

CHINATOWN AS A MICROCOSM OF SINGAPORE

By Karl Hack

NIUCHESHUI (Mandarin); NGAU CHEA SUI (Cantonese)

Reading and links

- Set pages of STB Plan for Chinatown, Heritage Society booklet ‘Rethinking Chinatown’, etc.
- Geraldene Lowe-Ismail, Chinatown Memories (Singapore: The Singapore Heritage Society, 1998). 56 pages. ****
- Singapore Tourism Board Press Releases: http://www.stb.com.sg/cgi-bin/med_press.cgi **
- ‘Chinaman Scholars Gallery’: <http://www.singapore-ca.com/at-csg.htm>
- URA (Urban Redevelopment Authority) Outram Area Report 1995: http://www.ura.gov.sg/dgp_reports/outram/text/main.html
- Search the NIEOPAC under ‘Chinatown’ and ‘Tanjong Pagar’ for several more references.
- Tanjong Pagar: Singapore’s Cradle of Development (Singapore: Tanjong Pagar Citizen’s Consultative Committee, 1989).
- Edwin Lee, The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore, 1867-1914 (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), pp. 23-31, ‘Chinese Society’, if you need a few pages on basic terms. Or if you know these (sinkkeh, bang etc), try
- Lynn Pan (General Editor), The Encyclopedia of the Overseas Chinese (Singapore: Landmark, 1998), pp. 200-208 on Singapore. With insets on Lim Boon Keng, Lee Kuan Yew, statistics, etc.
- Chinatown: Historic District (Singapore: URA, 1995).

Further and Advanced Reading

- David Lowenthal, The Past is Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), especially pp. 4-13 ‘Nostalgia’, pp. 384-89 ‘Preservation’.
- Diane Barthel, Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Also includes ch. 5 on ‘War and Remembrance’
- Peter Fowler, The Past in Contemporary Society: Then, Now (NIE DA655Fow)
- Brenda Yeoh, Contesting space : power relations and the urban built environment in colonial Singapore (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996). This is a classic, but very dense. Strictly for the enthusiast with lots of time. (NIE HT169.S5 Yeo)
- Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong (eds), Portraits of places: history, community and identity in Singapore (Singapore: Times Editions, 1995). (NIE DS610.4Por). Ch. 1, pp. 13-23, and anything else that catches your interest.
- Lee Kip Lim. The Singapore House, 1849-1942. (Singapore: Times, 1988).

- Kwok Kian-Woon, Kwa Chong Guan, Lily Wong and Brenda Yeoh, Our Place in Time: Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999). Ch 1, pp. 1-14, and any chapter that interests you.
- Edmund Waller, Landscape Planning in Singapore (Singapore: SUP, 2000). HT169 S55 WAL. Chapter 2 covers 'Landscape planning in the Colonial Period'.
- Chua Soh-Kheng, Social Structure of Singapore Chinatown (Singapore, NUS: Academic Exercise, 1973).
- Urban blueprint [interactive multimedia] / Channel NewsAsia (Singapore: MediaCorp News Pte. Ltd., c2001). NUS [HT169.12 Urb](#)
- Historic districts : conservation guidelines for Chinatown conservation area (Singapore: URA, 1991).
- Tan, Sumiko. Streets of old Chinatown : Singapore (Singapore : Page Media , 1990).
- Chinatown : an album of a Singapore community = [Niu ch`e shui] (Singapore : Times Books International : Archives and Oral History Dept., c1983).

What is Chinatown

In the 1980s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority realized that Singapore's breakneck redevelopment threatened to destroy its heritage. It designated five key areas as deserving preservation as units: Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India, Singapore River and the Civic/Cultural District around City Hall.

The aim was to:

- Preserve each areas architecture and atmosphere
- Improve the general environment by measures such as landscaping
- Enhance the special character of each area through introducing new activities while preserving traditional activities of tourism value
- Provide guidelines for private sector participation in the effort

Of all these areas, work on turning Kampong Glam into a Malay cultural centre has only just begun, Little India has worked mainly by leaving it, as for the Civic district, where leaflets have been distributed for a 'Civic District Trail'.

But one area, 'Chinatown' was in 1998 destined for more drastic treatment. The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) then announced a plan to develop the area, which involved building a large outdoor theatre area and centre, themed zones, and Chinese-themed gardens.

This plan raised a storm. This topic asks why, and what should we do with 'Chinatown'? What is the history, and historical messages, worth preserving here? How can history live with the present, and profit?

But is the very 'Chinatown' concept artificial, the creation and creature of marketing and tourism? Should the area be themed, or be treated as an organic, slowly evolving, living

witness to Singapore's history? The very name is recent, one of the earliest names being *Niu Che Shui* (Bullock Cart Water), after the carts which were the early occupants' main source of water. And is the very notion of a Chinatown in a majority Chinese city not a little bizarre. Should Katong be Eurasiatown, and Tanglin or Holland Village Angmohville? But then again, surely the concept of a 'Chinatown' does have a very venerable pedigree?

This goes back to Raffles and the 1820s. Raffles designated separate areas of Singapore for the major ethnic groups, since new immigrants could find support from within their respective communities. Each major group also had a 'kapitan' to represent them in dealings with the British. Indeed, for a long time the British colonial authorities restricted themselves to providing essential infrastructure and law, so for welfare, education and other amenities, each community looked to its own associations and wealthy merchants for leadership.



South Bridge Road 1890

What was Chinatown: history.

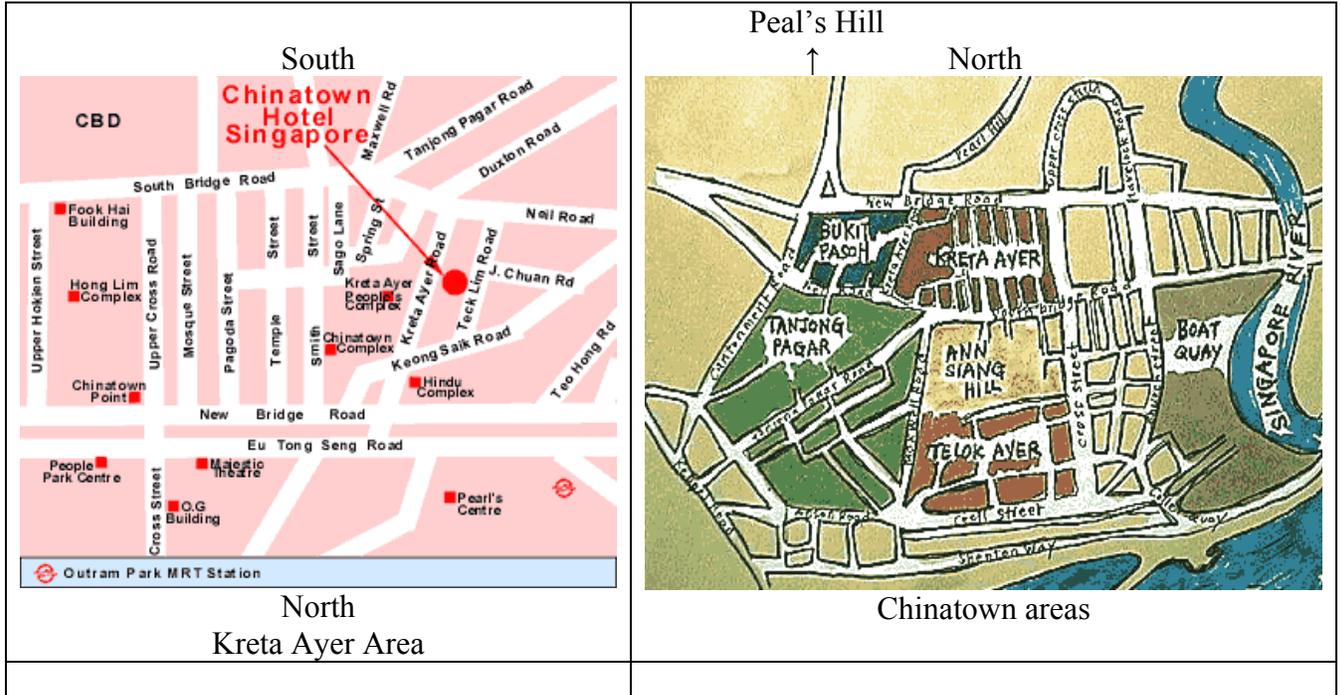
The 1828 Master Plan drawn up by Lieutenant Jackson incorporated Sir Stamford Raffles' 1822 recommendations to allocate areas specifically to various racial groups. The Chinese were settled south-west of the Singapore River in an area known as Chinatown. The area was demarcated by:

