

# **‘Kasut Manik’ Peranakan Baba and Nyonya; A Collection of Preservation Efforts.**

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**Abstract.** *Kasut Manik* or beaded shoe refers to traditional shoes embellished with intricate and gorgeous beads, which are a vital part of Baba and Nyonya’s Peranakan cultural history. This collaborative preservation effort demonstrates the ability to defend Peranakan baba and nyonya fashion artworks. The purpose of this study is to collect and research previous studies on the preservation of Peranakan Baba and Nyonya beaded shoes. The researcher employed the data triangulation technique in addition to SLR (Systematic Literature Review) to acquire diverse findings on the empowerment of Baba and Nyonya traditional heritage. Document or text analysis, audio-visual analysis and online field research are all part of this technique. The findings of this study reveal that the goal of preserving Peranakan culture can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The gathering of scholarly articles or journals, book publication, annual conventions, apprenticeship programmes, virtual sharing, collaborative networks, gift collections, exhibitions, and tourism promotion are among the initiatives proposed. This study is expected to provide guidance and aid in the preservation of Peranakan Baba and Nyonya culture. As a result, the purpose of this study is to create a collection of literature that has never been done before by a researcher as a written record to be used as an academic reference for future scholars.

Keyword: *Kasut Manik*, Peranakan Baba and Nyonya, preservation, efforts.

## **1.Introduction**

The Peranakan ethnicity of Baba and Nyonya is unique in that it is a Chinese-descent ethnicity found in the Straits states, particularly in Malacca, Penang, and Singapore. Peranakans are

called as 'Baba and Nyonya' in Malaysia, where 'Baba' refers to men and 'Nyonya' refers to women. The term 'Peranakan' solely means 'descendant' in Malay and Indonesian. The Baba and Nyonya Peranakan community is another name for the Chinese Peranakan community. Rudolph (1998) defines the Peranakan male community as 'baba', whereas the Peranakan female society is known as 'nyonya'. Peranakan Baba and Nyonya have many artistic heritages, including architecture, culinary art, apparel art, weaving art, pottery art, and many more. The Peranakans are also regarded as a wealthy people who own fine furniture, wear jewels on their clothing and live in mansions (Hardwick, 2008). The Peranakan's brilliance and high level of living are also reflected in their clothes. The intricacy of production and the one-of-a-kindness of beaded shoes became symbols of their wealth. According to Aizuddin Saat (n.d), Beaded shoes were popular in the 1930s among Peranakan men (baba) and women (nyonya). However, beaded shoes are currently mostly worn by women. Tan Kok Oo (2017) believes that beaded shoes became fashionable in the 1930s. Despite the fact that many Peranakan Baba and Nyonya heritages are being lost and the number of art practitioners is decreasing, the fashion art of Peranakan Baba and Nyonya that was once famous, namely the heritage of beaded shoe art, is still seen to be relevant, preserved, and gaining a place in the local and international market.

## 2. Literature Review

Beaded shoes are Peranakan Chinese women's shoes made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of little colourful beads. Each bead is meticulously sewn by hand, generating intricate motifs that enchant in a rainbow of vibrant colours. Beaded shoes, on the other hand, are more than just elegant shoes. (2021, Augustine). According to Raja Abdul Razak (2021), the most popular Nyonya object that can still be found today is the beaded slippers, or *Manek Eh* in Hokkien, the Peranakan people's 'lingua-franca'. The term *Kasot Manek* is also used to describe beaded shoes (PPM, 2023). Loo (2023), on the other hand, believes that 'Kasut Manik' is a hand-stitched shoe with a particular pattern that is carefully and lovingly created by highly talented workers utilising premium imported embroidery beads. Sohaimi Zakaria (2017), like Loo, characterises beaded shoes as handmade or fine needlework art shoes. It is entirely handmade, with its own design motif ornamentation, by talented artists utilising multi-colored embroidery beads and materials. Weaving and stitching delicate colourful beads into elaborate motifs is a time-consuming and delicate handmade endeavour. Making beaded shoes is more than a challenge.

