

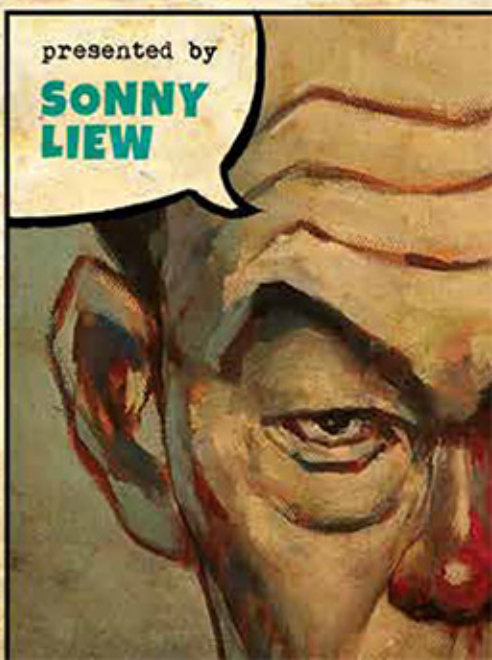
THE ART OF
**CHARLIE CHAN
HOCK CHYE**

陳
福
財



presented by

**SONNY
LIEW**



Praise for *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*:

“*The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* is a brilliant, innovative work that should be read and savoured by everyone who’s interested in Singapore. [A] beautiful, moving elegy... an introspection – tender, arresting, witty in equal measure – on the very meaning of life, progress and happiness.... In a year when Singaporeans will be treated to a relentless barrage of triumphalism, this may well be the most delightful, thought-provoking meditation on the country.”

— **Sudhir T Vadaketh**

*(Floating on a Malayan Breeze,
Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus)*

“A four-dimensional juggling act that’s like nothing I’ve ever seen or read.... The book has its own emotional power and poignancy, and its own intricate structure. One page would be hilariously funny or charming, the next bleak and disturbing. Chan Hock Chye’s life is like anyone’s life – full of triumphs and tragedies, victories and defeats – and the different-coloured threads in Liew’s tapestry reflect that beautifully.”

— **Mike Carey**

(Lucifer, The Unwritten)

“A tour de force.... Liew’s meticulous research, eye for detail and unerring sense of history has given us a work that will live on long after Charlie Chan’s passing. A labour of love for his art, his characters and his country.”

— **Kevin YL Tan**

*(Marshall of Singapore: A Biography,
The Constitution of Singapore: A Contextual Analysis)*

“With the complex spices of Singapore’s history and politics... the incredibly talented Sonny Liew tells the story of an artist you’ve probably never heard of... but before it’s over, you’ll know him like a lifelong friend.”

— **Paul Levitz**

(75 Years of DC Comics: The Art of Modern Mythmaking)

“A look at Singapore unlike any other before... *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* comments wryly on [the country’s] past and present while honouring comics as a storytelling medium.... both topical and timeless, [this] is a multi-layered celebration of storytelling.”


















— **Malay Mail**

“Challenges us to understand comics in a whole new way.... its unique approach to graphic biography showcases the very impact of sequential narrative and the ways that visuals construct our sense of history.”

— **Comics Alternative**















一山不容二虎

ONE MOUNTAIN CANNOT ABIDE TWO TIGERS

 <p>MY NAME IS LEE KUAN YEW.</p>	 <p>I WAS THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE FOR 31 YEARS.</p>	 <p>I WAS BORN INTO A SOCIETY THAT BELIEVED THAT THE BRITISH RULED OVER US BECAUSE THEY WERE A SUPERIOR RACE.</p>	 <p>BUT AFTER THEY WERE ROUTED BY THE JAPANESE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, WE CHANGED OUR MINDS.</p>
WHO ARE YOU?	 <p>I WAS ALWAYS THE SMARTEST IN SCHOOL.</p>	 <p>I KNEW, THEREFORE, THAT I COULD LEAD SINGAPORE AS ABLY AS ANY WHITE MAN.</p>	 <p>SO I JOINED FORCES WITH THE COMMUNISTS TO GAIN INDEPENDENCE FOR SINGAPORE.</p>
 <p>BUT AFTERWARDS, FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY, I HAD TO CRUSH THEM.</p>	WERE YOU RIGHT?	 <p>EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT SINGAPORE WAS TOO SMALL TO MAKE IT ON ITS OWN.</p>	 <p>SO WE TRIED TO FORGE A NEW COUNTRY WITH MALAYA.</p>
 <p>ALAS, SOME WERE TOO BLINDED BY RACE AND TRADITION TO SEE THE MERITS OF MY VISION.</p>	 <p>SINGAPORE'S SUCCESS SINCE THE SPLIT IN 1965 HAS PROVEN THEM ALL WRONG.</p>	 <p>BUT NEVER FORGET, IT IS ONLY WITH A WORLD-CLASS LEADERSHIP THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS SURVIVED AND THRIVED!</p>	NO WE MUST NOT
 <p>MANY REGARD ME AS AN INTELLECTUAL GIANT...</p>	 <p>...A WISE MASTER IN THE WAYS OF RULING OVER MEN.</p>	 <p>SOME HAVE CHALLENGED THE PATH I HAVE CHOSEN FOR SINGAPORE.</p>	 <p>BUT WHERE ARE THEY NOW?</p>