Upper Cross Street (West)
(East)

New Bridge Road (North)

Singapore River

Telok Ayer Street and shoreline (South)



The Telok Ayer district started to form as Chinese immigrants came ashore here from 1821. At that point, and until major land reclamation from 1879, Telok Ayer was part on the shoreline.

The early immigrants built a joss house where the current Thian Hock Kheng temple stands, to give thanks for their safe arrival. By the 1840s the area was already the commercial heart of the Chinese community, and construction of the present temple had begun in 1839. Raffles had helped to cement the area's identity, when in 1822, he confirmed the area southwest of the Singapore River would be set aside mainly for Chinese. This was part of his wider attempt to zone future development, setting aside the area northeast of the river (around the current padang) for government use.

Indeed, Raffle's imprint also helped direct different clan groups into different areas, even within Chinatown. He actually divided the Chinese by class – merchant, artisan and cultivator – but a close association between occupation and a region of origin saw, for instance, Hokkiens dominate in the area around Telok Ayer and the waterfront, Teochews along Singapore River (Clarke Quay) and around Fort Canning, Cantonese and Hakka further out at Kreta Ayer.¹

Then in 1843 the area most tourists now know as Chinatown, around Kreta Ayer (named after the bullock carts which brought water), also began to take off. Land parcels around Pagoda Street, Smith Street and Sago Lane were leased or granted to the public for homes and shophouses. Small businesses, goldsmiths, textile shops and pawnshops sprung up.

At night, the streets came alive with night markets, thieves' markets, Chinese theatres and some less reputable activities. In fact, so busy was it became known as 'Bah Yeh Tian' or area where there are 'nightless days', as activity never ceases. As evermore immigrants settled in Chinatown, trade and commerce in the area expanded.

Chinatown and 'Secret Societies'² Chinese arriving in Singapore often relied on *huiguan*, in effect guilds or selfhelp associations, often catering to one or more particular dialect groups or *bang*. *Bang* leaders such as Tan Tock Seng made donations, heard petitions, and acted as middlemen between the Chinese communities and the colonial government, or even helping to keep order. The *huiguan* might help with employment, initial accommodation, funeral arrangements and social facilities.

Many of these associations persisted as legitimate organizations. One of the earliest and biggest was the Ghee Hin (the rise of righteousness) formed 1820, gathering in immigrants from Fujian and Gunagdong, some of whom probably had links to similar organizations in China. Its mother lodge in Lavernder Street contained the ancestral tablets of important ex-members, before being donated to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital and torn down in 1892, following the Suppression of Secret Societies Ordinance.

By then the leaders of the kongsi or association were securing control of lucrative revenue farms. That is, the right to collect taxes on the sale of a good, or to monopolise its sale, in return for putting in the highest bid to the government.

This would have been all well and good. But secret societies also became involved in opium smuggling, coolie brokering, brothels, theft, gambling, extortion or 'protection' fees and even murder. Coolie-brokering could involve smooth-talking poor peasants to accept passage in return for a credit or bond to work for a year or more. They might then find themselves traded away, or the debt increased by the 'truck system', of seeling coolies in isolated locations goods (including opium) at inflated prices or on credit with high interest.

By 1860 the Ghee Hin had a majority of Hokkien (about 15,000), though there were also smaller numbers of other dialect groups. Other secret societies included their great rivals the Hai San (formed 1822).

By now, however, the societies were the cause of riots and competition, including Ghee Hin riots against Catholic Chinese in 1850 (killing over 500), and 1876 'Post Office' riots against a new, and more expensive, monopoly on post and remittances. The Government began to move towards surveillance, control, and finally suppression.

Societies were registered from 1869, and in 1877 the Chinese linguist William Pickering was appointed the first 'Protector' of Chinese, inaugurating the 'Chinese Protectorate'. After Pickering was attacked in 1887, new Governor Sir Cecel Clementi acted. He enforced a Banishment Order, and an 1889 Societies Ordinance came into effect in 1890, giving all secret societies and their 63,316 members six months to wind up operations

From then on societies registered themselves as recreational or social societies (which were exempt) or remained illegal. Under both guises, these were increasingly smaller, looser groups, involved in illegal activities. They caused street fights, ran rackets, and, despite the use of

banishment, by the 1920s bigger societies were growing again, often controlling many smaller *pangkeng* or groups (eg called after a 'room'). 1927 saw the height of interwar gang violence, as fights over brothels, armed robberies and over 200 banishments. On 2 September trouble spread to Boat Quay, Hok Thio Kheng members attacking rival gangs with knives and guns, with sporadic knifings and shootings elsewhere in the days after

The Japanese Kempeitai, and then Police Special Branch, took its toll. AS the post-1959 PAP government increased police powers, increasingly postwar gangs involved teenagers or men in their early twenties, pale (though sometimes violent) leftovers from the glory days of Singapore's Chinese societies.

As Chinatown expanded, the dominant architectural form became the shophouse. Though the similar shophouses can be found elsewhere, in Malaysia and Indonesia, the shophouse can still be thought of as a microcosm of Singapore. Like Singapore, it blends different Asian and European influences, and like areas of Singapore, any one shophouse or cluster has generally undergone several different uses over time.

The 'Singapore' shophouse

What is the Singapore shophouse? It is linked to general history of Chinese settlement in maritime southeast asia. There was probably a Chinese presence in Sumatra (Kota Cina) by the 11th century. Later, immigrants came from southern China, notably Guangdong Province. Not surprisingly, Guangdong's architecture had a major impact on Chinese buildings in southeast Asia..

In Guangdong, rows of shophouses terraces, or a single row along the front of a street, are common. These shophouses have characteristics to combat the humid, sub-tropical climate, of the province, with its typhoons, torrential rain and intense sunlight. Such characteristics made the architecture of southern China well suited to conditions in Southeast Asia. Features include high ceilings, ventilation grilles, airwells or spaces in the centre of the house, and extended eaves to provide cover around the building so reduce the effects of intense heat, were all useful in Singapore.

Early Singapore shophouses (see for instance the pictures in Gretchen Liu, [Singapore: A Pictorial History](#)) were basic adaptations of this form. Often their facades were quite plain, featuring shutters for windows, sometimes with louvres, but little ornate decoration. However, other elements were then added, for instance 'classical' style columns, then large, square neo-Georgian style windows, sometimes offset by intricate Chinese carvings and designs. Examples from the 19th century were simple two-story buildings, but 20th century versions also became taller and more ornate. Chinese Baroque, combines Georgian windows and cornices, Chinese-style plaster reliefs, and detailed Malay wood carving. Some houses also feature 'pintu pajar' or 'cowboy style halfdoors, which were kept shut for privacy while the main doors could be left open for air.

