getting increasingly difficult to find this fruit today as kampongs have been cleared and high-rise homes have overtaken homes with gardens. If you do get hold of this fruit, remember to cook it until it is soft, so its sour flavour will be well blended with the spices in the sauce. Coconut milk completes this dish, giving it a rich (*lemak*) taste.

Serves 6–8

- 3 Tbsp cooking oil
- 8–10 kaffir lime leaves, torn
- 30–40 pieces bilimbi, sliced
- 1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) king prawns (shrimps), legs and feelers trimmed
- 100 ml (3½ fl oz) coconut milk
- Salt to taste
- Sugar to taste

- REMPAH**
- 6 candlenuts
 - 250 g (9 oz) shallots, peeled
 - 10 red chillies
 - 1 Tbsp dried chilli paste (page 11)
 - 2 tsp roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (*belacan*) (page 11)

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind ingredients for *rempah* into a paste.

Heat oil in a wok and add *rempah* and kaffir lime leaves. Stir-fry until fragrant.

Add bilimbi fruit and mix well. Cook until bilimbi is softened, then sprinkle in some water and bring to a simmer.

Add prawns and stir-fry to mix. When prawns turn red and are cooked, add coconut milk, salt and sugar to taste.

Dish out and serve hot with rice or *mee siam* (page 116).



For Review Only

Soups



94 **Bak Wan Kepiting** *A delicious clear soup with shredded bamboo shoot and meatballs made of minced pork, minced prawns, crabmeat and fish paste, this is often made to celebrate special occasions.*

96 **Pong Tauhu** *The meatballs in this soup are made from a mixture of minced pork, prawns and mashed bean curd. As a child, what I really enjoyed about this soup was that the meatballs were large!*

98 **Itek Tim** *Among all the Peranakan soups, this salted vegetable and duck (itek) soup is the probably the easiest one to prepare.*

100 **Papaya Masak Titek** *This old Peranakan soup made using half-ripe papaya, salted fish and a rempah is a favourite with the older generation.*

102 **Hee Pio Soup** *This soup is hardly prepared on a regular basis because the prawn balls, egg rolls and meatballs in it are specially made.*

104 **Sotong Sumbat Babi** *This soup of squid tubes stuffed with a mixture of minced pork and prawns is visually appealing and very tasty.*

Bak Wan Kepiting

A delicious clear soup with shredded bamboo shoot and meatballs made of minced pork, minced prawns, crabmeat and fish paste. In our family, this dish was only prepared to celebrate special occasions such as Chinese New Year and weddings as the ingredients were expensive. On regular days, we would however enjoy another soup, *pong tauhu* (page 96), where the crabmeat was replaced with bean curd.

Serves 8–10

- 2 Tbsp cooking oil
- 3 tsp minced garlic
- 1 tsp preserved soy bean paste, mashed
- 200 g (7 oz) canned bamboo shoot, cut into strips
- 1 sprig coriander leaves (cilantro)

PORK STOCK

- 1.5 litres (48 fl oz / 6 cups) water
- 150 g (5½ oz) pork bones

MEATBALLS

- 2 Tbsp cooking oil
- 2 Tbsp minced garlic
- 300 g (11 oz) minced pork
- 300 g (11 oz) minced prawns (shrimps)
- 600 g (1 lb 5⅓ oz) crabmeat
- 1 Tbsp fish paste (page 78)
- 2 tsp ground white pepper
- 2 Tbsp light soy sauce

Prepare pork stock. Bring water to the boil with pork bones, then lower heat and simmer until liquid is reduced to about 1.25 litres (40 fl oz / 5 cups). Set aside.

Prepare meatballs. Heat oil in wok and stir-fry minced garlic until lightly browned. Drain well and place into a bowl with other ingredients for meatballs. Mix well and shape into small balls each weighing about 15 g (½ oz). You should get about 40 meatballs.

Prepare soup. Heat oil in a casserole pot and stir-fry minced garlic until lightly browned. Working quickly, add preserved soy bean paste and lower heat to avoid burning bean paste. Add pork stock and bring to the boil.

Add prepared meatballs and bamboo shoot strips. When meatballs float, they are cooked. Taste soup and adjust seasoning to taste with salt or light soy sauce.

Ladle into serving bowls and garnish with coriander leaves. Serve hot.

