

AWARD-WINNING SERIES

SECRETS OF SINGAPORE

CHINATOWN



UNCOVERED BY
CLUCK & MOO

ASSISTED BY
CATHERINE NADIRA TAN

“Unravel the mysteries of Chinatown and discover the secrets of what gives this place its unique charm. A clever way of storytelling that captivates the readers’ imagination through the vivid illustrations. Informative and easy-to-read, this book enables the reader to have a greater sense of appreciation for Singapore’s history.”

—Jurveen Kaur, English teacher

“A very informative book that offers plenty of laughs. Once you start, you won’t be able to stop!”

—Aaryan Rayyan Renga, 10, student

**SECRETS OF
SINGAPORE
CHINATOWN**



**SECRETS OF
SINGAPORE**
CHINATOWN

written by
Catherine Nadira Tan
illustrated by
Elvin Ching



EPIGRAM

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Published in Singapore by Epigram Books
www.epigram.sg

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For Dabria, again

National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Name(s): Tan, Catherine Nadira. | Zeropointfive, illustrator.
Title: Secrets of Singapore : Chinatown / written by
Catherine Nadira Tan ; illustrated by Elvin Ching.
Description: Singapore : Epigram Books, 2021.
Identifier(s): 978-981-49-0118-5 (paperback)
978-981-49-0119-2 (ebook)
Subject(s): LCSH: Chinatown (Singapore)—Juvenile literature. |
Chinatown (Singapore)—History—Juvenile literature. |
Singapore—History—Juvenile literature.
Classification: DDC 959.57—dc23

First edition, November 2021.

Hello! *I am Moo!*



And I am Cluck!



AKA Supermoo and Cluck Kent. Just kidding. We are best friends who grew up together in Chinatown.



We are going to relive the history of our neighbourhood and uncover its wonderful stories!





Chinatown's Chinese name literally means "Bullock Cart Water", so this place must be somewhat linked to my udderly complicated family.








OMG. I'm so egg-cited! I can't believe we are in a book!



Just promise you won't go cuckoo on me. Please?

Don't you worry. As we feathered folks always say, I'm going to wing it!





Chinatown is brimming with history!
From immigrant businessmen to samsui women, we will introduce you to some of the Chinese pioneers who built Singapore as well as the people who inspired important landmarks.
We call them **CHINATOWN CHARACTERS**.

Any other interesting information about Chinatown or the early Chinese community in general are marked as **FASCINATING FACTS.**

In **CLOSER LOOK**, we dive deeper into a topic.
Also, check out the maps on pages 143–145.