The archetypal house has a five foot way outside. That is, the roof extends to cover five foot of paving, as ordered by Raffles as early as 1822. It also has a rectangular plan. As you enter, the main family altar is at the far side of the front room. Further rooms follow reaching backwards, in what is a very narrow, deep version of the traditional Chinese courtyard house. Towards the centre air and light is provided by a courtyard or airwell. As you proceed further in, the spaces become progressively more private.

So Chinatown, while displaying Singapore's trademark fusion of differing styles, is also intimately linked to southern China, both in its main occupants, and its architecture. Contrary to its name, however, Chinatown was never entirely Chinese. There were small communities of Indians trading in meats and spices around the junction of South Bridge Road and Upper Cross Street. Their various communities built permanent places of worship, for example the Nagore Durgha Shrine (1830) along Telok Ayer Street, and the Jamae Mosque and Sri Mariamman Temple (1843) along South Bridge Road. According to the URA's 1995 report on the Outram area 'The peaceful co-existence of the different places of worship in the same area, even until today, reflects the racial and religious harmony in Singapore.'

The Sri Mariamman Temple (at the junction of South Bridge Road and Pagoda Road) is a good example of just how important some of these temples, and the area, are to other communities. Just as the Thian Hock Kheng temple took a central place in the life of many early Chinese immigrants, so too did the Sri Mariamman Temple for many Indians.

It is the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore. The site was acquired in 1823 by Narayan Pillai, a clerk of the [East India Company](#) who had accompanied Sir Stamford Raffles to Singapore. By 1827 it seems a wood and thatched temple had risen on the site, and by 1863 the present structure, since successively renovated. Now gazetted as a National Monument by the Government, the temple has been used as a place of lodging for new immigrants (till the 1900s) and as a Registry for Births and Death. The Temple Committee has helped settle disputes between community-members, and more recently has played an important role in promoting arts, literacy and Tamil education. The Temple itself is dedicated to Sri Mariamman, a manifestation of the Great Goddess, worshipped for health and prosperity. Sri Mariamman is popular in Southern India where goddesses are addressed as **amma** ('mother'). Given the large South Indian community in Singapore, [temples dedicated to the Goddess](#) and deities popular in South India dominate the landscape.³



Despite the coexistence of temples for different faiths, however, Chinatown retained a predominantly Chinese character. At the heart of its various sub-districts was South Bridge Road. Serviced by steam train from 1885, electric train from 1905, and trolley bus from 1929, South Bridge Road became a main commercial corridor linking the area to the main town and new harbour. Improved transportation, rising population and increasingly crowded conditions in the Chinatown area now caused the population to spill outwards, spreading inland.

Shophouses became clan houses, lodging places for coolies arriving on the credit system (bound to work on a fixed contract for a year or more in return for their passage) and brothels, amongst other uses. Success, above all, bred overcrowding.

Locations of Registered Society Headquarters in 1889

Mapping Secret Societies to Place: 1889 Locations of some Premises⁴

Hokkien Ghee Hin	China Street	18,973 members
Ghee Hok	River Valley Road	14,487
Ghee Hin Kwan Hok	Beach Road	6,466
Hok Hin	North Canal Road	14,317
Tsung Peh Society	Upper Nankin Street	7,413

Municipal authorities became more concerned about overcrowding and, in particular, the idea that this bred created pools for disease to thrive in. In 1907 the Simpson Report suggested this be tackled and recommended a Housing Commission or Trust be formed. A 1907 bill followed giving powers to force backlanes to be driven through back to back houses. But the fear owners would sell houses as opposed to ask for mere compensation helped limit action until after 1913, by when the legislation had been amended to prevent owners forcing the government to buy their houses. There followed the rather belated formation of a Housing Commission (1917) and then the Singapore Improvement Trust (1920, spun off from the Municipality in 1927).

The Singapore Improvement Trust, was unequivocal in its view of Chinatown in a 1923 report:

‘The density of the Singapore (Chinatown slum) blocks is a record – in two blocks recently investigated, respectively 555 and 728 inhabitants per acre per night ... the same cubicles being used by different people by day and night ... this unprecedented overcrowding in dark and disease-saturated old slums is of a record bad type ... The Singapore slums are the worst in the world’.

But even the SIT had very limited funds, so by World War Two it could boast little more than the island’s first public housing scheme, accommodating about 6,000 people at Tiong Bahru on the western side of Chinatown. Even after the war, less than 21,000 units were constructed in the thirteen years from 1947-59.⁵

This was not the sort of scale which would tackle problems made worse by war. Tuberculosis remained one of the four top killers in Singapore, beri-beri, a vitamin deficiency disease, stalked the area’s lanes. But reform met with obstacles on all sides. The SIT had no legal powers to enforce redevelopment (as opposed to building new houses), and little funding. Chinatown’s inhabitants, overcrowded because of dire need for accommodation, especially near work when motorized transport was still sparse, were sometimes suspicious of ‘improvement’.⁶ An issue which still dogs the area raised its head, would the original users be able to afford increased rents after improvement?⁷

By this time building was also extending westward, to form the area of Tanjong Pagar (Malay for Cape of Stakes, probably referring to the fishing kelongs or platforms) This area was just to the west of Kreta Ayer. In the early years it was dominated by nutmeg plantations and then fruit farming. But falling nutmeg prices, and the development of New Harbour (today's Keppel Harbour) westward along the shore led to development from the 1850s. The Tanjong Pagar Dock company (founded 1864 until government takeover in 1905) was foremost amongst the new companies involved in land reclamation and development.

New docks and wharves – stretching well over a mile (2.4 km) along the coast at their peak, and labourers, not to mention overspill as nearby Kreta Ayer filled up, gradually and inevitably saw Tanjong Pagar develop too. Duxton Hill and new developments were built inland, with the coolie *keng* (lodging houses) on Duxton Hill and Road becoming as crowded as any others: 20 or more to a floor, and sometimes a space rented out to different people at different times. On a more spacious note, though, institutional buildings were built inland on the area's northern fringes, at the base of Pearl's Hill. These included the Seaman's Hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Outram Prison. The reservoir at Pearl's Hill, built 1898, is still the main source of fresh water supply for the area today. The rapidly multiplying residents, meanwhile, featured a Hokkien bias, with dock coolies hired for the job by contractors, and so extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of trade. Then there were rickshaw pullers, and Indian sepoy (soldiers) and other working class.⁸

Given the existence of overcrowded working class quarters, secret societies, brothels, and against the background of rising nationalist sentiment in and from China, it is hardly surprising that 'Chinatown' was not always peaceful.

Sun-Yat Sen's death in 1925 formed a focus for much of the anti-imperial, Chinese nationalist sentiment of the time. Sun-Yat Sen had visited Singapore several times up to 1911, and following the establishment of the Republic of China, a branch of its ruling, Kuomintang, party was set up locally in 1912. Feeling over Sun Yat Sen's death was mixed with labour disputes by KMT and leftist unionist organisers. Strikes were on the rise. All this culminated in the so-called 'Kreta Ayer' Incident of 12 March 1927.