For Review Only



For Review Only

Rice & Noodles



108 **Sambal Belacan Fried Rice** *This well-flavoured and moreish fried rice is prepared using a favourite Peranakan condiment, sambal belacan.*

110 **Buah Keluak Fried Rice** *This is a rice dish I created specially for those who enjoy eating buah keluak (Indonesian black nut).*

112 **Lontong** *This stew makes a tasty light meal and can be served for breakfast or lunch.*

114 **Nyonya Mee** *This noodle dish is an all-time favourite among my family and friends. What makes this dish typically Peranakan is the use of preserved soy bean paste.*

116 **Mee Siam** *This flavourful dish requires several steps to do, but the results are well worth the extra effort.*

118 **Nyonya Laksa** *My family's version of this dish includes coconut milk in moderation, so it is not too rich.*

Buah Keluak Fried Rice

Like the recipe for *sambal belacan* fried rice (page 108), this is another rice dish I created specially for those who enjoy eating *buah keluak* (Indonesian black nut). I blend the kernels with other spices into a fine paste, cook it until fragrant, then mix it with rice, ensuring every grain is well coated. The minced pork and minced prawns add bite while making the dish more substantial. This dish goes well with *sambal belacan*.

Serves 4–6

Cooking oil as needed

1 Tbsp minced garlic

1 onion, large, peeled and chopped

250 g (9 oz) minced pork

400 g (14 1/3 oz) prawns (shrimps), peeled

4 eggs, beaten

1 cucumber, peeled, halved, soft centre discarded and cut into small cubes

8 kaffir lime leaves, central vein removed and finely sliced

12 laksa leaves, finely sliced

BUAH KELUAK PASTE

5 *buah keluak* (Indonesian black nuts)

3 candlenuts

5 slices galangal

1/2 Tbsp dried chilli paste (page 11)

150 g (5 oz) shallots, peeled

1/2 tsp roasted prawn (shrimp) paste (*belacan*) (page 11)

3 slices turmeric

RICE

2 rice cups long grain rice, rinsed

2 rice cups water

Prepare *buah keluak* 3 days ahead. Wash, then soak nuts for 3 days, changing water daily. On day of cooking, crack cap of nuts using a pestle, then remove kernel using a teaspoon (see page 46).

On day of cooking, start by cooking rice. Place rice and water into a rice cooker to cook. When rice is done, remove from heat and leave to cool completely before using.

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind *buah keluak* kernels together with other ingredients for *buah keluak* paste until fine.

Heat 2 Tbsp oil in a wok and add *buah keluak* paste. Stir-fry until fragrant. Dish out and set aside.

Add 3 Tbsp oil to wok. When hot, add garlic and stir-fry until lightly browned.

Add onion, *buah keluak* paste, minced pork and prawns. When pork and prawns are cooked, add beaten eggs followed by cooled cooked rice. Mix well to coat rice with egg and *buah keluak* paste.

Turn off heat and add cucumber cubes, kaffir lime leaves and laksa leaves. Mix well. Dish out and serve.



For Review Only

Snacks & Desserts



122 **Pulot Hitam Longan** *This dish of glutinous rice porridge flavoured with pandan leaves and sweetened with palm sugar and dried longans is one of my favourites.*

124 **Kueh Lapis Rempah** *This cake is Indonesian in origin. In the olden days, the spice blend used in this cake would be guarded by the Nyonyas as a family secret.*

126 **Sugee Almond Butter Cake** *Sugee almond butter cake is basically a butter cake with added semolina (sugee) that gives the cake its characteristic grainy texture and ground almonds that give it its flavour.*

128 **Rempah Udang** *This is a savoury snack of glutinous rice with a filling of ground dried prawns and grated coconut wrapped in banana leaves.*

130 **Kueh Bangket** *These bite-size, melt-in-the-mouth cookies are popularly prepared for the Chinese New Year.*

132 **Kueh Bengka Ubi Durian** *Originally a traditional tapioca cake, I've added durian to this as a treat for durian lovers.*

134 **Pineapple Tarts** *The traditional Peranakan-made pineapple tarts are open-faced and feature a lattice pattern made from excess pastry dough.*

136 **Sugee Butter Cookies** *These rich, buttery cookies have a light and crumbly texture and will simply melt in your mouth.*

138 **Mini Prawn Rolls** *These mini prawns rolls are a favourite snack for the Chinese New Year.*

140 **Sambal Lengkong** *This spicy Nyonya fish floss was traditionally prepared using a gerengseng (copper wok) as it was believed that the wok would impart a rich golden brown colour to the floss.*

142 **Nyonya Kaya** *Making this egg jam was really a labour of love in the past as you had to stir the mixture constantly for hours until it was thickened and smooth.*

144 **Sweet Potato in Ginger Syrup** *This traditional Peranakan dessert is made using just a few simple ingredients but it is an excellent comfort food that can be served at any time of the day.*

Sugee Almond Butter Cake

My god-brother, Samuel Chan, taught me how to bake this cake which is enjoyed by both the Peranakan and Eurasian communities in Singapore. In the 1970s and 1980s, both communities popularly used this cake as a wedding cake. Its roots can be traced back to the Portuguese in Goa on the west coast of India, who subsequently colonised Malacca, bringing the Indian ingredient (known in India as *sugi*, *suji* or *soojee*) with them. *Sugee* almond butter cake is basically a butter cake with added semolina (*sugee*) that gives the cake its characteristic grainy texture and ground almonds that give it its flavour.