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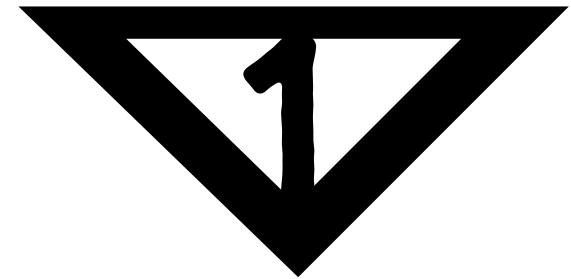
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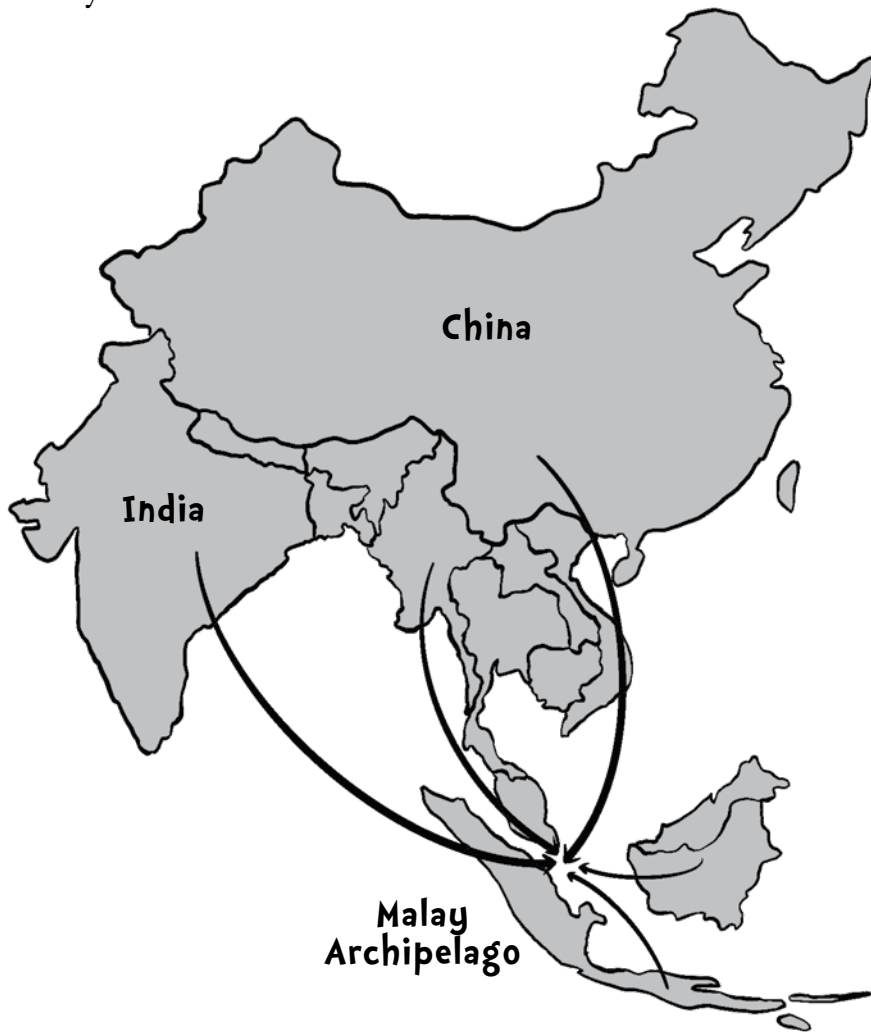
THAT'S MY TURF

The Grand Plan

How Chinatown became Chinatown

Hello, reader! Did you know that Chinatown is Singapore's largest historic district? It is an important place for understanding how the early Chinese immigrants lived, and a lively enclave with beautiful shophouses and places of worship, many of which are considered national monuments! But first, the big question: How did Chinatown become Chinatown?

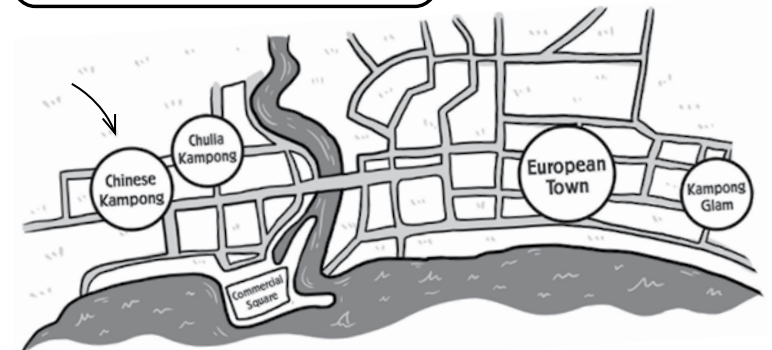
Well, a long, long time ago (the 1800s to be exact), people from the Malay Archipelago, China and India came to Singapore and decided to make this island city their home.



In the early days of British rule, housing was mostly located in the city, near the Singapore River. As more people flocked to Singapore's shores, Sir Stamford Raffles decided that immigrants from the same country should live near each other.

In 1822, the famous Raffles Town Plan was implemented. It divided the land in town among the different races in Singapore. The Chinese lived in the area along the Singapore River known as Boat Quay today.

