MALACCA: Excitement is in the air for Baba and Nyonya Association of Malaysia over its attempts to jointly declare Malacca’s unique Wangkang procession as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage with China.

Association chairman Ronald Gan said his team has submitted a letter of intention to Malaysian Commissioner of Heritage to place effort in gaining the joint status from Unesco for the age-old Wangkang festival at Yong Chuan Tian Temple in Bandar Hilir.

“We are racing against time and it would be an achievement for Malaysia if we could co-own Wangkang with China.

“The effort to achieve the status should be done through a government to government arrangement and where both countries should submit the documentation to Unesco by this March or else we will miss the boat and have to wait another few years,” he said when interviewed yesterday.
Gan said China needed Yong Chuan Tian Temple’s assistance as only Malacca has the full record of Wangkang since 1911.

He said Wangkang also existed in Indonesia, Thailand and Taiwan but Malacca’s Peranakan community had kept systematic records for some 100 years.

“Hence, we have the greatest opportunity to obtain the joint status from Unesco,” he said.

Gan said Wangkang was already a National Intangible Heritage in 2013 and now efforts must be made by stakeholders to gain the joint world status,” he said.

“China is already working towards gaining the status and we need to jointly apply to Unesco, firstly by holding a meeting with the Cultural Department of the Chinese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

“It would be a win-win situation for both countries as we have the documents that the Chinese need for their submission to Unesco,” he added.

The Wangkang procession is a significant festival held once every few decades in Malacca.

The festival is an age-old tradition of the Hokkien community to “cleanse” a place of evil spirits.
The Wangkang passing through Jalan Kota where some of the historic attractions are located while devotees and tourists look on. — filepic

Celebrations were held here in 1919, 1933, 2001 and 2012 and only held when the temple deity, “Ong Yah”, receives a message from the “heavens” to hold the event to get rid of evil spirits.

Wangkang is an important event especially for the Hokkien community who follow Taoist beliefs.

The main attraction and crowd puller is the majestic barge that proceeded on a 20km journey pulled by devotees where evil spirits are “taken aboard” before they are set ablaze at the end of the procession.