一山不容二虎

ONE MOUNTAIN CANNOT ABIDE TWO TIGERS

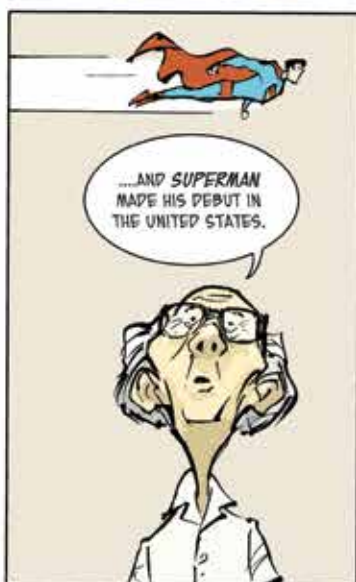
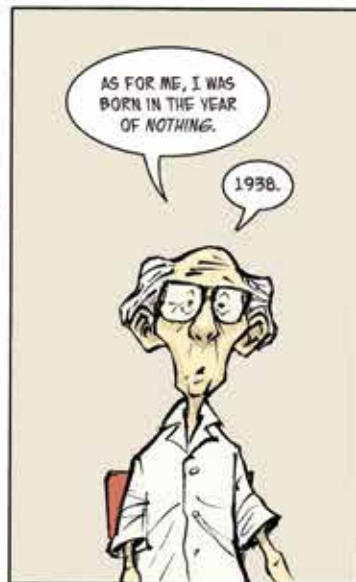
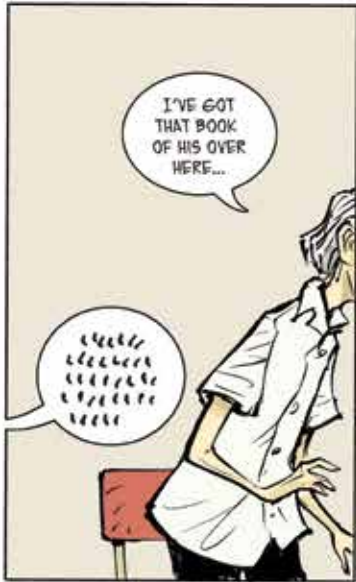
 <p>MY NAME IS LIM CHIN SIONG.</p>	 <p>I WAS ONCE A FIERY ORATOR IN THE CHINESE DIALECT OF HOKKIEN.</p>	 <p>I HELD SWAY OVER THOUSANDS THROUGH THE POWER OF MY WORDS AND THE DEDICATION OF MY ACTIONS.</p>	 <p>THERE WAS A MOMENT IN HISTORY WHEN I MIGHT HAVE BECOME THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE.</p>
WHO ARE YOU?	 <p>BUT THEY CALLED ME A COMMUNIST AND LOCKED ME AWAY.</p>	 <p>IN PRISON, I WAS OVERCOME BY DEPRESSION AND ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.</p>	 <p>AFTER THAT, I LEFT FOR ENGLAND, WHERE I BECAME A FRUIT SELLER.</p>
 <p>I AM NOT A COMMUNIST.</p>	WERE YOU RIGHT?	 <p>I AM A PATRIOT.</p>	 <p>I FOUGHT FOR MY COUNTRY AND MY FELLOW COUNTRYMEN.</p>
 <p>YES, SINGAPORE HAS HAD GREAT ECONOMIC SUCCESS UNDER LEE KUAN YEW...</p>	 <p>MANY MATERIAL THINGS HAVE IMPROVED...</p>	 <p>BUT WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR, WHAT DO YOU SEE?</p>	NO WE MUST NOT
		 <p>IN 1996, I DIED OF A HEART ATTACK.</p>	



Charlie Chan Hock Chye, aged 72, 2010



Previous pages
**ONE MOUNTAIN CANNOT
ABIDE TWO TIGERS**
1998
Chan Hock Chye
Unpublished



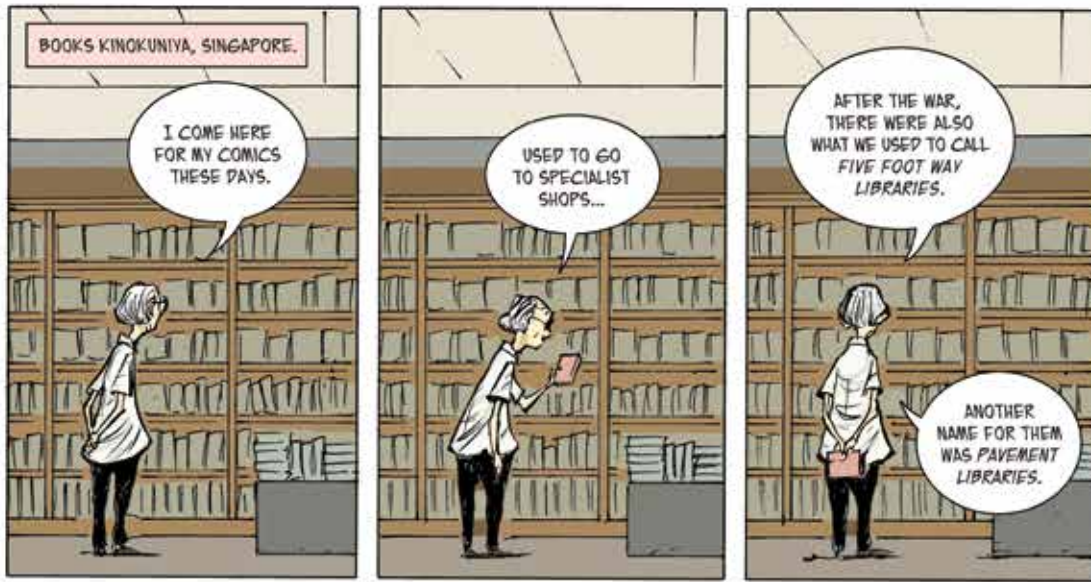
*THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION 1942-1945