On that day, the British had given mainly respectable, Hokkien organisers permission for a meeting at the Happy Valley Amusement Park, to commemorate the second anniversary of Sun Yat Sen's death. The conditions: no speeches, no China flags, no procession. But on the day Hainanese activists started making speeches, and turned the meeting into a procession. When the procession got to the Kreta Ayer area, trouble started.

A trolley bus tried to force its way through the crowd. The police tried to make an arrest. The crowd, a mix of students and of men in their twenties, responded by attempting to storm Kreta Ayer Police Station. The police fired warning shots. The attackers persisted. The police fired for real. The result: 2 Chinese dead, 4 lay mortally wounded, 11 others

injured. Kuomintang activists, anti-imperialist sentiment among Singapore's Chinese youth and Hainainese, radical night-school teachers, and incipient communism had all added fuel to the flames. One banner had read: 'abolish all unequal treaties', another, 'eternal success to the world revolution'. The desire for unions to better conditions, KMT and communist organization, and pro-China anti-imperial sentiment continued to simmer after. But the liberal use of banishments, and police Special Branch informers and even plants such as Communist Party Secretart-General Lai Teck, then kept these forces within limits until war.



Sago Lane, 1950

There are good selections of images at:

1. Gretchen Liu, Singapore: A Pictorial History (including living conditions)
2. Brenda Yeoh, Contesting Space, plates.
3. PICAS, the Singapore National Archive's online service (<http://www.a2o.com.sg/picas>)

The war was to place a double burden on a 'Chinatown' already bursting at the seams: increased population, decreased housing quality. On the one hand, the influx of refugees swelled Singapore's population. It was around 560,000 in 1930.⁹ A figure soon increased to over a million by refugees from Malaya (whose population was then just over five million). After the war Singapore's numbers declined just a fraction, to a shade under the million mark.¹⁰ On the other hand, the war saw housing damaged, destroyed or simply run down.

War itself was bad enough, but in Chinatown the government decided not to build aircraft shelters, believing its streets already too dangerously crowded. Instead, residents were to be encouraged to take shelter away from the city. That was hardly practical for people who needed to carry on earning a living.¹¹ So when Japanese bombers arrived in December 1941, death as well as destruction was to be plentiful..

Sixty three people were killed in Singapore and 133 injured in the first Japanese air-raid alone, on the brilliantly moonlit night of 7th to 8th December.¹² Many more were killed after, with as many as 2,000 casualties a day. The bombers came in multiples of 27: 54; 81; 108. They flew over like silver fish, floating in a sea of azure blue. Discharging their bombs as a unit, they would make the ground shudder.¹³ Though their main targets were military, especially the docks, nearby Chinatown inevitably suffered with them. Roads filled with debris, broken telephone lines twisted and played, shophouses burned. People resorted to the deep storm drains either side of the roads for cover. But when the bombs and later artillery shells came too close the lucky ones, who had kept their heads down, found backsides peppered with shrapnel. When they came closer still, the drains ran with blood.¹⁴

This is not to say that Chinatown's streets of two and three-storeyed, shuttered buildings were unchanging. Far from it. The very shoreline receded over time, so seafront streets found themselves inland. The Thian Hock Keng Temple in Telok Ayer Street is a classic example ..



Thian Hock Keng Temple (Temple of Heavenly Happiness). 1839-42. Restored 1998-2000. Telok Ayer Street, Chinatown, Singapore. The Malay words "Telok Ayer," which mean "Water Bay," date from the time that the temple and street paralleled the shore. The temple was constructed at the site of a joss house used by early immigrants to thank the sea goddess for their safe arrival, using donations from dialect group (bang) leaders such as Tan Tock Seng. The same Tan tock Seng who was also behind the eponymous hospital.

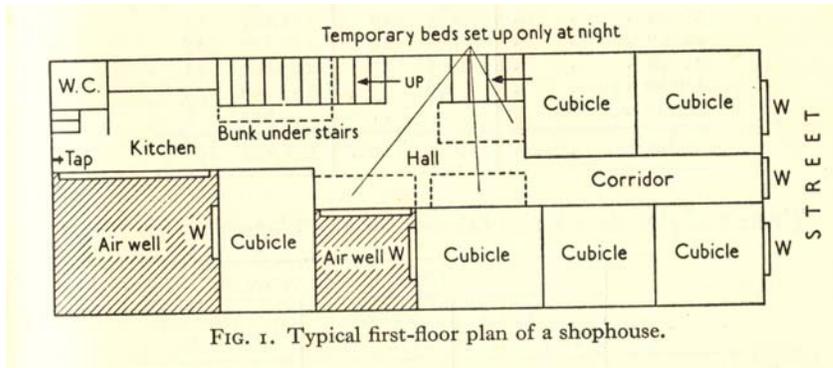
Once the temple was a focus for the community, as well as containing ancestral tablets. As with most other Chinese temples, it was built on principles established since the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Symmetrically aligned courtyards and walled compounds are key elements. Geomancy (*feng-shui*) dictated the alignment of buildings with natural features of the landscape. The temple here originally enjoyed an excellent location in these terms, facing the sea to the front and with hills to the rear. Before the twentieth century the hills and the sea had disappeared from site as reclamation and development proceeded.

The roof is supported by cantilevered structures supported by pillars. Roof ridges are swept up at the ends in the 'swallow tail' manner, with a pair of cavorting dragons facing each other at either end. These symbolise the male and female principles of *yin* and *yang*. Their eternal conflict represents the quest for perfect truth. Colours play an important role too. Red represents fire and blood, symbolising prosperity, good fortune, virtue and the male *yang* principle. It is typically used on walls, pillars and decorations.

The Thian Hock Kheng temple represents a continuity over time in Singapore, and beyond Singapore to China. But outside the temples the temper and function of whole streets changed dramatically over time.

Smith Street and Sago Street were famous for their brothels early in the century. By 1941, these establishments, which once thrived by servicing an overwhelmingly male workforce, had been closed for a decade. As had the Japanese brothels clustered around Malay Street and Bugis Street, a stone's throw from Raffles Hotel. Closed as the worldwide depression of the 1930s drove down rubber prices and slowed male migration, but not female, and as London's scruples about regulating such exploitation overcame common sense.¹⁵

The pattern was, then, one of changing use and fortunes. Houses once new and pristine were converted to brothels even as others remained residential, the brothels were closed in the 1930s, but then refugees and Japanese bombs further increased the density of population in an area always short of facilities such as sanitation and adequate piped water. By 1947 Singapore's population was closing on the million mark. At the same time the Chinatown area, now a grid of two and three-storey shophouses of just over a square mile, stretching from New Bridge Road down to the sea, held 135,000 people. Ninety Four per cent being Chinese. In the most heavily populated subdivision the density reached the equivalent of 450,000 per square mile, one of the densest in the world at the time.¹⁶



Typical Shophouse Floorplan of the 1950s. The only way of emptying the bucket toilets was often to carry them through the kitchen, or down stairs. Tenants claimed nightsoil carriers sometimes deliberately spilt the contents if their tip was not big enough.¹⁷ The majority of kitchens were of the verandah type, and the majority of stoves of the fire-bucket type, and electricity had only just piped oil-lamps as the predominant form of lighting. Just as well really, considering postwar Singapore suffered periodic brownouts due to electricity shortages.

