

as being in the collection of the British Museum at the Museum of Mankind, London, although the Museum of Mankind as a separate entity closed in 1997. There is a case of proofreading carelessness on p. 258 where the caption for fig. 267a is given as a drawing of a pattern on a bead; this was present in the first edition, absent in the second. The caption should have read "Detail of birdman rock carvings." In my view, the line detail drawing in the first edition is more informative than the photographic image that was retained. Photographic images are often inferior to line drawings, as can be seen by comparing the bead forms illustrated in Horace Beck's classic publication with those on pp. 362-363. In the chapter on amber and pearl, there is still no mention of the Dominican Republic, a major source of amber.

In Africa, my area of special interest, there are surprising gaps and errors. When it comes to ancient beads, the map facing p. 20 shows the sites of Grotte des Pigeons, Haua Fteah, and Enkapune, but does not show that of Blombos Cave in South Africa, which has even older beads, although the name of the site is squeezed into the extreme bottom left of the Timeline. The site of Mapungubwe in South Africa is incorrectly listed as a tribe in the Index, with no mention of the "garden roller" beads or the connection with the Indo-Pacific bead trade from eastern India and further east except in a footnote that gives no credit to Claire Davison's work on bead analysis or the work of Peter Francis, Jr. There is no mention of the finely worked straw beads made in Mali as an alternative to filigree gold, though the Timeline shows (incorrectly) such a bead as made in Ashanti, Ghana (no. 1246). It might have been worth mentioning the great development of beadmaking and beadworking as a means of generating cash among women, especially in eastern and southern Africa.

Throughout the second edition, there was an effort to adhere to the pagination of the first edition. The final section, "Contemporary: Europe and North America," was much expanded (from 14 pages to 45) and rightly so in view of the great number of artists creating glass beads and beadwork. Beads made of plastic, especially polymer clay (Fimo), are featured; also paper as shown in the picture of a group of women in Oaxaca, Mexico (p. 325). Unsurprisingly, nearly all of the examples illustrated originate in North America and a great many pictures illustrate seed beads used to form ornaments of great complexity, which might put them outside the scope of a book on beads.

There are quite a few small typos throughout the text and captions. In the Bibliography there seems to be no

consistency in listing book titles, which may or may not be italicized. More titles originate in North America than Europe, which is normal for a book produced in the USA, but causes some surprising omissions.

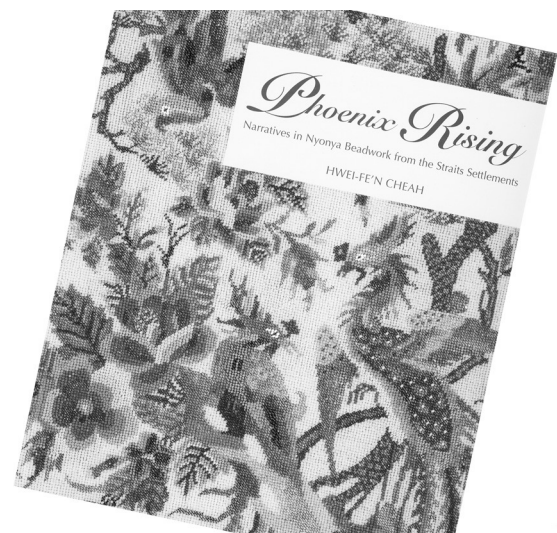
To sum up, even with its omissions and irritating captions and typos, the first edition was a landmark publication in the field of bead studies and the revised edition with enhanced illustrations and Timeline is worth adding to the bookshelf.

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Phoenix Rising: Narratives in Nyonya Beadwork from the Straits Settlements.

Hwei-Fe'n Cheah. NUS Press, National University of Singapore, AS3-01-02, 3 Arts Link, Singapore 117569. 2010. xvi + 384 pp., 206 color figs., 22 B&W figs., glossary, index. ISBN 978-9971-69-468-5. \$55.00US (paper cover).

Hwei-Fe'n Cheah has written extensively on the beadwork and embroidery of the Nyonyas of the Straits Settlements and Netherlands Indies. *Phoenix Rising* is the culmination of these efforts to build a picture of Nyonya fiber arts and to place that work in a larger cultural context, both regional and worldwide. She builds on earlier work by Ho Wing Meng and Eng-Lee Seok Chee.



Cheah sees her book as having three interlocking parts, each examining one significant aspect of Nyonya beadwork. “I refer to these as narratives to acknowledge that each is a partial and reconstructed history of Nyonya beadwork retold through a particular lens: its social role, its development through time and space, and its significance in the present” (p. 17).

One important aspect of her book is the creation of a chronology of Nyonya beadwork. For this she finds inspiration in M.A. Dhaky who worked toward a dating system for Indian embroideries. Pieces with known provenance and articles inscribed with dates were used by him as “anchors” and, characterized by the types of motifs and chromatic range of beads used at different periods, he came up with a fairly well-defined chronological trend, leavened with the knowledge that beads and motifs can be reused at later times. Cheah followed a similar path, focussing on pieces with good provenance, museum accession dates, and analysis of newspaper used as backing. She notes that imagery changed over time, and the types of beads used, variations in cloth backings and needlework cloth, slipper styles, and changes in wedding customs all contributed to what she felt was a reasonable chronology reflected in the captions of the figures in her chronology chapter.