THE ART OF
CHARLIE CHAN
HOCK CHYE

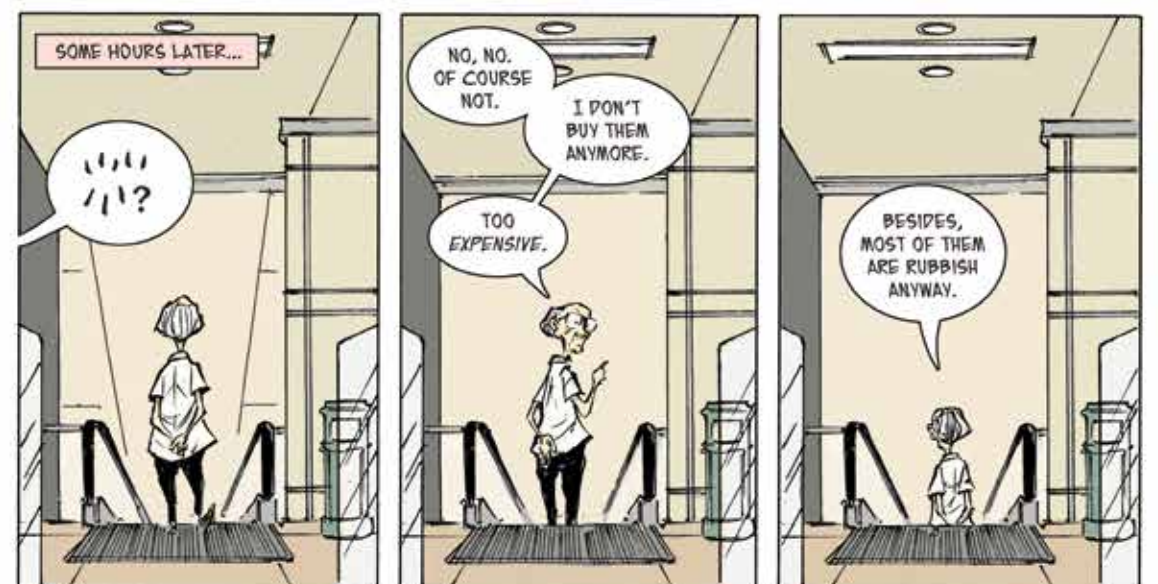
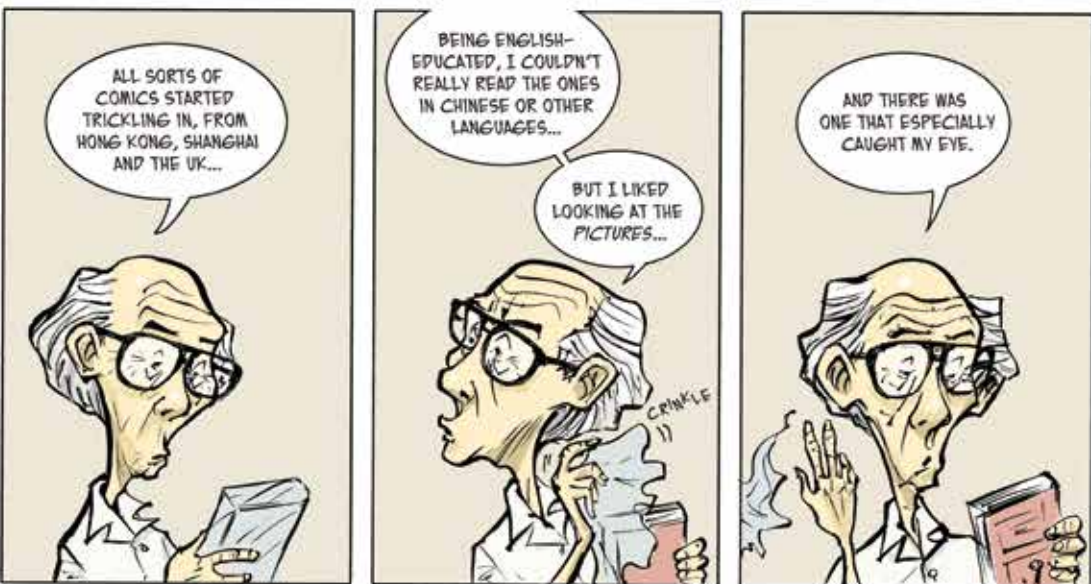


