

**PHOENIX RISING**  
**NARRATIVES IN NONYA BEADWORK FROM THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS,**  
**1870 TO THE PRESENT**

**Two Volumes**

By

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## ABSTRACT

Until the first half of the twentieth century, Nonya beadwork and embroidery were important means of textile decoration for the Peranakans, the acculturated Chinese settlers in the Straits Settlements and the Netherlands Indies. Intricate and visually distinctive, Nonya beadwork is now regarded as a visual marker of a quaint Peranakan past. Its amalgamation of local, Chinese, and European influences is seen as a testimony to the celebrated hybridity of the Peranakan heritage. Yet despite the wealth of research on Southeast Asian textiles and the current intensification of interest in Peranakan material culture, no rigorous art historical study on Nonya beadwork has thus far been undertaken. This study contributes to the scholarship of Southeast Asian textile history by focusing on the relatively neglected area of needlework, demonstrating its potential as a source of cultural and historical information. This thesis also expands the perspectives on Peranakan Chinese decorative art by focusing on the historicity of Nonya beadwork, both as object and activity, such that beadwork becomes a tool with which to probe the social and symbolic world of the Peranakans.

As an activity, beadwork was considered to be an important part of a Peranakan girl's set of skills. As an object, carefully crafted Nonya beadwork was used as ornamentation for weddings, as part of the gift exchange from a bride to a groom and his family, and as dress accessories for Chinese New Year and important celebratory occasions. Even though beadwork was a gendered activity, the beaded object entered the lives of Peranakan men and women, young and old. In this way, Nonya beadwork was entwined within the wider relationships between gender, generation, and social hierarchy in Peranakan society. As a secular item, neither the creation nor the use of Nonya beadwork faced the strict constraints of spiritual beliefs and cosmological world views that regulated the production of religious artefacts or other Southeast Asian ceremonial and ritual textiles. The Peranakans could therefore incorporate styles and motifs into their beadwork that reflected their changing ideals, aspirations, and lifestyles. Inscribed into the history of Nonya beadwork is a narrative of the Peranakan community's cultural transformations.

Whereas Nonya beadwork is now considered traditional, this thesis argues that the meanings imbued in beadwork have always been shaped by the Peranakans' concerns about the social and political milieux of the times in which they were created and used.

For a migrant community located at the busy crossroads of the East-West trade, its negotiation of a precious but distant Chinese heritage and its ties to an adopted land were inextricably bound up with its encounters with the flow of ideas from East and West and the ways in which it confronted modernity. By unravelling the history of the Nonya beadwork through an analysis of the changes in the Peranakans' attitudes towards beading and the modifications of techniques, designs, and styles in beadwork, this thesis reveals the shifting expressions of Peranakan culture and identity in the Straits Settlements as the Peranakan community engaged with modernity, gendered norms, and an ancestral heritage in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, expressions from which Peranakan culture is conceived in the present.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Volume One

Glossary	.....	ix
Introduction	.....	1
Chapter One	Approaching Nonya Beadwork.....	18
<i>Part One</i>	<i>The Social Role of Nonya Beadwork.....</i>	<i>57</i>
Chapter Two	The Changing Shape of Peranakan Society.....	59
Chapter Three	Domesticated Daughters, Dutiful Wives: The Social Role of Nonya Beadwork.....	99
<i>Part Two</i>	<i>Beadwork and the Negotiation of Peranakan Identity.....</i>	<i>137</i>
Chapter Four	Towards a Chronology of Nonya Beadwork.....	142
Chapter Five	Embroidering Culture: Early Nonya Beadwork from 1870 to 1900.....	177
Chapter Six	Crafting Identities: Tensions and Tradition in Nonya Beadwork from 1900 to the 1970s.....	200
<i>Part Three</i>	<i>Nonya Beadwork in Contemporary Society.....</i>	<i>239</i>
Chapter Seven	Tradition and the Peranakan Present.....	241
Conclusion	.....	270
Works Cited	.....	275
<i>Appendices</i>		
Appendix A	The Trade of Beads in the Straits Settlements, 1827–1937.....	307
Appendix B	Nonya Beadwork in the Field Museum, Chicago.....	326

**Volume Two**

*List of Figures*

*Figures*

## GLOSSARY

This Glossary is divided into three sections: Selected Non-English Terms used by the Peranakans, Other Non-English Terms, and Needlework and Beadwork Terms.