The result by the 1950s did not always smell sweet, however picturesque the jumble of signs, hawkers stalls, five-foot ways and people may have been. One 1950s study, of one street (Upper Nankin Street) showed its houses divided into many small, dank cubicles, a separate family in each. In 1950s Upper Nankin Street most stoves were of the fire bucket type, electric lighting was only just outstripping oil lamps in use, and all toilets were open-bucket, with about twenty adults (several cubicles) sharing each. The majority were emptied of night soil only once every two or three days.^{18 19} If some resorted to the drains, this could only be reckoned a sanitary measure.²⁰

Upper Nankin Street or 'Black Cloth Street'²¹ – 1950s – 'Some Residents'²²

Cheong Ah Mui (46)

Biodata: Lives with her husband and four children (14, 8, 6, 4) in a large, first-floor cubicle of 15 ½ by 13 ½ feet, with two large windows. There are boxes, a bed for siestas (at night everyone sleeps on the floor) and a sideboard and two cupboards. Her 59-year old husband was born in Kwantung, coming to Singapore at 13 to work repairing ships and in odd jobs.

Interview: At 8 her father died, and so she went to the countryside, looking after the housework while her mother worked. When old enough, she picked mulberry leaves for a silk farmer, then became a spinner. She married as a secondary wife, coming to Singapore when the primary wife returned to China to look after her mother-in-law. Singapore people are 'heartless and proud' ... Singapore people don't even care if you die'. She cannot get a job ... To work in a rubber factory requires skills, as an earth carrier, strength. She has neither.

Wong Kwok Tong (66)

Biodata: Born in Kwantung, he came to Singapore at 22 and has occupied the same three-windowed cubicle (now with unmarried sons of 24 and 26) for about 20 years. The room is 9 foot by seven foot with double bed, sideboard and table, and oil lamp lighting.

Interview: Schooled about 7-8 he then farmed until 12, going on to store work in Canton and Hong Kong. At about 20 the business he worked for bankrupted, and so he came to Singapore to support his new wife. It took him six years as a store assistant to save enough to return and bring over his wife and 6 year old son. His wife bore five sons and a daughter, before dieing in the Japanese occupation. The gist of his views was that ‘Singapore people are complex. In China you hardly ever meet people like Hokkien, Teochew, or Hainanese. Everybody around you speaks the same dialect as yourself. Singapore people are heartless (“have thin love”); Chinese people remember kindness for a thousand years’.

Leow Ah Thai (66)

Biodata: Born in Kwantung, engaged to an assistant in her father’s box-making shop at 6, she married at 17 having never been to school. Her 7 ½ foot by 7 ½ foot cubicle has a single bed and a shelf. The light-source is a trickle of light over the partition, and oil-lamps at night.

Interview: Her children died young (she blamed her husband’s ancestors grave having a poor position). She helped to farm, but when her husband died she had nothing, and came to Singapore to do odd jobs – carrying earth, rubber factory work and so on. Now old and unemployed she receives \$5 a month from Social Welfare. Even if given a free passage she would not return to China. The gist of her words was that ‘Everything is so hard in China. For example, if you want some water you must walk quite a distance, and then carry it back, whereas in Singapore you just turn on the tap and down flows the water’.

Yong Ah Tong (56)

Biodata: Born in Kwantung, she shares a windowless attic with two other women, having separate budgets. She came to Singapore at 35, having been abandoned by her husband, and leaving her son with her mother-in-law. Discovering her husband remarried she worked as a domestic servant.

Leong Chee Chiew (49)

Biodata: Born Kwantung, he came to Singapore at 23. He, his wife and three children (4, 8, 14) have occupied a cubicle of 9 foot by 8 foot for 14 years (eg since the Occupation).

Interview: engaged at 8 and married at 15, he did farmwork till 27. He came to Singapore to escape the harsh life, hoping to return. His wife refused to join him, as she was an only child, and so he remarried. Odd-jobs were followed by carpentry until tuberculosis struck in 1951. Under treatment by Tan Tock Seng Hospital, he receives unemployment allowance. The gist of his words was that perhaps 20 people in the street had TB, he does not find any difference between people in China and Singapore, and Singapore is much better to live in.

Of course, generalizations are precisely that. Some houses had just one or two occupants. One road, Upper Chin Chew Street, had mainly ‘kongsis’ or associations of SamSui. Women who were mostly single, and generally out at work from dawn to dusk.²³ And the very road names we use were not always the ones used by residents. Chin Chew Street was known as ‘Bean Cake Street’, Nankin Street ‘Siong Pek Kwan Street’, after the secret society based there. Tourist guidebooks sometimes included these alternative names, for the benefit of the outsider.²⁴

By the 1960s much of the area still suffered from a lack of amenities, and from material decay. In the 1960s, many of the buildings around Pearl's Hill, and even old shophouses in Chinatown and along New Bridge Road, were replaced by new developments.

The Outram Prison area was redeveloped into Outram Park HDB estate in 1968. People's Park Centre was built on an old market also in 1968, and the "death houses" at Sago Lane were demolished and Kreta Ayer Complex built in 1975. These developments housed business areas on the ground floor with residential quarters on the upper floors. This was supposed to be an extension of the traditional shophouse concept in order to facilitate a combination of high-density residential and commercial use.

*Restored Shophouses on Pagoda Street, Singapore*²⁵



Restored Shophouses on Pagoda Street, Singapore. September 1998. [Photograph © George P. Landow] This elegant structure, which now houses an antique shop, represents a particularly elegant form of shophouse and originally probably contained a family association.



Corner of Amoy and McCallum Streets. According to Geroge Landow's site, these 'seem to exemplify good architectural restoration and the issues that even it raises. These shophouses, or former shophouses, look physically sound, lived in, and generally appear to capture (!) much of the flavor of the original buildings in their original surroundings ... unlike some [other quite charming ones](#) in Singapore, [they] do not, in other words, appear so perfect, so bright and shiny, that they appear to belong in Disneyland or to the world of **The Truman Show**.' But why can an obsession with the 'temple' and the 'shophouse', rather than the 'coolie-lodge' licensed to deal with indentured coolies, who might be shipped on to Malaya or further afield, or the brothel or opium den?

Also in the 1960s, the PAP's campaign against so-called 'yellow culture' and vice, gambling, prostitution, secret societies, and later hygiene began to have an effect, as street hawkers were gradually moved into new centers, including food centers. Not for nothing did the PAP members wear white.

By the 1970s, then, 'Chinatown' was changing in character, and its relatively small population becoming a less significant part of Singapore overall, as number ballooned from about 1 million in the 1950s, to 3 million in the 1980s.

By the early 1980s, when the Urban Development Authority decided to preserve the area's historical feel rather than simply redevelop it, many shophouses were empty or derelict. Since then, the URA has gradually cleared streets and redeveloped them, trying

to turn some over to office use (eg in Tanjong Pagar, where the MRT station gives easy access), and then keeping other areas for shops, food and temples.

In a sense, the Singapore Tourist Board Plan for Chinatown, launched in 1998, was an extension of this trend to 'preserve' the fabric of key buildings, while redeveloping select streets along thematic lines, to create a critical mass of interest.

That, however, is where this 'online lecture' ends.

What remains is for you to read a selection of the sources and, of course, to ask from your own perspective, and perhaps that of your family as well, what relevance 'Chinatown' has to you, and how it might be developed.

What is in a Name? The Significance of some Street Names in Chinatown

Amoy is the European term for Xiamen, the great maritime port in Fujian province, China. Fujian was the departure point for many of the immigrants to Singapore.

Neil Road: Names after a British hero in the Indian Mutiny in 1857 which took place in Calcutta, India. The mutiny arose as a revolt against British rule in India and the ill-treating of the Indian soldiers. Other roads similarly named were Outram and Havelock Roads.