Beaded shoes were previously sewn by Peranakan girls as young as 12 using cut beads particularly imported from Europe to ensure their longevity and aesthetic appeal (Timothy Auger, 2008). A Nyonya's marriageability is determined by her craftsmanship and diligence; for example, if a Nyonya does not know how to manufacture good beads and embroidery, she is a useless lady (Ghim, 2021). According to Lee Yuen Thien (2021), parents frequently chose future sons-in-law based on their sewing talents because it is believed that one may learn about a person's character and personality via their workmanship. Beaded shoes, regardless of their shape or style, exude a sense of grandeur. Beaded shoes are the ideal accessory for any elegant, traditional, or modern ensemble. Previously worn by both Peranakan men (Baba) and women (Nyonya), Nyonya beaded shoes are now only worn by women (Tan Kok Oo, 2017). Peranakan beaded shoes, according to Lee Yuen Thien (2021, as cited in Mizan Kamalina Jummat, 2021), manager at the Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum in Malacca, having more to do with cultural identity and expression than fashion or utility. He went on to say that beaded shoes depict the Peranakan people's lengthy history, and the design is usually tied to their diverse lifestyles.

Peranakan handicrafts, like other handicrafts in Malaysia, have their own individuality as one of the intangible heritage handicrafts (fine art category) gazetted by the National Heritage Department. However, no *adiguru* or ‘master craftsman’ of beaded shoes has been recognised by the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, which is part of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture. In a statement issued by the late Tun Endon Mahmood, the wife of Malaysia's fifth former Prime Minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was active in the national arts, she stated that various elements of Malaysia's collective culture are eroding and may disappear entirely if action is not taken to preserve or record them for future generations. The beaded shoe handicraft sector in Malaysia has lagged behind other handicraft industries in Malaysia due to a declining population, a lack of actual descendants of Baba and Nyonya, and modern technological problems (Zakaria, 2017). This is significant since the Peranakan Baba and Nyonya are the country's first ethnic groups and have unique cultural assets, particularly the beaded shoe art that was prominent in the late 15th century. Despite different efforts, this handmade work appears to have lost its individuality by the year 2000 (Kim, 2003). Ros Mahwati (2021) agreed, stating that a lack of awareness and appreciation for the indigenous culture may lead to the erosion of Peranakan identity. Cultural discontinuity arises when people do not wear beaded shoes frequently enough and no attempt is made to market them.

### 3. Methodology

The systematic literature review (SLR) method is used in this investigation. The search focused on aspects of beaded shoe art, Peranakan Baba and Nyonya, as well as conservation and empowerment measures that have been undertaken. According to Blanche and Durheim (1999), one major goal of highlighting the study of previous researchers is to comprehend the subject being examined and to identify current shortcomings. The material gathered will then be analysed and discussed as the study's findings. This study also employs the 'triangulation' methodology, which is the practise of gathering data using more than one method. The combination of data from document/text analysis (journals, articles, books, websites, newspapers), audio-video analysis, and online field research was extremely beneficial in producing the study's conclusions.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Articles and journals

Until 2023, papers and journals concerning beaded shoes will remain a valuable source of information in the worlds of fashion and tradition. Beaded shoes, commonly known as *kasut manik* have become a fascinating handcraft product to research. Researchers can give significant information to art practitioners, scholars, and heritage lovers about the role and evolution of beaded shoes today, in addition to helping raise and respect the art and skills involved with the creation and usage of beaded shoes. The following is a brief listing of prior researchers' articles on beaded shoes;

Figure 4.1: Previous scholars' articles and journals on beaded shoes.

Year	Author	Research	Research Focus	Keyword
2019	Siti Khadijah Farhah Sulaiman	<i>Motif Dan Warna Dalam Budaya Cina Peranakan; Kajian Kes ke Atas Kasut Manik Tradisional</i>	Motifs and colors used in beaded shoes	Motifs, colors, meaning of beaded shoes
2018	Noor Azam	Beaded Shoes: The Culture of Baba	Beaded shoe	Manufacturing

	Azmi et al.	Nyonya	production guidelines/procedures, bead selection, and manufacturing processes	processes and guidelines
2017	Sohaimi Zakaria et al.	<i>Pengalaman Mewarisi Pengalaman dan Kemahiran Seni Kasut Manik Baba dan Nyonya: Pandangan Melalui Sejarah Lisan</i>	Mrs. Maszni, the Malay entrepreneur is not a descendant of beaded shoes.	Experience, skills, non-descendant
2016	Thienny Lee	Dress and Visual Identities of the Nyonyas in the British Straits Settlements; Mid-Nineteenth to Early-Twentieth Century	The dress identity of Nyonya	Chinese aesthetics, lady's clothing, European fashion influences
2016	Devanny et al.	<i>Kajian Asimilasi Budaya Pada Sandal dan Tas Wanita Cina Peranakan</i>	The uniqueness of personal jewelry and accessories combined with Javanese, Dutch and Chinese cultural influences.	Assimilation, accessories
2016	Linda Ai Wah Cheok	Patterns, Pride and Prejudice: A Comparative Study of Patterns and Motifs Across the Indo-Pasific	Featuring home décor from Japan, China, and Singapore.	Motif, Indo-Pasific
2005	Hwei Fe'n Cheah	Phoenix Rising: Narratives in Nyonya Beadwork From the Straits Settlements, 1870 to the Present	Bead embroidery on accessories, home decorations	Beadwork