### Selected Non-English Terms used by the Peranakans

There is, as yet, no standardised romanization for Peranakan terminology in the Straits Settlements, which includes many loan words or derivations from Malay and Hokkien (a southern Chinese dialect). “Bead,” for instance, can be spelt as *manek* or *manik* and both are used in the literature on Peranakan culture. The spellings used in this thesis will therefore conform as far as possible with that used in Peter Lee and Jennifer Chen’s *Rumah Baba: Life in a Peranakan House* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore History Museum, 1998) in the first instance; Gwee Thian Hock’s *Mas Sepuloh: Baba Conversational Gems* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 1993); and Eng-Lee Seok Chee’s *Festive Expressions: Nonya Beadwork and Embroidery* (Singapore: National Museum, 1989).

<i>adat</i> (Malay)	correct behaviour as specified by custom
<i>an chng</i> (Hokkien)	cleansing ceremony for the bridal chamber, undertaken before the wedding day
<i>anak dara</i> (Malay)	virgins – unmarried daughters of marriageable age
<i>anak-anak</i> (Malay)	children; also the name for a beadwork pattern of motifs set within a grid format
<i>ang pow</i> (Hokkien)	envelope for gifts of money; literally translated as “red packet”
<i>atas timbul</i> (Malay)	relief embroidery done by couching metallic thread over bamboo sticks or large needles which were pulled out as the couching was completed, creating a raised effect; sometimes used to create a basket-weave pattern
<i>baju panjang</i> (Malay)	long-sleeved long blouse with a front opening, reaching below the knees
<i>baju tutup</i> (Malay)	man’s front-buttoning tunic with a high collar
<i>bangsawan</i> (Malay)	modernised Malay opera
<i>belacan</i> (Malay)	spicy shrimp paste

<i>benang mas</i> (Malay)	gold or gold-wrapped thread
<i>bibik</i> (Baba Malay)	elderly Nonya
<i>biru manis</i> (Malay)	light blue or “sweet blue”
<i>biru tua</i> (Malay)	dark blue or “old blue”
<i>bukitan</i> (colloquial)	from <i>buket tanahan</i> meaning beribboned bouquet motif, <i>buket</i> meaning bouquet; from the term used in the Netherlands Indies
<i>chap-ji-por</i> (Hokkien)	see entry under <i>kain urat</i>
<i>chap goh meh</i> (Hokkien)	fifteenth (and last) day of the Lunar New Year
<i>cherki</i> (Hokkien)	card game popular with the Nonyas
<i>cheng beng</i> (Hokkien)	day of remembrance for the souls of the deceased
<i>cheongsam</i> (Cantonese)	Chinese dress with mandarin collar and slits at either side up the length of the thigh; can be loose or fitting
<i>cincalok</i> (Hokkien)	spicy marinated shrimp
Datok Dapoh (Malay)	Kitchen God
<i>daun nipah</i> (Malay)	leaf of the nipa palm (genus <i>nypa fruticans</i> ), dried and used for making hand-rolled cigarettes
<i>dondang sayang</i> (Malay)	Malay verses set to music
Kuan-The-Yah (Hokkien)	Goddess of Mercy, known in Mandarin as Guanyin
<i>halus</i> (Malay)	refined
<i>hantar sireh</i> (Malay)	presentation of a quid of betel, usually as a wedding invitation to female guests
<i>hay</i> (Hokkien)	prawn
Hock Lok Siu (Hokkien)	Chinese Gods of happiness ( <i>hock</i> ), prosperity ( <i>lok</i> ), and longevity ( <i>siu</i> ); commonly known in Mandarin as Fu Lu Shou
<i>hu</i> (Hokkien)	fish
<i>jiho</i> (Hokkien)	wooden plaque above the front door of a Peranakan home, usually inscribed with auspicious characters