Nyonya beadwork uses tiny glass seed beads, generally less than 1.5 mm, and can be incredibly detailed. In early pieces, animals and flowers swarm in profusion in pieces both embroidered and netted. While the origin of netting in Nyonya beadwork is uncertain, it is beautifully worked and impressively detailed for a technique that doesn’t easily lend itself to curved and ornate lines. Other pieces are embroidered on velvet and often coupled with metallic threads and sequins. Familiar Chinese design elements such as dragons, peonies, phoenixes, and sometimes figures from Chinese astrology all tumble together in densely clustered tableaux.

The early part of the 20th century is represented by a mingling of traditional styles and, increasingly, new designs and the use of petit-point stitch. As women began wearing lighter colors, so too did lighter colors become more predominant in beadwork backgrounds. Netted and couched-stitch beadwork gradually fell out of favor and petit-point became more dominant. Roses displaced the peony and Western needlework images like dogs and flower girls began appearing, followed in the 1930s by cartoon characters. Wedding fashion changed sufficiently so that elaborately beaded wedding gear was no longer in style. With beadwork uncoupled from heavily symbolic design elements, European designs and those of popular culture surged in popularity. In the 1950s, as the Straits and Southeast Asia recovered from the economic devastation of

World War II, in which many Peranakans lost much of their wealth in tribute to the Japanese, women became an essential part of the work force, completing the trend toward making beadwork a hobby, not a lifestyle, and freeing women from the isolation of the home where needlework flourished.

Phoenix Rising relays detailed information about the manufacture of rocailles, charlottes, hex-cuts, and faceted or knurled metal seed beads and corrects Ho Wing Meng’s bead terminology error; i.e., having referred to seed beads with a single facet as being caused by “accidental effects of the polishing” (see Ho 1987:45). On the issue of cultural influences, Cheah notes there are disagreements, Ho seeing a Minangkabau influence on wedding ornaments, while both Eng-Lee and Joo Ee Khoo associate Nyonya beadwork with that of Europeans. She acknowledges Valerie Hector’s ongoing studies of the beadwork of mainland China and how elements from that work might also have influenced Nyonya designs.

Regarding beadwork techniques, while the images of pieces in progress in the chapter “Toward a Chronology of Nyonya Beadwork” are clear and useful and the image of the netted beadwork laid over a drawing of flowers increases one’s respect for the skill of the Nyonyas who transformed flat line drawings on paper into colorful pictorial netted beadwork, I would like to have seen an appendix of beadwork diagrams and text, showing the stringing used to make the netted works, especially given that in her review of Ho’s book, Cheah (2008:85) herself takes issue with his technical descriptions, noting their unclear threading patterns and lack of relevance to Malay and Chinese pieces she had examined. While it can be difficult to know for certain how pieces are constructed, careful noting of the placement of knots, observation of how the threads move over beads at the edges of pieces, the use of a loupe and strong light to determine passage of thread visible through transparent beads, and a painstaking following of threads through a piece, coupled most importantly with actually working the technical description with beads and thread to see if one’s theories are correct, can oftentimes make sense of method and allow for reasonably accurate transcription.

My greatest concern is Cheah’s use of the term “lane stitch,” described as “where two or more beads are fastened to the fabric base with a single stitch.” The term lane stitch refers most commonly to American Indian beadwork of the Northern Plains and Columbia River Plateau and is a stitch in which a number of beads (more than two) are strung before the carrying thread returns through the ground and the overall effect is one of numerous rows of beads at least four to ten beads in length, *all parallel to each other with straight edges*, hence use of the word “lane” to define the stitch. The predecessor term for this was “lazy” or “lazy

squaw” stitch, the negative connotations of which prompted the suggested renaming to “lane stitch” by Bill Holm. An illustration of the “lazy stitch” shows equally numbered beads in rows with even edges (Orchard 1975:151), which style of beading does not appear to be present in Peranakan beadwork. Cheah’s source material (Van Horn 2006:60) shows a number of parallel rows of four beads, which groups of rows are worked at 90° angles to each other to create a basket-weave pattern, an unusual use of the lane stitch. Examination of a photograph sent to me by Cheah upon query does not show an appreciable number of parallel rows of similar length and, instead, shows a stitch perhaps best described as a random fill-in stitch. In any case, it is not lane stitch and it’s unfortunate that this term is now associated in print with Nyonya beadwork.

Phoenix Rising is lavishly illustrated with over 200 photographs showing a diversity of forms from slippers, wallets, purses, belts, and ceremonial accouterments such as headdresses, collars, handkerchiefs (*sapu tangan*), and shoulder pieces (*sangkot bahu*) to items associated with the wedding chamber such as mattress panels, mirror covers, pillow ends, and curtain ties. Several period photographs show people wearing many of the items pictured in the book and often they are named individuals, rather than anonymous stand-ins for the larger culture, increasing the sense of the personal that Cheah’s book warmly conveys with its frequent reference to oral and family histories. Her exploration of the nature of the bead trade in and around the Straits is enlightening and her dissection of Peranakan Chinese culture, its place at the heart of 19th-century international trade in Southeast Asia, and our peek into the daily lives of its women who left no written histories of their own is engrossing. *Phoenix Rising*’s flaws are few and the contribution Cheah makes to the study of this material is extensive, both broad and deep.

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This publication contains the papers presented at the Borneo International Beads Conference held in Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia, 9-10 October 2010. The *Journal* was available at the conference and the organizers need to be congratulated for the photos as well as the speedy production of the *Journal*. In fact, they should be congratulated on the overall excellence of their first International Conference.