## 4.2 The publication of books

The creation of a book to preserve beaded shoes is a significant step in supporting and promoting this handcraft technique. By producing books about beaded shoes, we may gather, preserve, and pass on the knowledge and experience involved in the beaded shoe making process to future generations. The following is a list of books discovered and used by researchers to make this research a success. These books explore the history of Peranakan origins, ways of life, experiences, beliefs, and arts;

Figure 4.2: Publication of a book about Peranakan Baba and Nyonya that includes information about the art of beaded shoes.

Book Title	Author	Year	Publisher
Let's Manik Together: The Art of Peranakan Beadwork	Lee Yuen Thien	2022	PPCM, Melaka
The Baba of Melaka: Culture and Identity of a Chinese Peranakan Community in Malaysia	Tan Chee-Beng	2022	SIRD, Malaysia
Straits Chinese Embroidery & Beadwork: The Private Collection of Baba Peter Soon	Lillian Tong	Jubilee Edition 2020 (terbitan asal 2015)	Pinang Peranakan Mansion, Penang
Kebaya Tales: 10th Anniversary Edition	Lee Su Kim	2019	Marshall Cavendish, Singapore
A Baba Album: Life & Times of a Reawakened Peranakan	Peter Wee	2017	Katong Antique House, Singapore
Manek Mischiefs: Of Patriarchs, Playboys and Paramours	Lee Su Kim	2017	Marshall Cavendish, Singapore
Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum: Home of a Peranakan Family Since 1861	Melissa Chan	2015	Chan Heritage Sdn. Bhd

Sarong Secrets: Of love, loss and longing	Lee Su Kim	2014	Marshall Cavendish, Singapore
Nyonya Kebaya: A Century of Starits Chinese Costume	Datin Seri Endon Mahmood	2012	Periplus Editions, Singapore
The Pinang Peranakan Mansion: A Museum of Straits Chinese Cultural Heritage	Chan Suan Choo	2011	Media Art Printing, Penang
Pheonix Rising: Narratives in Nyonya Beadwork from the Straits Settlements	Hwei-Fe'n Cheah	2010	NUS Press, Singapore
Gateway to Peranakan Culture	Lim GS, Catherine	2003	AsiaPac Books, Singapore

### 4.3 Annual International Convention



Picture 4.3: Different posters for the Baba Nyonya International Convention.

Many activities are planned during the convention to keep the gathering lively. A bazaar, for example, is conducted to introduce and sell Peranakan products. A gala supper was also hosted to allow participants to connect and eat traditional Peranakan dishes. A museum visit is also planned to provide insight into Peranakan history and culture. A Peranakan exhibition is also conducted to display art, traditional attire, and one-of-a-kind things associated with Peranakan culture. Symposiums are also hosted throughout the convention to enable the sharing of knowledge and ideas between specialists and participants. This symposium provides a forum for discussion of Peranakan heritage, art, and history. Overall, the conference provided an excellent chance for Peranakan culture and history enthusiasts to meet, interact, and learn more about this rich heritage.

### 4.4 Apprenticeship program

In 2018, the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) launched the ‘Penang Apprenticeship Programme for Artisans (PAPA)’ with the goal of preserving trade and traditional skills in the community. PAPA is a community-based project that focuses on hands-on learning and direct interaction between traditional handicraft professionals and beginners. This programme seeks to guarantee that this intangible cultural legacy is recognised and preserved as part of the ‘Outstanding Universal Value of World legacy Sites’. PAPA also allows traditional craftsmen to pass on their knowledge to the next generation, ensuring that these abilities do not die with the older generation.





Picture 4.4: PAPA poster; ‘Nyonya Beaded Shoes (Kasut Manek Workshop)’.  
 Source: Penang Heritage Trust (PHT), 2018.