It was believed that there were many sago factories in this area in the past and that the street was named after them. Sago is used in food, especially puddings and grown in tropical areas. The Cantonese called this street Little Temple Street after a temple built there in 1895, called the Da Bo Gong. This area was also known for its death houses where the terminally ill and dying went to wait for their eventual death. Shops around these houses sold joss sticks, candles and other paraphernalia related to funerals.

The official name for Temple Street was Almeida Street. The land belonged to Joaquim Almeida, son of Jose Almeida, a well-known pioneer. Joaquim Almeida was a doctor on a Portuguese ship and when his ship passed Singapore in 1819, he saw the island and liked it. He returned in 1825 and set up a clinic and shop. He later branched into setting up a trading firm selling Portuguese and Chinese goods and made his fortune.

This street was also the concentration for Teochews.

The name originated from the Sri Mariamman temple on the corner of the street. The high tower called the Gopuram in Tamil looked like a pagoda and therefore the road was named after it.

The bridge refers to the former Thomson Bridge across the Singapore River. J.T. Thomson was a colonial Surveyor, (Thomson Road is named after him). The bridge was rebuilt and renamed Elgin Bridge in the 1920s. The road located south of the Bridge was

known as South Bridge Road and the road North of the Bridge was named North Bridge Road.

Ann Siang Hill was originally known as Scotts Hill after Charles Scott who owned the land and grew nutmegs there. When he died, the land was sold to Chia Ann Siang who was born in Melaka in 1832.

Materials

1. STB Press Release, 13 November 2001:

CHINATOWN FOOD STREET OPENS

Singapore revives street hawking after a 20-year break, as Chinatown Food Street opens on November 13. Located on Smith Street in Singapore's Chinatown district, this is now the draw card with 18 hawker stalls and al-fresco seating for up to 260 diners.

Dr Lee Boon Yang, Singapore's Minister for Manpower, officiated the launch of the much anticipated Chinatown Food Street. Dr Richard Hu, who has given enormous support to the developments of Chinatown and Food Street all these years, was also present as the Special Guest for the event.

Dr Lee, who said he was confident that Chinatown Food Street would draw the crowds, added: "I am pleased that we are now able to experience a slice of what life in Chinatown used to be in the 1970s to the early 1980s, but in a modified version that answers to the affluent Singaporean's preference for more hygienic conditions."

Food Street is part of the Chinatown Experience Guide Plan, a multi-agency effort spearheaded by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and supported by various government and grassroots agencies, to bring back the street life and heritage to Chinatown.

Selection of food vendors for Food Street was the mastermind of a panel of culinary experts, food critics,

representatives from F&B associations, the STB and the Chinatown stakeholders, such as the Chinatown Business Association (CBA) and the Kreta Ayer Citizens' Consultative Committee. The panel, led by food consultant Mrs Juliet David, went through a stringent selection process to select the Singapore's best vendors for the 18 hawker kiosks and 12 shop-house restaurants.

The STB also put in over S\$1 million towards the development of Chinatown Food Street. Other agencies which provided support to facilitate the transformation included the Land Transport Authority, the National Parks Board, the Ministry of Environment, the Singapore Land Authority and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

"These are tough times, but when it comes to the business of enjoying good food, few can equal the passion of Singaporeans. I'm simply delighted that today, we are able to bring back a piece of nostalgia that is so much a character of Singapore and Chinatown," said Mr Yeo Khee Leng, Chief Executive, Singapore Tourism Board.

Chinatown Food Street's opening marks a milestone in returning the nostalgia to Singapore. With this, street life in Chinatown will be revived.

On November 13, Chinatown Food Street will open to the public from 9pm. Thereafter, operating hours are between 11am and 11pm daily.

Enclosures:

Fact Sheet 1 - List of hawker stall operators

Fact Sheet 2 - List of Restaurant operators

2. STB Press Release - 25 September 1998. This is a basic summary of the document, 'Enhancing the Chinatown Experience' .

This plan received stinging criticism, and has since been muted. Why was this?

**NEW CHINATOWN TO RE-CAPTURE SPIRIT OF
THE OLD**

Chinatown is set to become a bustling and vibrant district with a personality that reflects both its past and present.

Chinese opera and martial arts performances; Chinese arts and craft makers; tea houses, street food vendors, restaurants and eateries serving the widest range of Chinese delicacies. These and many other age-old Chinese cultural practices will reside in a Chinatown of the 21st century, which will be enhanced by the introduction of a Village Theatre, an Interpretative Centre, Elemental Gardens and pedestrianised, themed streets.

This historically and culturally significant area will be the first of 11 unique precincts to be carefully and lovingly developed by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) as part of the Tourism 21 masterplan.

The work will recall, capture and express the spirit that infused the Chinatown of old. When the area is finally ready in three years' time, Chinatown will be a busy and vibrant district, the gathering place and cultural focal point for Singaporeans and visitors alike.

What the enhanced and reinvigorated Chinatown will be like is the subject of a two-week long exhibition, launched today (Friday, September 25, 1998) by the Minister for Finance and Member of Parliament for the Kreta Ayer-Tanglin Group Representation Constituency, Dr Richard Hu.

Chinatown signals start of work at other thematic zones

The exhibition, *'Enhancing the Chinatown Experience'* unveils the STB's enhancement plans for this very special part of Singapore. This project signals the start of enhancement and development work on the other zones identified under the Tourism 21 blueprint, which aims to transform the Lion City from a tourist destination into a tourism capital of the new millennium.

The development of Singapore's thematic zones by the STB and its partner agencies from the public and private sectors aims to enhance Singapore's tourism allure by drawing attention to, and then capitalising on the strengths and uniqueness of our cultures and attractions.

Of the thematic zones, four have been identified as priority areas. They are Ethnic Singapore (comprising Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam), Orchard Road, Singapore River and the Entertainment District. .

Working hand in glove to restore Chinatown

As the first thematic zone, Chinatown thus serves as a test bed for the STB's plans for the other zones. The plans for Chinatown build on the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Development Guide Plan (DGP), which provides the urban planning, conservation and development guidelines for the area.

The STB's plans also focus on the hardware aspects such as the creation of focal points, lighting, signages, street furniture and transport. These will accentuate the software aspects, which will enliven the streets with activities and create an exciting calendar of events. All these will help make every visit to Chinatown memorable.

The Board's blueprint thus combines with the URA's development plans and seeks to guide the overall creation of the Chinatown experience of the future.

Additionally, the plans will introduce greater vitality to each zone by attracting investments into the area as well as encouraging stakeholders to play a critical role in bringing this about, even as people will be encouraged to make their homes in the area.

The development of Chinatown is expected to take about three years and is estimated to cost \$97.5 million. The enhancement of this district and the other thematic zones is a long-term investment that the government is making to boost Singapore's tourism industry.

Recalling the spirit of Chinatown

In opening the exhibition today at the former Lai Chun Yuen, a restored Chinese tea house-cum-theatre on Trengganu Street in the heart of Chinatown, Dr Richard Hu explained that these efforts were not an attempt to re-create Chinatown. "Rather, we are recalling and revitalising the Chinatown spirit so fondly remembered by Singaporeans and visitors alike and in the process, bringing forth those attributes that made this area so unique and special in our heritage."

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PLAN

The Village Theatre

Chinatown's new personality will be manifested and expressed by creating focal points to serve as magnets, drawing locals and tourists to the area. Topping this will be the Village Theatre, an arts, cultural and entertainment gathering place to be located in Kreta Ayer, the geographical heart and entertainment hub of Chinatown.