<i>kain urat</i> (Malay)	double thread loose-weave canvas specially created for counted thread embroidery, known in the English-speaking world as Penelope canvas; also known to the Peranakans as <i>chap-ji-por</i>
<i>kain chaylay</i>	checked cotton worn by Nonyas, mostly in sombre reds and browns
<i>kasut</i> (Malay)	shoe; in the context of beadwork, it generally refers to sandals or slippers
<i>kasut cakiak</i> (Baba Malay)	open toe slipper where the upper is made of a single piece of material; <i>cakiak</i> is a Hokkien term that describes open-toe clogs with wooden soles
<i>kasut kodok</i> (Malay)	frog-nose-shaped slippers where the slipper face is cut in two pieces – an upper piece and a small semi-circular piece which is placed to form the flat tip at the toe of the slipper; also known as <i>kasut beridong</i> or <i>kasut tongkang</i> in Singapore and Melaka, and as <i>chun eh</i> in Penang
<i>kasut manek</i> (Malay)	beaded slippers
<i>kasut pintal</i> (Malay)	open-toe slippers with an upper made from two V-shaped pieces of material looped together
<i>kasut seret</i> (Malay)	generic term for slippers; literally translates as “dragged slippers”
<i>kayu kilingan</i> (Malay)	set of four wooden rollers used to stretch embroidery across a <i>pidangan</i> frame
<i>kebaya</i> (Malay)	long-sleeved hip-length blouse with a front opening
<i>kebaya renda</i> (Malay)	<i>kebaya</i> edged or decorated with lace
<i>keladi</i> (Malay)	yam
<i>kemunchak</i> (Malay)	ornamental pins, usually placed on the altar table
<i>keramat</i> (Malay)	Malay shrine
<i>kerosang</i> (Malay)	a set of three brooches used to fasten the <i>kebaya</i>
<i>kerosang ibu</i> (Malay)	the largest of the set of three brooches worn at the top
<i>kim</i> (Hokkien)	crab
<i>kim suah</i> (Hokkien)	gold or gold-wrapped thread

<i>klentong man</i> (colloquial)	itinerant haberdasher who announced his presence by ringing a bell that made a sound like “klentong” (also known as the <i>jarom</i> (needle) man in Malay)
<i>koon sah</i> (Hokkien)	Chinese style skirt and blouse with front or side fastening; also known as the <i>baju Shanghai</i> in Baba Malay
<i>kuning ayer</i> (Malay)	colour of “watery” yellow
<i>kum cheng</i> (Hokkien)	lidded oviform jar with cover, used as a soup-tureen
<i>lap chye</i> (Hokkien)	ceremonial exchange of gifts at a Peranakan wedding
<i>manek</i> (Malay)	bead
<i>manek kacha</i> (Malay)	glass bead, usually referring specifically to “rougner” glass seed beads larger than about 2 millimetres diameter
<i>manek pirigu</i> (Malay)	metallic seed bead
<i>manek potong</i> (Malay)	literally translates as “cut bead,” referring to small glass seed bead
<i>muka bantal</i> (Malay)	pillow or bolster end
<i>ong lai</i> (Hokkien)	pineapple; homonym for “arrival of the king”
<i>pak chindek</i> (Malay)	master-of-ceremonies at a Peranakan wedding
<i>pantun</i> (Malay)	rhymed verses in Malay or Baba Malay
<i>pantang</i> (Malay)	bad luck
<i>paru-paru</i> (Malay)	pink or “lung-coloured”
<i>pidangan</i> (Malay)	embroidery frame; similar to the frames used by the Peninsular and Sumatran Malays, for whom it is also known as the <i>pamedangan</i> or <i>pemidang</i>
<i>pintu pagar</i> (Malay)	fence door
<i>pisang raja</i> (Malay)	“king” bananas
<i>pua th'ng tay</i> (Hokkien)	term used in Penang to refer to the <i>kebaya</i> ; literally translates as “half-long half-short” blouse
<i>ranjang kahwin</i> (Malay)	wedding bed, also known as <i>ranjang loksan</i>
<i>redi</i> (Malay)	portable hammock that was shielded with a cloth, with a carrying pole across the top

<i>Sam Kok</i> (Hokkien)	Chinese classic, <i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i>
<i>Sam Pek Eng Tai</i>	The tragic love-story of Sam Pek and Eng Tai, also known as <i>Butterfly Lovers</i>
<i>sang kheh umm</i> (Hokkien)	mistress-of-ceremonies at a Peranakan wedding
<i>samfoo</i> (Cantonese)	Chinese style blouse and trousers
<i>sanggul</i> (Malay)	chignon worn by Nonyas; generally worn high on the crown of the head
<i>sangkut bahu</i> (Malay)	ceremonial shoulder-piece comprising an arrowhead-shaped panel and a rectangular panel
<i>sapu tangan</i> (Malay)	ornamental ceremonial handkerchief with a metal ring attached to it; worn from a woman's finger
<i>sarong</i> (Malay)	tubular piece of fabric wrapped around the lower half of the body like a long skirt
<i>serai</i> (Malay)	lemon grass
<i>sinchew</i> (Hokkien)	spiritual head of the house or family
<i>sinkeh</i> (Hokkien)	newly-arrived Chinese migrant to the Straits Settlements
<i>sireh</i> (Malay)	betel-nut
<i>syair</i> (Malay)	narrative verses or fables
<i>tali ayer</i> (Malay)	border pattern of interlocking triangles
<i>tang chek</i> (Hokkien)	winter solstice
<i>tempat surat</i> (Malay)	document case for the marriage agreement
<i>th'ng sah</i> (Hokkien)	term used in Penang for <i>baju panjang</i>
Ti Kong (Hokkien)	Daoist Jade Emperor of Heaven
<i>Tong Soo</i> (Hokkien)	Chinese <i>Book of Fate</i>
<i>tudong saji</i> (Malay)	semi-circular food cover, usually made of pandanus leaves
<i>wang belanja</i> (Malay)	cash gift presented by the groom to the bride's family
<i>wang tetek</i> (Malay)	money given by the groom to the bride's parents as compensation for bringing her up; literally translates as "weaning money"