### 4.5 Virtual sharing

Peranakan Sayang's virtual sharing on the topic ‘Let's Chakap Manik Together’ via Facebook and YouTube is an important initiative in conserving and spreading the craft of bead shoes. It provides a virtual area for people to come together to learn, share, and grow in this beautiful craft. Peranakan Sayang provides a venue for people to engage, share expertise, and build a community around the art of bead shoe making through this website. ‘Let's Chakap Manik Together’ also allows participants to engage with one another, exchange ideas, and share their experiences in the realm of beaded shoes. Participants can ask specialists questions about the history, various patterns and meanings, and personal experiences, as well as come up with innovative ideas and obtain inspiration for beaded shoes.



Picture 4.5: ‘Let's Chakap Manik Together’ by Peranakan Sayang through virtual sharing.  
 Source: Facebook Peranakan Sayang, 2022.

#### 4.6 Collaboration network

Malaysia Airlines' parent company, Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), has collaborated with Kenny Loh, a local designer who has influenced the art of beaded shoes, to develop a limited edition beaded shoe collection in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. The Long-Term Business Plan 2.0 of MAG aims to preserve the Peranakan ethnic group, Malaysian heritage, culture, and customs, as well as reinvigorate the local craft world. MAG is pleased to collaborate with Kenny Loh to jointly reduce waste while educating the next generation on the local craft scene, with the goal of becoming Asia's Leading Travel and Service Group promoting socio-economic development in order to gradually achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 (Philip See, 2022).



Picture 4.6: Kenny Loh (third from left) and MAG collaborated on a beaded shoe design. Beaded shoes come in three different colours: Singapore Red, Melaka Blue, and Penang Green. It is named after three Malay Peninsula locations that are home to the Peranakan population. (MAG, 2022).

#### 4.7 Gift Collections

Malaysia Airlines is attempting to promote local handicrafts to overseas tourists through its efforts. Malaysia Airlines plays a part in presenting and promoting Peranakan culture and Malaysian handicrafts to the international audience by introducing and marketing inventive products such as 'Maisarah Loo Miniature Nyonya Beaded Shoe' to visitors. This allows for the preservation and enjoyment of Peranakan cultural history, as well as the development of a respect for creative arts and local handicrafts. Furthermore, Penang's beaded shoe expert, May Lim Siew Seng, has manufactured her collection of beaded shoes in the form of a keychain, which may be used as a keepsake. Meanwhile, in Melaka, travellers can purchase fridge magnets and stamps as decorations and keepsakes.



Picture 4.7: (Left) ‘Maisarah Loo Miniature Nyonya Beaded Shoe’. A unique gift showcasing Nyonya’s traditional shoes in miniature size. (Right) May Lim Siew Seng’s personal collection keychain, 2023, and fridge magnet inspired by beaded shoes.

#### 4.8 Tourism exhibition and promotion

Recently, the Petaling Jaya Museum, run by the Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ), invited the public to attend the Cultural Heritage Exhibition named ‘The Heritage Of The Straits Chinese’ in June 2023. The purpose of this exhibition is to educate the public about the cultural legacy known as Baba and Nyonya. The exhibition includes artefacts, photographs, anecdotes, and historical recordings that provide a complete overview of Peranakan Baba and Nyonya daily life, arts and crafts, and cultural legacy. Furthermore, promoting beaded shoe products through brochures in tourism centres is an excellent approach to link Peranakan cultural products with tourists and customers from both domestic and international markets. This is an opportunity not just to promote lesser-known cultures, but also to celebrate the cultural and historical diversity that shapes the local community's identity.



Picture 4.8: The heritage of The Straits Chinese and Penang Baba Nyonya Heritage exhibition poster. Source: Petaling Jaya Museum and Penang Tourist Information Center (PTIC).



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the preservation efforts have had a significant impact on the continuation of the Peranakan legacy of Baba and Nyonya for use by researchers or future generations. In addition to participating in art exhibitions, cultural events, and collaborative design and marketing of beaded shoe goods, technology and social media can be used to promote Peranakan beaded shoes. Websites, e-commerce platforms, virtual exhibitions, and online marketing can help reach more people and spread the word about breakthroughs in Peranakan beaded shoe manufacturing and design processes. This research will hopefully provide guidance and aid in the preservation of Baba and Nyonya Peranakan culture. As a result, this study was successful in assembling a collection of material never previously assembled by researchers as a written record that may be utilised as a scientific reference by future researchers.

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