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**SONNY
LIEW**





FIVE FOOT WAY LIBRARY (1966) | Chan Hock Chye | Ink and wash on paper



AH HUAT'S GIANT ROBOT

快報雜誌



Above
AH HUAT'S GIANT ROBOT Vol. 1
 1956
 Chan Hock Chye
 Stones Throw Press

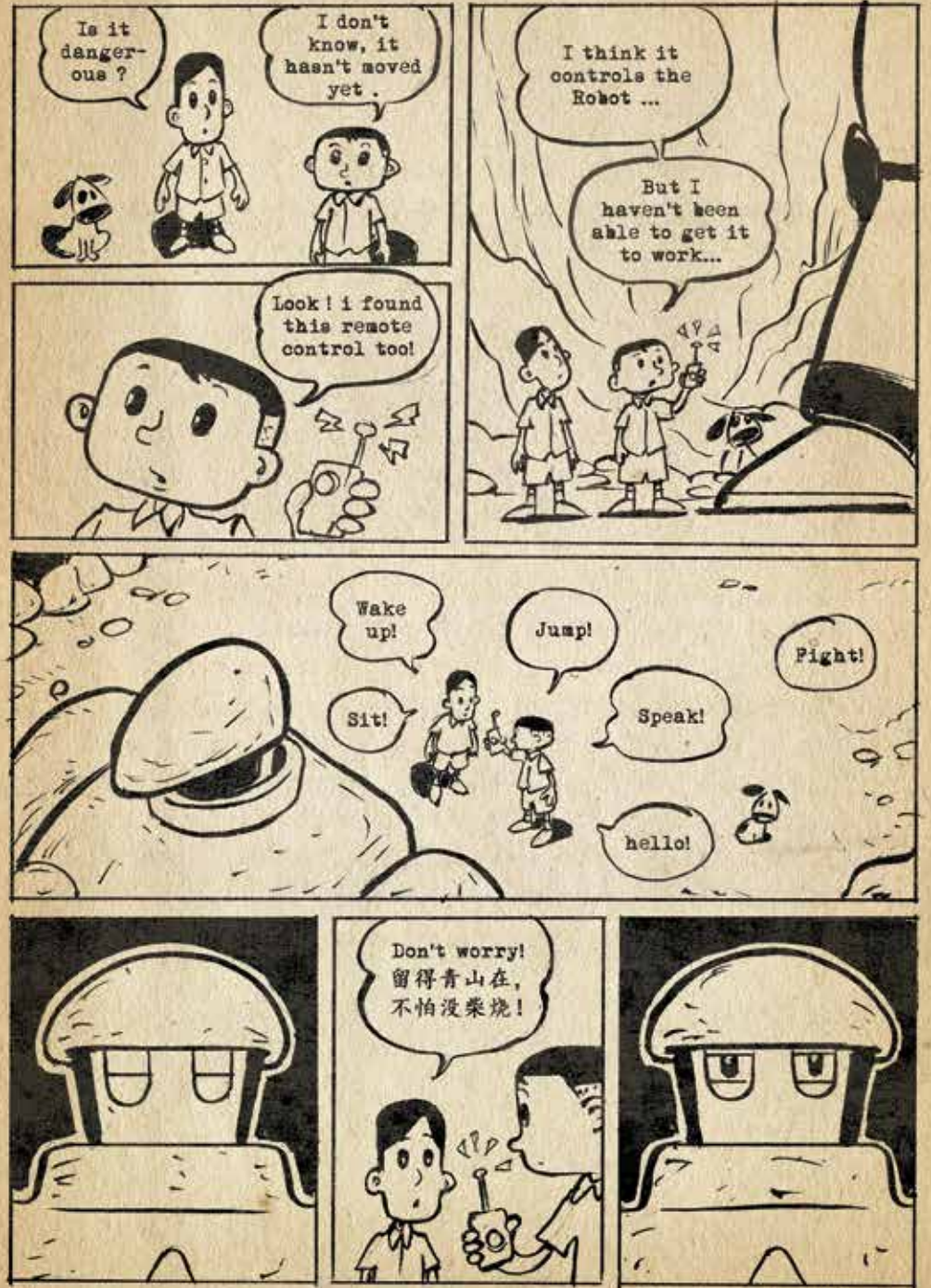
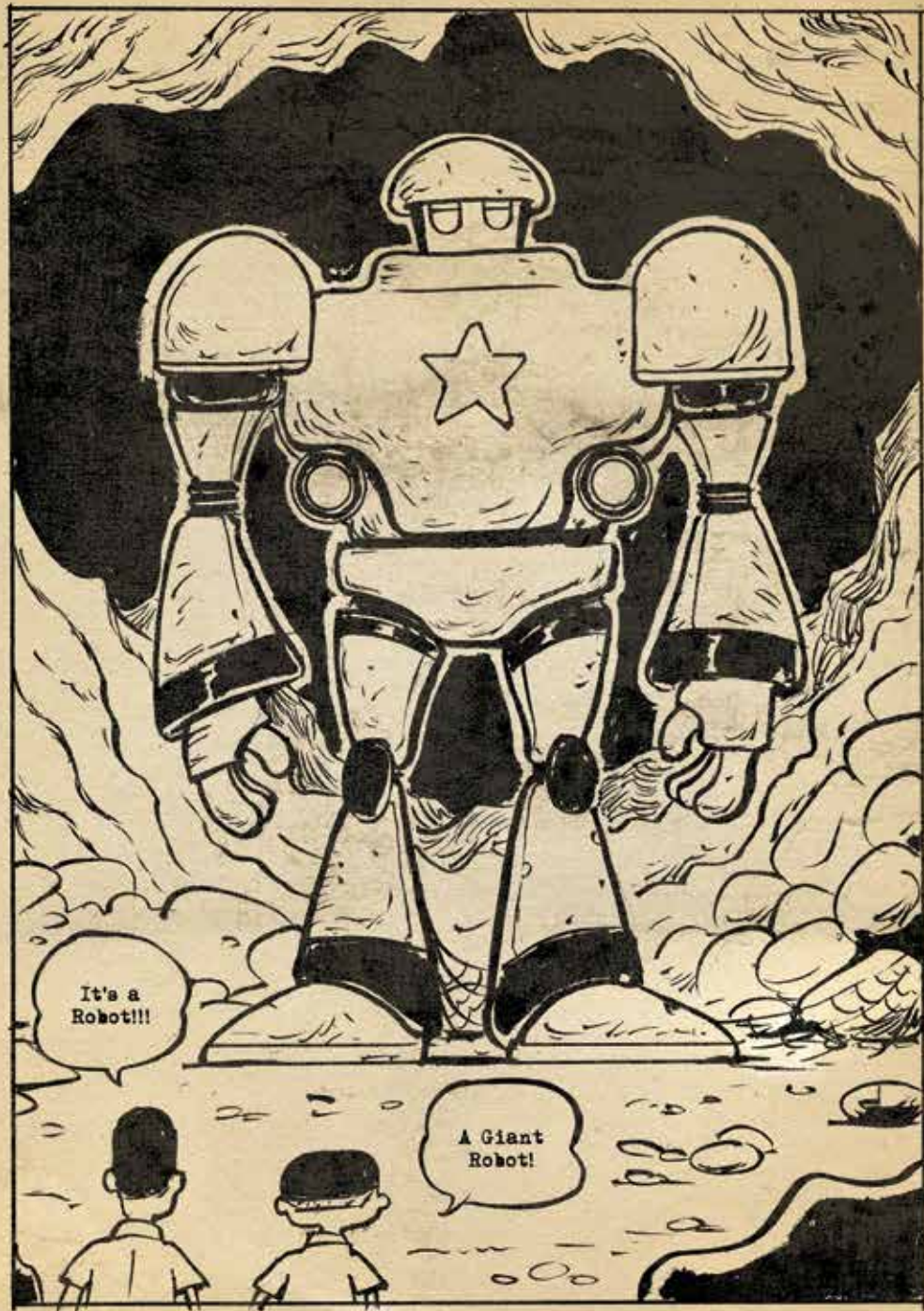
Opposite
AH HUAT'S GIANT ROBOT: AWAKENINGS
 1954
 Chan Hock Chye
 Tiger Press

Ah Huat's *Giant Robot: Awakenings* was Chan's first published work. Written and drawn when he was 16, the 34-page comic first appeared as an extract in *Qian Jin* ("Forward") magazine, before being printed in its entirety as *Ah Huat's Giant Robot Vol. 1* by Stones Throw Press.

"AWAKENINGS" INTRODUCED READERS TO AH HUAT, HIS FRIEND WAI MING, YOYO THE DOG, AND THE TITULAR GIANT ROBOT...

...WHO APPEARS TO BE INERT, UNTIL THE TWO BOYS CHANCE UPON THE DISCOVERY THAT IT ONLY RESPONDS TO COMMANDS GIVEN IN CHINESE...





Chapter One

**FIGHTING
SPIDERS,
LONGKANG
FISH**

童真年代





Charlie Chan Hock Chye, aged 10, 1948

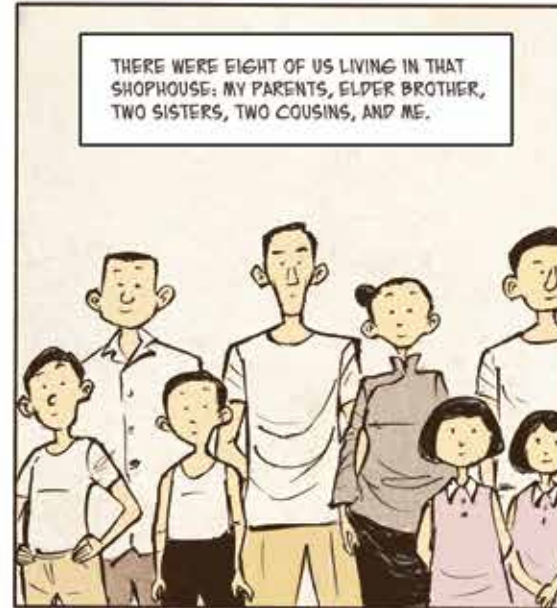


SOMETIME IN THE 1920S, MY FATHER LEFT PENANG FOR SINGAPORE AND STARTED A PROVISION SHOP ALONG GEYLANG ROAD.

