

neighBOURhoods



**WE** ♥  
**CHINATOWN**

Urban Sketchers Singapore

**WE**   
**CHINATOWN**

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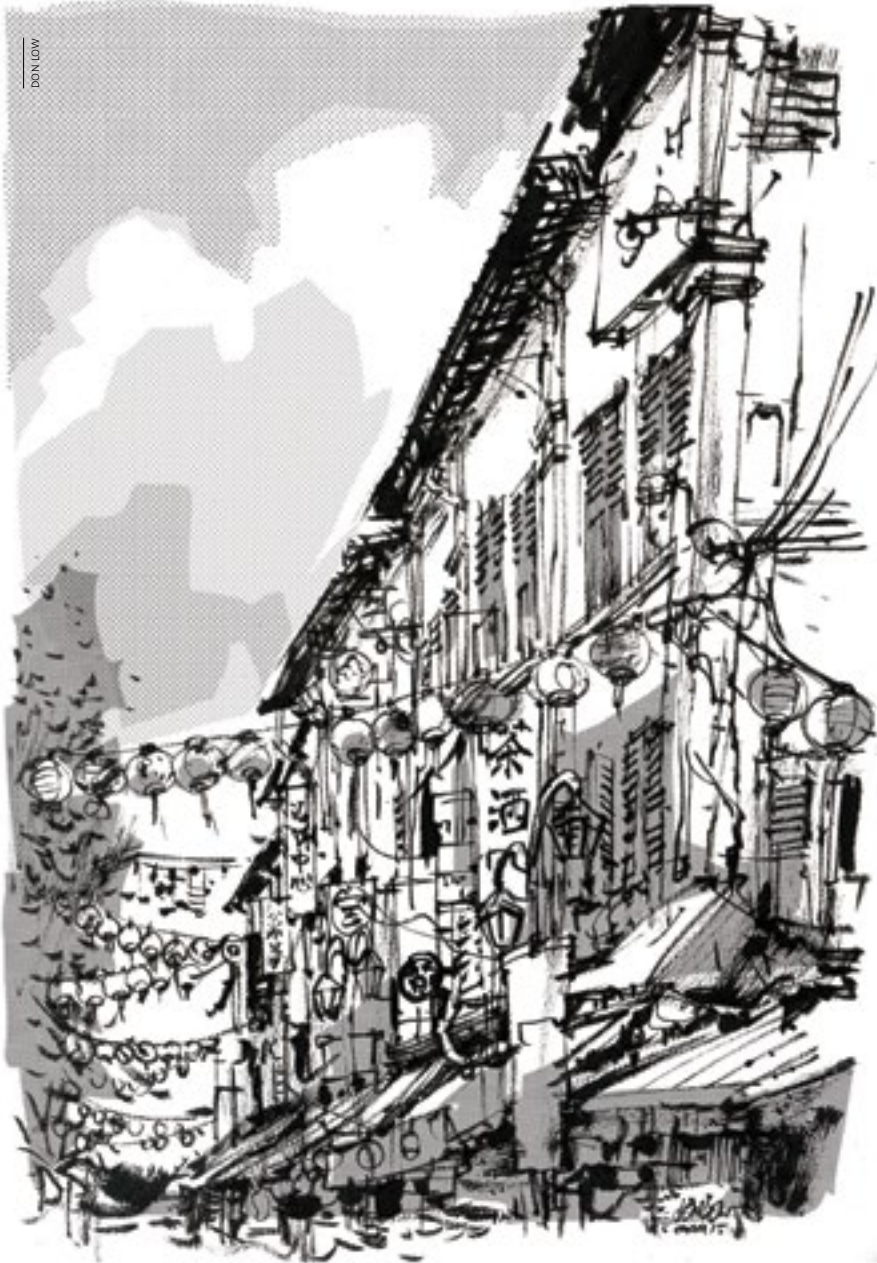
# WE ♥ CHINATOWN

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WEE EDITIONS / SINGAPORE



TEOH YI CHIE



## Singapore's Early Chinatowns

In Singapore, the term “Chinatown” is used to describe a designated tourism district, but that term is a misnomer. Notwithstanding the large ethnic overseas Chinese population from the island’s census, there were two historic “Chinese areas” rather than just one ethnic enclave. The first is known as “Dua Po” or “Tai Por”, loosely translated as “Big Town”. This is the area to the west of the Singapore River, and was occupied in the 19th century by the Cantonese and Hakkas, Hokkiens and Teochews, living in defined districts within the “enclave”. The other, “Swey Po” or “Siew Por” (“Small Town”), was east of the colonial cantonment area between Purvis Road and the Rochor River system. The residents here were later settlers, including the Hainanese, Hakkas, Foochows, Henghuas, Kwongsais and other smaller southern Chinese groups.

