



Hee Peow Soup

## Nonya So Fine By Chng Zhenzhi

**Have** you ever tasted food so delicious you cannot wait to share it with your family and friends? *Ayam buah keluak* (chicken cooked with *buah keluak*) from Straits Chinese (Nonya) Restaurant sent me looking for my hand-phone to tell my mum about the restaurant.

This reasonably priced Peranakan restaurant at Tan Chong Tower is one of three outlets of the Guan Hoe Soon Group of Restaurants. The first restaurant at Joo Chiat Road was set up in 1953 by the grandfather of current owner Mr Kevin Yap. The former honed his culinary skills as a chef to a wealthy Peranakan family. Peranakans are descendents of immigrant Chinese who settled in the Malay Archipelago as long as 300 years ago. Many of them married local Malay women, as Chinese women were not allowed to leave China until the mid-1800s. Peranakan cuisine is thus a unique, beguiling mix of Malay and Chinese cuisines.

The *ayam buah keluak* (\$8) was a blend of savoury and tangy richness coupled with an indescribable aroma from the *buah keluak* (a

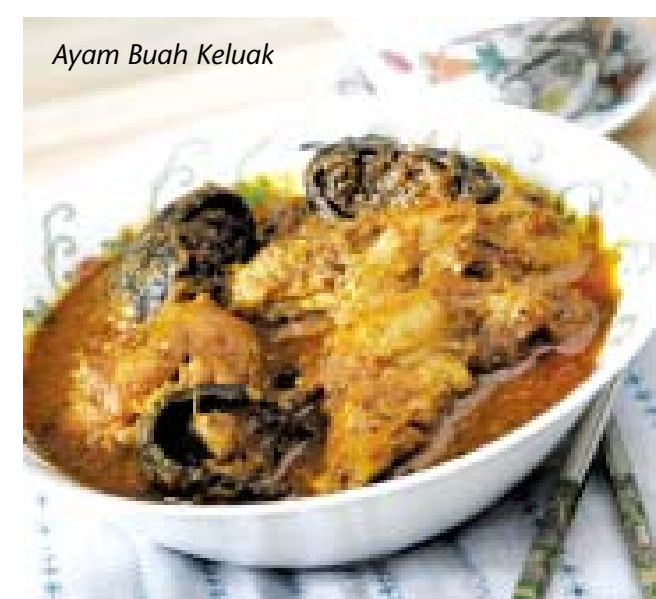
black Indonesian nut about the size and shape of a brazil nut). *Buah keluak* is an acquired taste. Straits Chinese softens its flavour by mixing the "flesh" of the nut with pork and prawn, and stuffing the mixture back into the shells before stewing them with chicken. The dish also comes with pure *buah keluak* for food buffs like myself.

Apart from *ayam buah keluak*, there were other classic Peranakan dishes at Straits Chinese. The fiery *udang sambal* (\$10) will awake the most jaded taste buds with succulent prawns simmered in thick *rempah* made from shallots, lemongrass, chilli, candlenut and homemade *balacan* (shrimp paste). The *rempah* is considered the soul of all Peranakan dishes.

Despite its Malay heritage, Peranakan food is not Halal. *Babi pong tay* (\$8), braised pork in dark soy sauce, flaunts the flavour of five-spice used in the marinade. This dish reflects the Chinese influence. Another is the *hee peow* soup (\$3.80/pax), a clear soup with fish maw, egg rolls and meatballs.

Preparing Peranakan food is elaborate and

time-consuming. The Guan Hoe Soon Group of Restaurants is a blessing for those who wish to savour authentic Nonya cuisine. The next time you think about fusion food, look beyond "teriyaki cod with wasabi mashed potatoes" at fashionable restaurants. Peranakan cuisine offers the same experience and is unlikely to burn a hole in your pocket!



Ayam Buah Keluak



This restaurant is part of the Central Singapore Food Fable Trail. For more details, please visit [www centralsingapore.org.sg](http://www centralsingapore.org.sg) or call 63709901.

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