GEYLANG PROVISION SHOP (1987) | Chan Hock Chye | Ink and wash on paper | Drawn from memory and photographs



THE SHOP SOLD THINGS LIKE SALTED FISH, WAXED DUCK, DRIED CHILLI, PENCILS, CHOPSTICKS, CIGARETTES, SOFT DRINKS, BELACHAN, WHEAT FLOUR, SUGAR, RICE, PEANUTS, TINNED FOOD, CONDENSED MILK, SOYA SAUCE AND JOSS STICKS...



THERE WERE EIGHT OF US LIVING IN THAT SHOPHOUSE: MY PARENTS, ELDER BROTHER, TWO SISTERS, TWO COUSINS, AND ME.



OUR COUSINS WERE OLDER AND HAD THEIR OWN JOBS OUTSIDE, AND OF THE CHILDREN, I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO HELPED OUT AT THE SHOP.



IT WAS MOSTLY BECAUSE I'D GET THE CHANCE TO DRAW WHENEVER THERE WERE NO CUSTOMERS AROUND.

I'D DRAW AND COPY EVERYTHING: COMICS, PHOTOGRAPHS, NEWSPAPER ILLUSTRATIONS, LOGOS ON BOTTLES AND BOXES, PORTRAITS OF MY FAMILY MEMBERS...



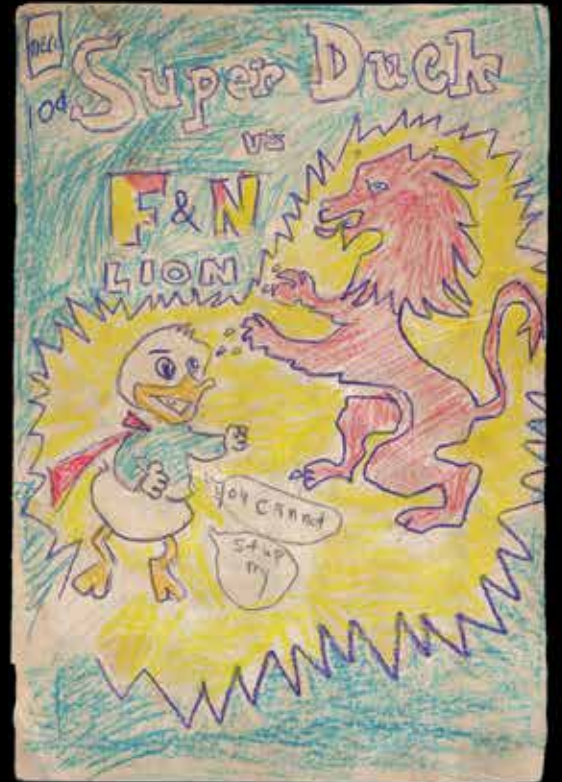
Top left
CARBIDE LAMP
1947



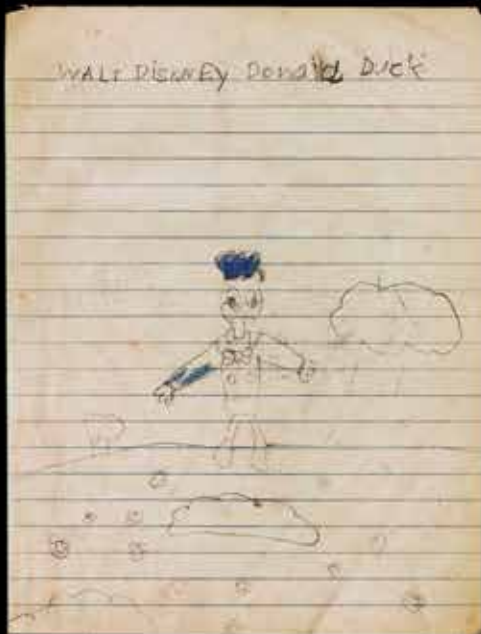
Top right
GREATER FAR EASTERN CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE
1945
Copied from a Japanese propaganda magazine



Top left
FIGHTING SPIDER, LONGKANG FISH
1944



Top right
SUPER DUCK VS. F&N LION
1948



Bottom left
WALT "DISNEY" DONALD DUCK
1944



Bottom right
MY SISTERS
1949



Bottom
GREAT WORLD AMUSEMENT PARK
1949
Copied from postcard



THAT WAS HOW I ENDED UP AT PEARL'S HILL PRIMARY.



MY FATHER WAS A LITTLE PUZZLED BY MR. LIM'S GENEROSITY.



(I'M NOT CERTAIN IF MY FATHER EVER DID EXPLAIN THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER.)

FOR ME, THOUGH, DRAWING IS IN FACT A KIND OF STUDYING.

OR EVEN MORE, PERHAPS.

AS NORO SHINPEI ONCE SAID, "TO DRAW IS TO SEE AND DISCOVER."



PA
1976
Chan Hock Chye
Ink and wash on paper
Portrait of the artist's father, drawn from a photograph.