If this is not complex enough, consider that there were even smaller settlements within these southern Chinese enclaves. The samsui women arrived from a district in Canton province, but lived only in the small area bound by Cross Street, Eu Tong Sen Street and Hokkien Street, which was inside the Cantonese area. Such differentiations and details are often overlooked, and the erstwhile Cantonese area (or Kreta Ayer area) only is now erroneously demarcated as “Chinatown”. This, then, is the challenge of reading its spaces and sketching the shophouses, office tower blocks, multi-religious buildings and other sites in the area, and I believe Urban Sketchers Singapore has done a tremendous job in capturing these complex diversities and aspects in its sketches.

**Lai Chee Kien**

Architect and urban historian



Completed in 1973, People's Park Complex was Singapore's first multipurpose building with residential, retail and commercial facilities within a single structure. At 31 storeys and occupying one hectare, it was also the largest shopping complex of its time in Singapore.



APRIL YIP

Singaporeans and tourists soak in the festive atmosphere as they stroll through the stalls, admire Lunar New Year decorations and sample local and international snacks at a carnival outside People's Park Complex.



TIA BOON SIM

TIA, 14 Jan 2012 - New Bridge Road, Singapore

The best time to absorb the vibrant atmosphere that Chinatown has to offer is during Chinese New Year. In 2012, Chinatown installed a massive water dragon structure between Eu Tong Sen Street and New Bridge Road to usher in the Year of the Dragon.



CHRIS NG

**Left** After his wife was refused entry into another opera house, tin-and-rubber magnate Eu Tong Sen built the Tin Yin Dance Stage in 1927. Majestic Theatre only acquired its current namesake after WWII, when Dahua Film Company took over. The glorious building now hosts non-profit organisation Chinatown Social Enterprise and Singapore Turf Club and Cash Converters outlets.





LIM HAN SENG

Senior citizens gather at the scenic Chinatown Garden Bridge and its Chinese pavilion to chat, practise tai chi and play chess. During Chinese New Year, this is often the best place to view the festive decorations.



PHYLIS CHONG

**Above** Mosque Street is named after the Jamae Mosque situated at its junction with South Bridge Road. The mosque was erected by Indian Muslim migrants from South India, and has been a prominent landmark in Chinatown for nearly 200 years.



RAUL SARIA



LIBRARY @ CHINATOWN

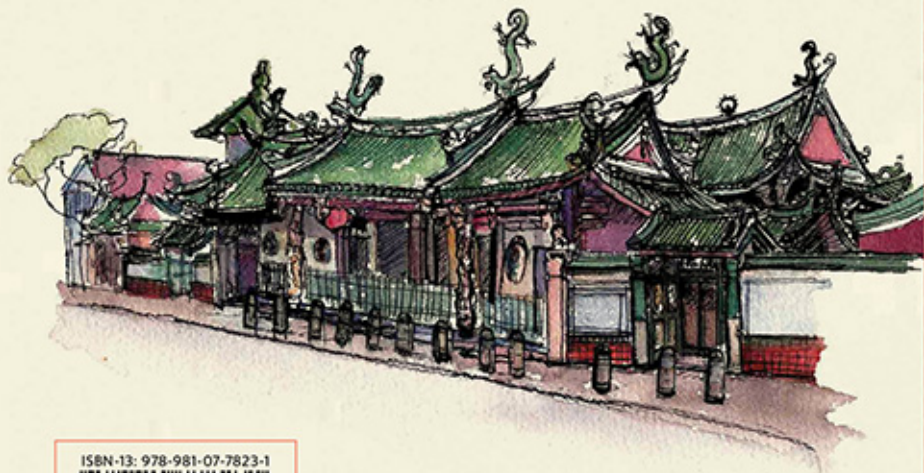
"My first impression of library@chinatown was how quiet and conducive it was for reading. The amount of Chinese publications was impressive, covering a wide variety of topics and interests. But the part I liked best about this library was the kids' section. It may not be big, but it carries a good selection of Chinese storybooks that would interest the little ones. This is definitely a good place to inculcate the love and appreciation for Chinese literature in the younger generation."

- Klessis Lee, blogger at *The J Babies*

Privately funded by Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple and Chinatown Point's owner, and staffed almost completely by volunteers, National Library Board's library@chinatown is Singapore's first community-supported library. It is also the first themed public library on Chinese arts and culture.

Established by the colonial government to house Chinese immigrants, Chinatown—otherwise known as Kreta Ayer or “Niu Che Shui”—is today a bustling destination. The pre-war shophouses that once housed coolies and opium dens are now occupied by souvenir shops, spas, bars and boutiques. The food stalls on Smith Street pay homage to hawkers of the past, while early malls like People’s Park Complex have been modernised with rooftop gardens.

Designated a conservation area by the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 1989, the multi-ethnic neighbourhood also houses Singapore’s oldest Hindu temple and the prominent Jamae Mosque. *We Love Chinatown* offers a glimpse into this vibrant neighbourhood through the eyes of the talented artists from Urban Sketchers Singapore.



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