The Village Theatre will be an integrated complex housing a traditional performing venue, retail and F&B outlets, a teahouse and a Chinese temple. It will be a place to shop, drink, eat, learn, be entertained, and rejuvenated.

Interpretative Centre

Plans are also underway for a Chinatown Interpretative Centre to be housed in three shophouses in Pagoda Mall. This Interpretative Centre will be a vital cultural resource centre on Chinatown's past and its people. Here, stories of the past will unfold, revealing what the people of Chinatown believed in, how they played and how they lived. The Interpretative Centre will serve as the doorway through which visitors can enter and immerse themselves in the diverse heritage of Chinatown and its people.

Themed streets

In addition, key streets in Kreta Ayer will be themed, based on the emerging concentration of trades that are particular to each of these thoroughfares. Thus, the *Food, Tradition, Festive and Bazaar Streets as well as Market Square* will help to bring back the street life synonymous with old Chinatown.

The Elemental Gardens

In keeping with the character of Chinatown, a collection of pocket gardens, each taking after the five Chinese elements of Earth, Fire, Water, Metal and Wood will be created. These gardens will serve as rest stops for visitors during their exploration and discovery of the district.

Visual cues, special lighting & landscaping

Besides developing focal points to draw people to the area, Chinatown's appeal will be enhanced through visual cues like distinctive street and directory signs and storyboards, street furniture, street lamps and road markers.

And when the sun goes down, the area's ambience will be heightened through the sensitive use of coloured lighting of varying intensities. The special lighting will imbue the area with a personality that is all its own and capture the character and charm of key buildings and monuments, even as it helps to delineate main roads from side streets and back alleys.

In line with this, the densely built urban landscape in Chinatown will be softened with trees and flowering plants along the streets, to provide shade, breeze, and colour. With more greenery, visitors will find it more pleasant to walk in the area.

Convenient access to Chinatown

Besides the Chinatown MRT station, which will make visiting the area more convenient, a specially designed bus and trishaw route will be planned to improve accessibility within Chinatown. The routes will integrate with existing and proposed MRT, bus and taxi stops as well as car parks.

One of the four exits of the Chinatown MRT Station will open directly onto Pagoda Mall. Rain or shine, visitors taking the train to Chinatown will be able to use the Pagoda Mall Gateway in comfort, as the station and a length of the street will be covered. This all-weather facility will enable street vendors to ply their trade from pushcarts and encourage events to be specially organised for this stretch of the street.

Chinatown living

As Chinatown cannot thrive on visitors alone, new residents will be encouraged to move into the area, along with new businesses. The URA already has plans to inject new life there through the zoning of more areas for residential developments.

Chinatown to be venue for festivals & events

In order to attract people to Chinatown and encourage repeat visits, a packed calendar of events will be specially developed for the area. Where it only used to come alive during the Lunar New Year festivities, Chinatown will also be home venue for the staging of other significant Chinese festivals and exciting events like lion dance and *wushu* competitions.

“Over time, these measures will contribute to making Chinatown grow and prosper, and enable existing Chinatown businesses to flourish and new businesses to take root here,” said Dr Hu, who also opened the thematic zone’s first Mid-Autumn Festival after he launched the exhibition. “It will provide a base for a new generation of Chinatown residents and offer our visitors memorable experiences.”

Chinatown plans the fruit of combined public & private sector efforts

The Chief Executive of the Singapore Tourism Board, Mr Yeo Khee Leng, said the plans for the Chinatown thematic zone had taken about a year to put together. They involved the expertise of a wide range of government bodies and also incorporated the work of a team of specialist consultants covering every aspect of Chinatown: from history, to market feasibility, to architecture, landscaping, and lighting.

To ensure alignment and convergence of objectives, the STB worked closely with relevant government agencies and private sector stakeholders. The consultants’ recommendations were put through the multi-agency Thematic Zones Steering Committee, which had representatives from the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Land Transport Authority, National Parks Board, Land Office, Public Works Department, National Heritage Board and the Trade & Industry, Law, Information & the Arts and Environment ministries. Chinatown stakeholders and grassroots leaders, represented by the Revitalisation of Chinatown Committee, were also consulted when drawing up the plans.

Commenting on the efforts involved, Mr Yeo said, “It has been an extremely thorough and painstaking task. I can say that everyone involved has taken great care that we produce a set of proposals which capture not only the imagination but also the heart and soul of Chinatown.

“The ultimate aim is to transform Chinatown into an area where people want to spend their time, whether they’re residents or are visitors.”

‘Enhancing the Chinatown Experience’ – the Exhibition will be held at No. 25 Trengganu Street (the former Lai

Chun Yuen), from 26 September to 9 October, 11 am to 9 pm daily. Admission is free.

6. STB Press Release: 26 Apr 2001

TELOK AYER GREEN TO TELL THE STORY OF EARLY IMMIGRANTS

Residents of Singapore's Chinatown district and visitors can look forward to beautiful and serene green pockets within the area in the next year. To be developed jointly by the National Parks Board (NParks) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), these green pockets will not only serve as quiet resting points, but will also reflect the history of the area.

This is part of the Chinatown Experience Guide Plan, which was first mooted in 1998 by the STB.

The two earmarked green pockets are the historically rich Telok Ayer Green and Ann Siang Hill Park. Enhancement works have already begun at Telok Ayer Green after which NParks and STB plan to carry out works at Ann Siang.

The Telok Ayer Green is sandwiched between two famous national monuments, the Thian Hock Keng temple and the Nagore Durgha Shrine, both historic places of worship frequented by Singapore's early immigrants. Many came here to offer their prayers of thanks for a safe journey across the seas from their homeland.

When completed by the end of the year, the Green will have a series of three bronze sculptures - a sampan replica at the entrance, a sculpture depicting a Chinese festival procession and a third showcasing Indian spice traders. These works of art will not only beautify the park, but will also narrate the tale of the early immigrants through storyboards. The STB has called for a public tender on 20 April 2001 for sculptors to take up the task of designing and producing the pieces.

"While not disturbing the peaceful ambience of the Green, both partners hope to enhance the attractiveness of the park. The Chinatown residents have been updated of the progress of the Green and we are happy to hear that they look forward to the improvements as much as we do," said Mr Edmund Chua,

Deputy Director of Thematic Development, Singapore Tourism Board.

As most of the earliest immigrants arrived by sea, a motif reminiscent of this theme will also be carried through the Green. The path through the garden will be laid with granite, rubblestone and pebble finish in a wavy pattern which will subtly symbolise the sea. A water feature at the centre of the green will complete this picturesque setting.

Besides sculptures and landscaping features, trellises and additional resting benches will be added. As the Green is a resting space, trees will be retained to provide a natural feel to the park as well as to provide more shade to park users. The STB and the NParks envisage that these works will make Telok Ayer Green a more enticing resting area, while also providing a learning experience for those who stop by to rest.