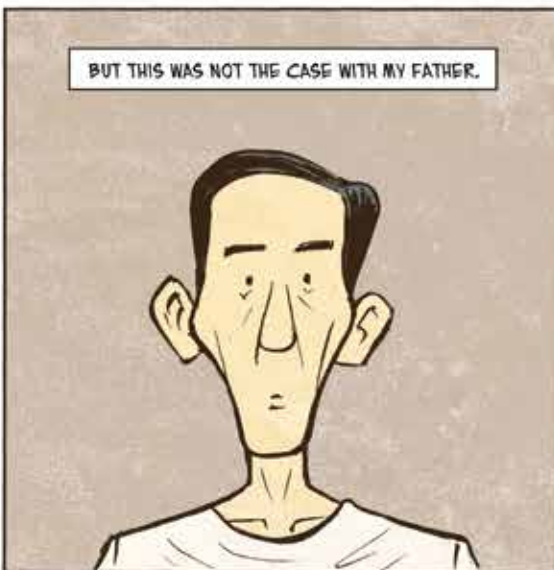
"To draw is to see and discover. Every time you draw, you discover something new."
— Noro Shinpei, Japanese manga artist (1915–2002)



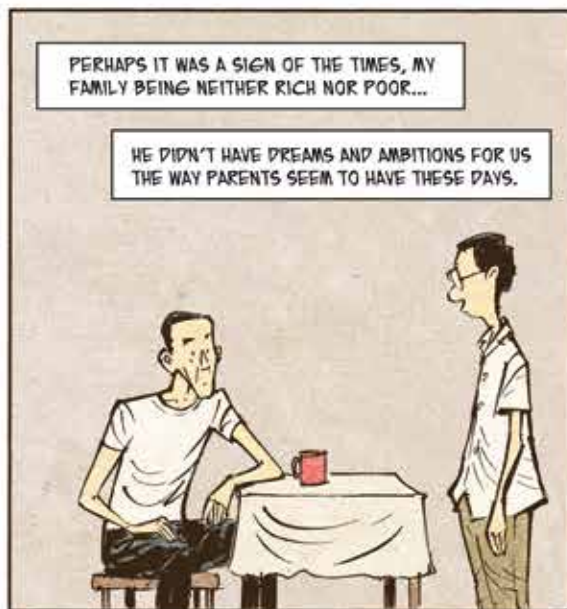
IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR THOSE SEEKING TO BECOME ARTISTS TO ENCOUNTER RESISTANCE.

NO! I WILL NOT ALLOW IT! GEH SUT KA MANA JIAK EH PAH?!

*HOKKIEN: HOW CAN AN ARTIST MAKE A GOOD LIVING?!



BUT THIS WAS NOT THE CASE WITH MY FATHER.



PERHAPS IT WAS A SIGN OF THE TIMES, MY FAMILY BEING NEITHER RICH NOR POOR...

HE DIDN'T HAVE DREAMS AND AMBITIONS FOR US THE WAY PARENTS SEEM TO HAVE THESE DAYS.



EH TAN JIAK BOH?*

*HOKKIEN: CAN YOU FEED YOURSELF DOING THAT?



I THINK THAT FOR HIM, DRAWING COMICS WAS SIMILAR TO A JOB DOING ADVERTISING ILLUSTRATION, A DECENT ENOUGH TRADE THAT ONE COULD LIVE OFF, EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT NEVER MAKE YOU RICH.

SO HE LEFT ME TO MY OWN DEVICES.



IT WAS SOMETHING HE WOULD COME TO REGRET LATER IN LIFE.



I'M NOT SURE MY PARENTS EVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT I WAS DOING.



WHY DOES THE ROBOT ONLY UNDERSTAND CHINESE?

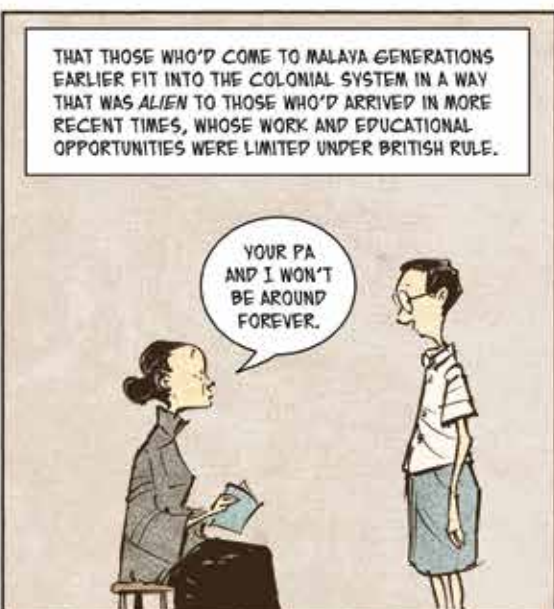
SO FUNNY!



I COULD HAVE TRIED TO EXPLAIN THAT IT WAS A COMMENTARY ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC SCHISM IN SINGAPORE BETWEEN THE PRIVILEGED CHINESE WHO SPOKE ENGLISH, AND THE POOR DISENFRANCHISED ONES WHO ONLY KNEW MANDARIN AND DIALECTS...

HOW MUCH ARE YOU GETTING PAID FOR THIS?

MUST LEARN TO START SAVING, YOU KNOW.



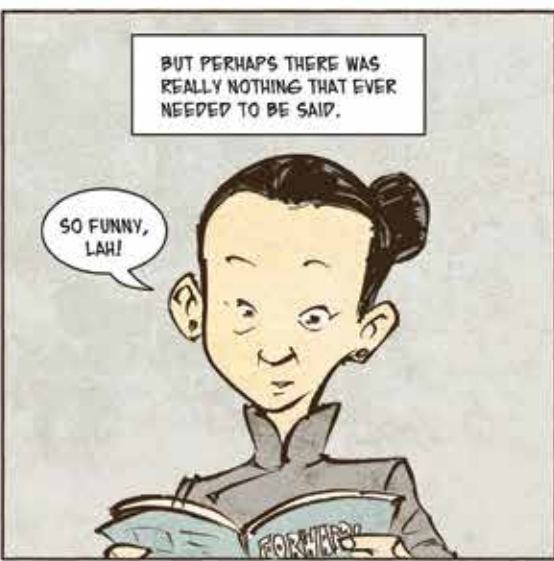
THAT THOSE WHO'D COME TO MALAYA GENERATIONS EARLIER FIT INTO THE COLONIAL SYSTEM IN A WAY THAT WAS ALIEN TO THOSE WHO'D ARRIVED IN MORE RECENT TIMES, WHOSE WORK AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WERE LIMITED UNDER BRITISH RULE.

YOUR PA AND I WON'T BE AROUND FOREVER.



ONE DAY, YOU'LL HAVE CHILDREN OF YOUR OWN.

AH LOK'S SON IS ONLY A FEW YEARS OLDER THAN YOU, AND HE ALREADY HAS A FAMILY AND HIS OWN HOUSE.



BUT PERHAPS THERE WAS REALLY NOTHING THAT EVER NEEDED TO BE SAID.

SO FUNNY, LAH!