Makes one 22-cm (8½-in) square cake

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 130 g (4½ oz) plain (all-purpose) flour | ¼ tsp salt |
| 80 g (2⅔ oz) semolina (<i>sugee</i>) flour | 4 eggs, at room temperature |
| 1 tsp baking powder | 4 Tbsp sweetened condensed milk |
| 250 g (9 oz) butter, at room temperature | 1 tsp vanilla essence |
| 175 g (6¼ oz) castor sugar | 4 Tbsp ground almonds |

Sift plain flour, semolina flour and baking powder into a mixing bowl. Mix well and set aside.

Using an electric mixer, beat butter, sugar and salt until creamy. Add eggs one at a time and beat until incorporated. Add condensed milk and vanilla essence.

Fold in flour mixture until incorporated, then fold in ground almonds. Allow batter to sit for about 5 minutes.

Preheat oven to 170°C (330°F). Line and grease a 22-cm (8½-in) square baking tin.

Pour batter into prepared baking tin and bake for 30–45 minutes. The baking time will depend on your oven and the size of the baking tin used. The cake is done when a skewer inserted into the centre of cake comes out clean.

Remove cake from oven. Leave cake to cool in tin for about 10 minutes before removing to cool completely on a wire rack.

Decorate cake with fondant if desired. Slice and serve.



Rempah Udang

A savoury snack of glutinous rice with a filling of ground dried prawns and grated coconut wrapped in banana leaves, *rempah udang* is very popular with both children and adults. Although the rice and filling are already cooked prior to grilling, the additional step of grilling the banana leaf parcels infuses the rice with the fragrance of the leaves and gives them a lovely, appetising smoky flavour.

Makes about 30 parcels

- Banana leaves as needed

2–3 dried *bunga telang* (Clitoria ternatea) flowers, rinsed

Water as needed

600 g (1 lb 5⅓ oz) white glutinous rice, soaked for 4 hours

250 ml (8 fl oz / 1 cup) coconut milk

½ tsp salt

60 bamboo cocktail sticks or tape

FILLING

200 g (7 oz) dried prawns (shrimps), rinsed and drained
- 4-cm (1½-in) lemon grass bulbous end

3 cloves garlic, peeled

200 g (7 oz) shallots, peeled

2-cm (1-in) knob turmeric, peeled or 1 tsp ground turmeric

2 Tbsp cooking oil

2–3 Tbsp dried chilli paste (page 11)

100 g (3½ oz) grated skinned coconut

½ tsp salt

2 tsp sugar

Wipe banana leaves clean, then scald in hot water or over an open flame to soften leaves and prevent them from tearing when folded. Cut to obtain about 30 square sheets, each 9-cm (3½-in). Set banana leaves aside.

Place dried *bunga telang* in a bowl with 100 ml (3½ fl oz) water. Leave to soak for about 15 minutes, longer if you want a deeper blue. Strain colouring.

Rinse and strain glutinous rice. Place on a steaming tray. Mix coconut milk with 100 ml (3½ fl oz) water and salt. Pour over glutinous rice. Using a teaspoon, drop spoonfuls of blue colouring randomly on rice to colour it in patches.

Steam rice for about 45 minutes or until rice is tender and cooked. Set aside to cool. While rice is cooling, prepare filling.

Heat a wok and dry-fry dried prawns until fragrant. Leave to cool, then grind until fine using a mortar and pestle or blender.

Using a mortar and pestle or blender, grind lemon grass, garlic, shallots and turmeric into a paste. Heat oil in a wok and add ground mixture and dried chilli paste. Stir-fry until fragrant. Add ground dried prawns and grated coconut. Stir-fry until golden brown. Add salt and sugar.

To make parcels, spoon 2 Tbsp cooked glutinous rice on a banana leaf square and press it down lightly. Spoon enough filling in a line along the middle of rice, then roll banana leaf up neatly to get a cylindrical parcel. Secure open ends with cocktail sticks or tape. Repeat until ingredients are used up.

Grill parcels for 1–2 minutes or until leaves are lightly browned. Serve.