<i>wayang</i> (Malay)	Chinese-style opera
<i>wayang Peranakan</i> (Baba Malay)	Peranakan opera derived from Chinese-style <i>wayang</i>
<b>Other Non-English Terms</b>	
Baxian (Mandarin)	Eight Immortals of Daoism
<i>bunga raya</i> (Malay)	hibiscus
<i>endek</i> (Indonesian)	<i>ikat</i> from Bali
<i>fu ru dong hai</i> (Chinese)	wealth as abundant as the eastern sea
<i>ikat</i> (Indonesian)	textile where designs are formed by resist-dyeing the yarns before weaving commences
<i>lingzhi</i> (Chinese)	fungus of immortality
<i>lu</i> (Chinese)	deer; also a homonym for high income
<i>plangi</i> (Indonesian)	textile where designs are created by resist-dyeing after weaving
<i>piña</i> (Filipino)	fine fabric woven from pineapple fibre in the Philippines
<i>qilin</i> (Chinese)	mythical creatures, often translated as unicorns
<i>qiyun shendong</i> (Chinese)	term referring to art, meaning the infusion of movement in the artwork through spirit consonance
<i>ronggeng</i> (Indonesian)	Javanese-style of dance
<i>selendang</i> (Indonesian)	shoulder-cloth
<i>songket</i> (Malay)	fabric woven with gold thread
<i>sulaman</i> (Malay)	embroideries
<i>tampan</i> (Indonesian)	ceremonial cloth from South Sumatra with ship design, also referred to as ship-cloth
<i>tekat</i> (Malay)	embroidery, generally of couched metallic thread

## Needlework and Beadwork Terms

Aida canvas	even-weave fabric used for counted cross-stitch; the fabric count (usually between 8 and 22) refers to the number of holes per inch – the larger the count, the finer the weave
bead couching	technique of attaching beads to fabric by passing a first thread through a row of beads and couching the first thread with a second thread; also known as spot stitch, appliqué, or overlay-stitch
canvaswork	embroidery technique based on a half-cross stitch over a counted-thread canvas base; also known as needlepoint or Berlin woolwork, the latter referring to the wool-on-canvas embroidery style that originated in Berlin in the early 1800s
charlotte	glass seed bead with one or more flat faces or facets
colour-lined bead	glass seed bead whose hole is lined with a colour that is generally different from the colour of the glass
couching	embroidery technique of applying one thread (usually decorative, like gold or silver thread) to the surface of a fabric base by attaching it with a second thread; also known as laid-work
gros-point stitch	cross-stitch formed of a two crossed diagonal stitches
hex-cut bead	glass seed bead with a hexagonal cross-section
knot stitch	stitch formed of a small knot made by looping the sewing thread once or twice around the needle before passing the latter through the fabric; the French knot and the Peking knot are variants of the knot stitch
lane stitch	a single stitch on which multiple beads (usually more than two) were attached to a fabric or other base material to form a stitched row of beads; also known as lazy stitch
needle-weaving	weaving using a needle to pass the weft threads through already formed warp threads
netting	technique of passing threads through beads to form a net-like mesh
Penelope canvas	fabric for needlepoint or counted thread embroidery, with warp and weft threads laid two-by-two
petit-point stitch	half-cross stitch worked diagonally over the intersection of one set of warp and weft threads on counted thread canvas; also known as tent stitch

purl	metallic thread made by coiling metallic wire to form a tube-like thread
perle thread	lustrous twisted yarn
rocaille	rounded seed glass bead
satin stitch	stitches placed parallel and abutting each other lengthwise; long-and-short satin stitch is where satin stitches are of alternating long and short lengths, usually used where the merging of colours is sought
seed bead	small bead, generally of less than 5 millimetres in diameter
seed stitch	small, evenly-sized stitches separated from each other and placed in random directions
threading	technique of creating a net-like mesh by passing threads through beads to link the beads together, akin to netting or macramé with beads, without the use of a base support such as a textile
tubular bead	seed bead whose length is greater than its diameter