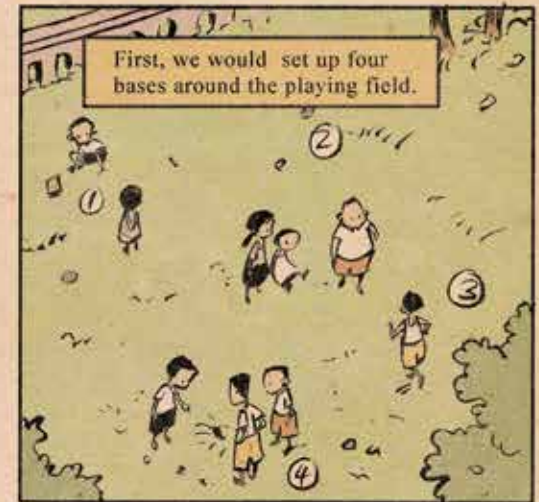
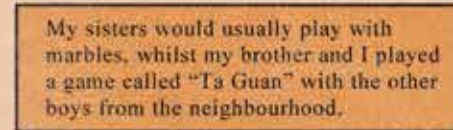
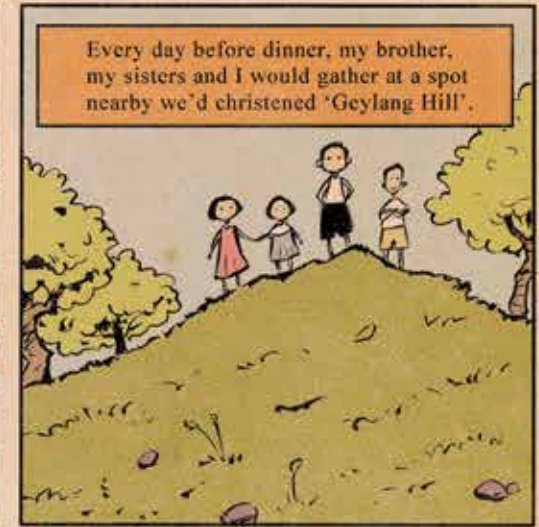
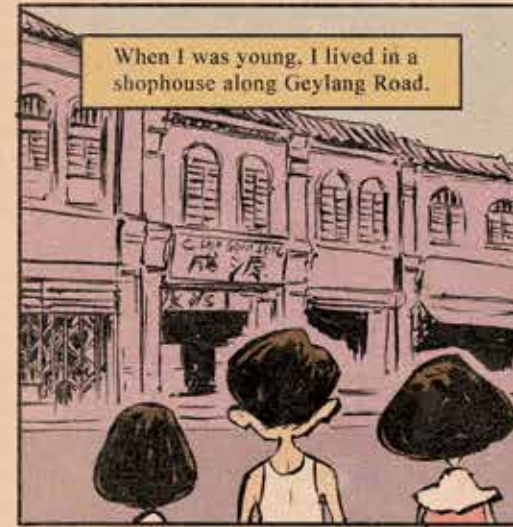


Above
MA
 1983
 Chan Hock Chye
 Oil on canvas

Portrait of the artist's mother as a young woman, painted from a photograph.

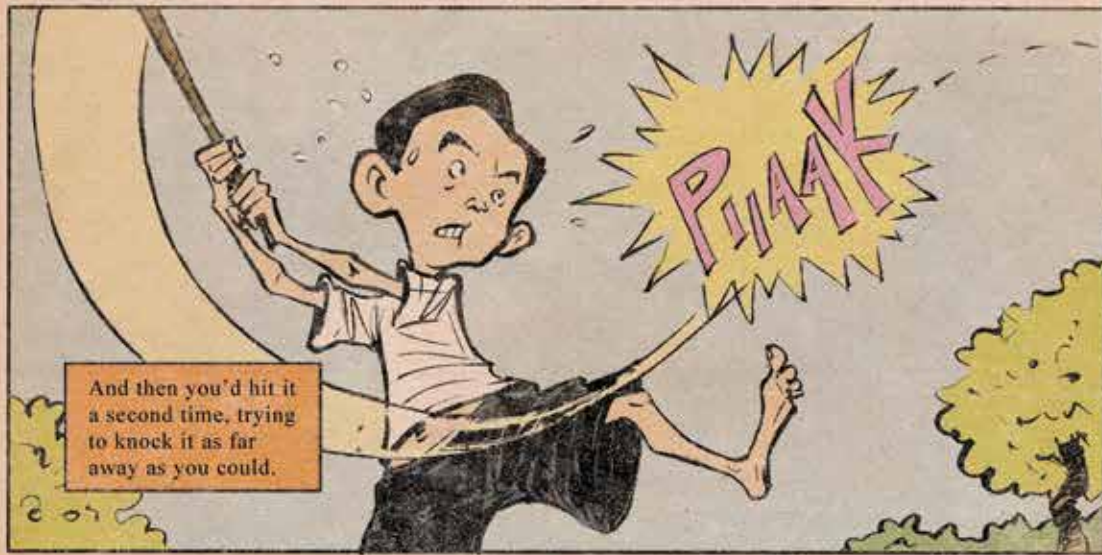
GEYLANG HILL 芽籠山

BY CHAN HOCK CHYE



Note: "Ta Guan" - Cantonese, literally meaning "Hitting Sticks"

Opposite & following
GEYLANG HILL
 1986
 Chan Hock Chye
 Self-published
 From a chapbook collection of Chan's short stories.



