

Monday December 29, 2008

## A many-splendoured Peranakan wedding

GEORGE TOWN: A celebration of love and Peranakan culture saw childhood sweethearts Loke Wen Wei and Ooi Beng Koon donning intricately embroidered traditional robes and headdresses for an elaborate wedding ceremony.

Orchestrated by the groom's mother Dr Gan Kam Ling, the four-hour ceremony was held at the Pinang Peranakan Museum yesterday.



**Playing chicken:** The couple looking on as a rooster and hen are released under the bridal bed. It is believed that whichever animal comes out from under the bed first will dictate the sex of their first child.

"I am a Nyonya and keen to see and revive interest in Peranakan culture that has long been forgotten," said Dr Gan.

"It is important to showcase the unique culture to the world, particularly at the Peranakan Museum," she said.

Dr Gan's 72-year-old Nyonya aunt was also at hand to ensure the ceremony was as authentic as possible.

A beaming Loke said his mother suggested the Peranakan wedding to him six months ago.

"I am game for new experiences, especially when it involves tradition," he said, adding that he and his wife were planning to have "at least one child".

Ooi, who admitted that she was a little nervous, said although she was not from the community, she enjoyed the Peranakan wedding experience.



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Chariots of fire: The newlyweds making their way to the tea ceremony on pull rickshaws.

"It was wonderful because my friends and family also got to witness a lovely culture," she said.

The newlyweds, both 27, live in Sydney, Australia.

Traditionally, a typical Baba-Nyonya wedding lasts for a whole month.

The event begins on the eve of the wedding day with the *cheow tao* ceremony to initiate the bride and groom into adulthood.

Peranakan cultural expert and the day's master of ceremonies Michael Cheah said the tea ceremony was usually held on the third day of the wedding.

"But people cut short the ceremony these days. Instead, the tea ceremony is held together with the lifting of the veil," he said.

Penang Chinese Association president Datuk Seri Khoo Keat Siew said Baba-Nyonya weddings are time-consuming and elaborate affairs "but the younger generation must continue to perpetuate the richness of the Peranakan custom and culture".

Some 200 guests including Indonesian Consul-General Moenir Ari Soenanda attended the event.

"This is the first time I've attended a Peranakan wedding. The setting was so elaborate, with such a great collection of antiques," Moenir said, noting that there were some similarities between the Baba-Nyonya and Malay traditional wedding costumes worn in Indonesia.

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