7. Thian Hock Temple Telok Ayer Street – under construction.

8. George Landow, 'The Shophouse: A Characteristic Singaporean Architectural Form', at:

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/architecture/shophouse/intro.html>

Click on the pictures for further links. Some address issues such as the restoration versus preservation, and the mark of age, eg:

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/architecture/shophouse/7.html> and

Here is George Landow analyzing the nineteenth century British critic, John Ruskin, on the difference between mere chocolate-box delight in 'old' surfaces, and the 'age-mark': 'In the first volume Ruskin had written of the beauties of age itself, and these are apparently part of the sublime emotion which creates the noble picturesque: "There is set in the deeper places of the heart such affection for the signs of age that the eye is delighted even by injuries which are the work of time; not but that there is also real and absolute beauty in the forms and colours so obtained" (3.204). Even at this early period Ruskin distinguishes this pleasure from what he later called the surface-picturesque; for he remarks that although a building may have "agemark upon it which may best exalt and harmonize the sources of its beauty," our enjoyment of this sign of aging "is no pursuit of mere picturesqueness; it is true following out of the ideal character of the building" (3.207). This distinction between age-mark and mere picturesqueness became'. Source: George Landow, 'The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin', Chapter 3:1: Ruskin on the Picturesque:

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/victorian/ruskin/atheories/3.2.html>

¹ Secret Societies in Singapore (Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 1999), p.14.

² Sources include:

³ Summarised (and photographs) from Medha Malik Kudaisya, Assistant Professor, University Scholars Programme, National University of Singapore, 'Sri Marianam Temple:

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/architecture/srimar/1.html>. Sources she cites include: Dehijia, Vidya (ed), Devi. The Great Goddess. Female Divinity in South Asian Art. Washington, D.C., Arthur M. Shackler Gallery, 1999. Michell, George. Architecture and Art of Southern India. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995. Liu, Gretchen. In granite and chunam: the national monuments of Singapore. Singapore, Landmark Books and Preservation of Monuments Board, 1996. Sinha, Vineeta. 'Hinduism in Contemporary Singapore,' in K.S. Sandhu & A. Mani, ed., Indian communities in Southeast Asia. Singapore, ISEAS and Times Academic Press, 1993. pp. 827-47.

⁴ Secret Societies, p. 27.

⁵ Teo Siew-Eng and Victor Savage, 'Singapore Landscape: A historical Overview of Housing Image', in Chew and Lee, A History of Singapore, pp. 312-39, especially 324-27.

⁶ George Peet, Rickshaw Reporter (Singapore: Eastern Universities, 1985), pp. 205-06.

⁷ The standard work on these tensions, and historical town planning in general, is Brenda Yeoh, Contesting space : power relations and the urban built environment in colonial Singapore (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996). But it is a work that demands considerable time to read.

⁸ Tanjong Pagar Constituency, Tanjong Pagar: Singapore's Cradle of Development (Singapore: Landmark Books for Tanjong Pagar Citizens' Consultative Committee, 1989), *passim*.

⁹ In 1931 the populations was 557,745, though by its fall in 1942 it had been swollen by refugees. By 1947, it had grown to 938,144. Saw Swee-Hock, 'Population Growth and Control', in Edwin Lee and Ernest Chew (eds.), A History of Singapore (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 221

¹⁰ R. B. Smith, 'Some Contrasts Between Burma and Malaya in British Policy in South-East Asia, 1942-1946', in R. B. Smith and A. J. Stockwell, British Policy and the Transfer of Power in Asia: Documentary Perspectives (London: SOAS, 1988), p. 31 gives an estimate of 5,278,866 as a 1938 estimate.

¹¹ E. M. Glover, In Seventy Days: The Story of Malayan Seventy Days: The Story of Malaya (London: Frederick Muller, 1946), p. 39.

¹² Kirby, The Loss of Singapore, p. 183. There has been much debate on the lights. The moon would have been enough anyway. No doubt the air raid precautions were inadequate given the prior sighting of Japanese convoys. On the other hand, Singapore's gas lamps would still have taken time to extinguish, unless the precaution of a pre-war brownout had been ordered.

¹³ Glover, In Seventy Days, pp. 157-58. Ivan Simson Singapore, Too Little, Too Late: The Failure of Malaya's defences in 1942 (Singapore: Donald Moore for Asia-Pacific Press, 1970), p. 93. Simson suggests about 400-500 deaths a day (p. 96), and up to 2000 casualties and missing all-told. Large concrete pipes, up to six feet long, were also provided as shelters, and later on slit trenches were dug too.

¹⁴ Leasor, Singapore: The Battle That Changed the World, p. 177 and 245-46. Noel Barber, Sinister Twilight: The Fall of Singapore (London: Collins, 1968), pp. 88-89 gives an account of one woman saved because three other people who were killed fell on top of her, saving her from a subsequent attack. Page 126 describes shells hitting Orchard Road as well. Areas hit in the first bombing raid included Chinatown, and Seletar and Tengah airfields. On page 245 Leasor quotes one 'eye-witness': 'eight decapitated bodies in one street ... I looked at the drains on each side of the narrow street. They were full of water, bloody water'. Compare this to Lavinia Warner and John Sandilands, Beyond the Wire: The True Story of Japan's P.O.W.s That Inspired the Motion Picture *Paradise Road* (London: Arrow, 1997), pp. 27, 34 and 41.

As for the air-raids, Singaporean author Goh Sin Tub has captured the same moment:

'We walk that eerie road,
Devastated Singapore,
Burning, billowing black,
Bodies rushing on the road,
Bodies still on the road
(except that body, that part of body, in the drain
minus arm, minus leg and don't know what ...

pain everywhere.

We fell till we feel no more,

no longer see

dazed eyes that ask:

Is this real?

Goh Sin Tub, 'Remember that December?', from Robbie B. H. Goh, Memories and Desires: A Poetic History of Singapore (Singapore: Unipress, 1998), p. 27.

¹⁵ James Francis Warren, Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993). Singapore was not so obviously 'Sin-galore', but the sin was there all the same, with sly prostitutes, and even 'rickshaw parades'.

¹⁶ Barrington Kaye, Upper Nankin Street: A Sociological Study of Chinese Households Living in a Densely Populated Area (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1960).

¹⁷ Kaye, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁸ For Chinatown's problems, as they persisted into the 1950s, see Barrington Kaye, Upper Nankin Street Singapore (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1960), pp. 1-2, passim. In 1822 Raffles suggested the area southwest of the river be allocated to the Chinese (pp. 75-78).

¹⁹ Now restored, the fresh paint of Chinatown sometimes seems to tourists (and more especially people who remember the more begrimed 1960s or 1970s) almost too clean and modern. But at least one student at the National Institute of Education has commented that the renovated premises reminded their relatives of the pre-war period. What the tourist or serviceman of the 1960s may see as authenticity, may simply appear to others as decay and neglect. For a discussion of such issues, see David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

²⁰ My parents were in Singapore as part of the British forces in the mid-1960s. For them, Chinatown, however picturesque, was not a place one would eat without a second or even third thought.

²¹ See Peter Dunlop, Street Names of Singapore (Singapore: Who's Who Publishing Singapore, 200), p. 218, on the Nankin Street: 'After the Chinese city, Nanking. The Hakkas call it siong pek koi after a secret society. Upper Nankin Street, now under the Hong Lim Centre, an early HDB city centre redevelopment, was called black cloth street because of the many Samsui women who used to live there.

²² From Barrington Kaye, Upper Nankin Street Singapore, especially pp. 226-45, ch. 12, 'Some Residents of Upper Nankin Street'.

²³ Barrington Kaye, Upper Nankin Street Singapore, p. 7. The report avoided their street as they were supposedly 'singularly invulnerable to interview techniques'.

²⁴ Iskander Mydin, Pioneers of the Streets (Singapore: Art, Inquiries and Antiquities, 1989), pp. 24-27. See also H. T. Houghton, Chinese Names of Streets in Singapore (Singapore: JMBRAS, 1982).

²⁵ From George P. Landow, Professor of English and Art History, Brown University; Distinguished Visiting Professor, NUS, 1998-99.

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/architecture/shophouse/3.html>.