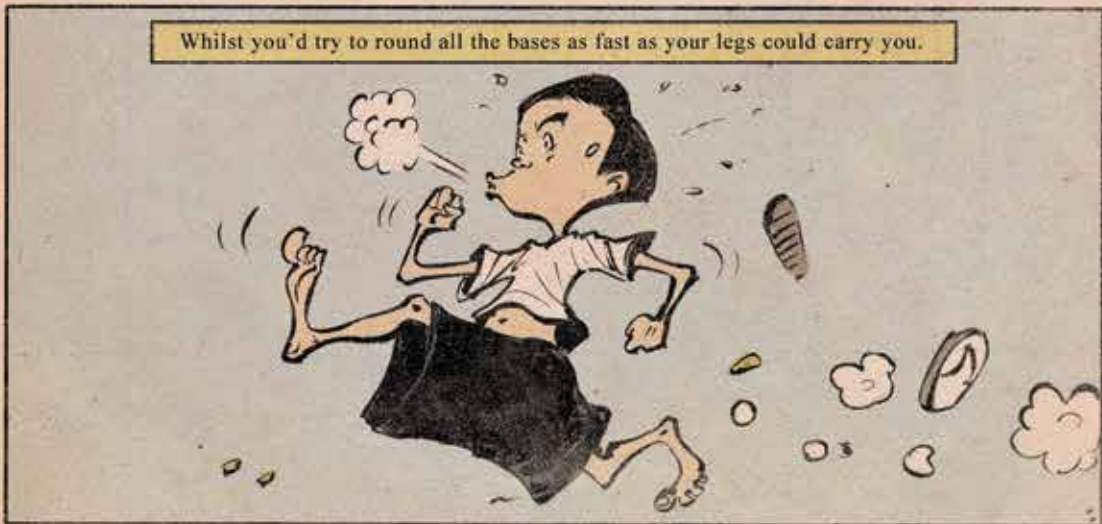
And then you'd hit it a second time, trying to knock it as far away as you could.



The others would try to catch or recover the stick...



...and attempt to get it back to one of the boys guarding the bases.



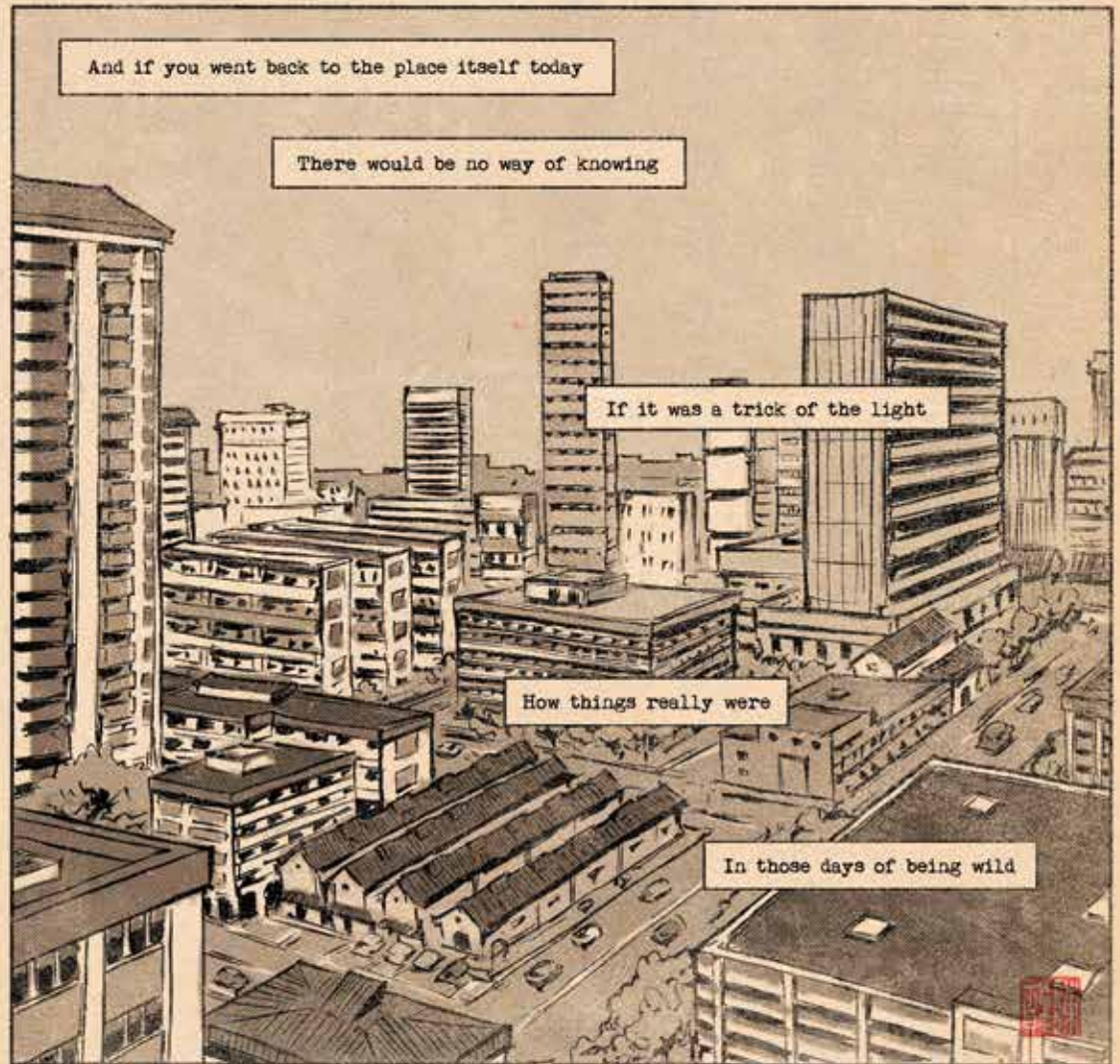
Whilst you'd try to round all the bases as fast as your legs could carry you.



Up on the hill, there would be kids cheering you on.



In old photographs, Geylang Hill appears to be little more than a small mound a few inches tall.



And if you went back to the place itself today

There would be no way of knowing

If it was a trick of the light

How things really were

In those days of being wild



Charlie Chan Hock Chye, aged 76, 2014

THE ART OF
**CHARLIE CHAN
HOCK CHYE**



"A joy to read. Sonny Liew masterfully weaves the history of Singapore with the history of comics into something you've never experienced before."

— Gene Luen Yang
(*American Born Chinese, Boxers & Saints*)



"Unique and unprecedented... a masterpiece. This book is a joyous, beautiful, million-faceted thing - a celebration of the comic book medium, a technical masterclass, a thrill ride, a *Bildungsroman* and an unflinching retrospective of the post-war-into-modern era. I love it, and I'm in awe of it."

— Mike Carey
(*Lucifer, The Unwritten*)

"Equally uncompromising in its political critique and its artistic vision... leaving you with the sense of having been in the company of an exceptional talent."

— Cherian George
(*Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation*)



"Prepare to be swept away by a history of Singapore as you've never seen it before. Sonny Liew delivers a brilliant and fiercely perceptive appraisal of this remarkable island state."

— Paul Gravett
(*Comics Art, 1001 Comics You Must Read Before You Die*)



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