The Raffles Town Plan was also known as the Jackson Plan. It was named after Lieutenant Philip Jackson, the officer who drew up the plan according to Raffles' vision for Singapore.



When Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, there were only about 30 Chinese among a population of 150. As Singapore grew, so did the number of Chinese inhabitants.

Within 10 years, the Chinese had become the largest resident group. It was large enough for at least five dialect groups to be identified. They were the Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas and Hainanese (see page 44).

Li ho bo?*

Ngi ho mo?*

Le ho bo?*

Du ho mo?*

Neih hou ma?*

*How are you?

Chinatown Districts

If you are planning to visit Chinatown, and we hope you do, know that it's a **HUUUGE** place, so you probably can't see everything within a day.

Chinatown is divided into five precincts, or areas. They are **Kreta Ayer**, **Telok Ayer**, **Ann Siang**, **Tanjong Pagar** and **Bukit Pasoh**.

Each is special in its own way, and it's a good idea to spend at least half a day exploring each precinct. We highlight some of the interesting streets and places within each area.



Kreta Ayer

It is so easy for us to get water today—all we need to do is turn on a tap. But in the 1800s, Chinatown residents had to leave their homes when they wanted to get fresh water. They used bullock-drawn carts to carry water from wells situated on Ann Siang Hill (see page 27). Bullock carts were the earliest and most popular mode of transport for commuting and transporting goods back then.



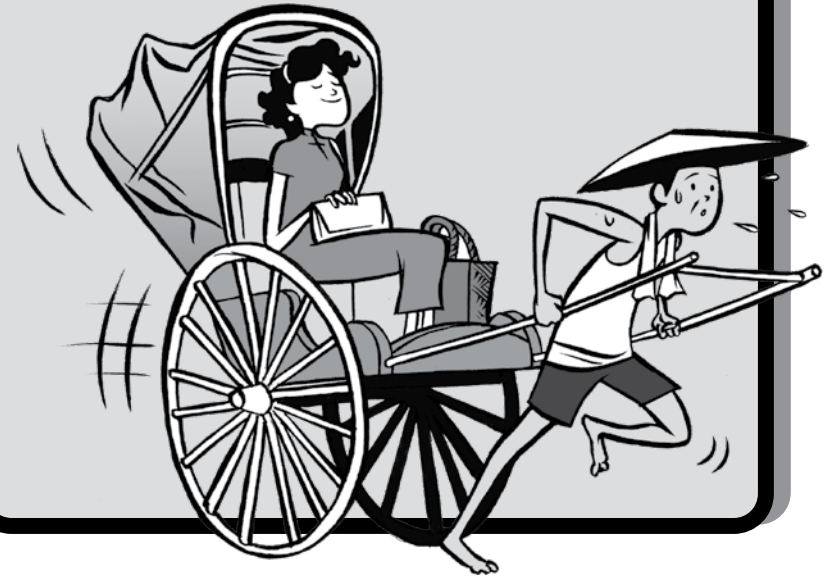
One well still stands on Ann Siang Hill today. Don't try to draw water from it though—it's just for display!

That is why Chinatown's Chinese name is Niu Che Shui, which stands for “Bullock Cart Water”. One of its key districts is Kreta Ayer (Malay for “water cart”).

FASCINATING FACTS

In the late 1800s, as bullock carts were getting phased out, rickshaws were introduced in Singapore and became a major form of public transport.

Rickshaw-pulling was the main source of income for many Chinese immigrants. But for all their hard work pulling those two-wheeled vehicles, rickshaw-pullers only earned around 30 cents a day!



CLOSER LOOK

In the past, Kreta Ayer was a predominantly Cantonese area. It was known as the place to go for leisure and entertainment. In fact, many teahouses and opera theatres were located there.

Kreta Ayer also housed (and still does) many other interesting and important landmarks. Though this may be Chinatown, not all the landmarks are Chinese. Singapore is known as a melting pot, after all!

1) The Majestic (Former Majestic Theatre)

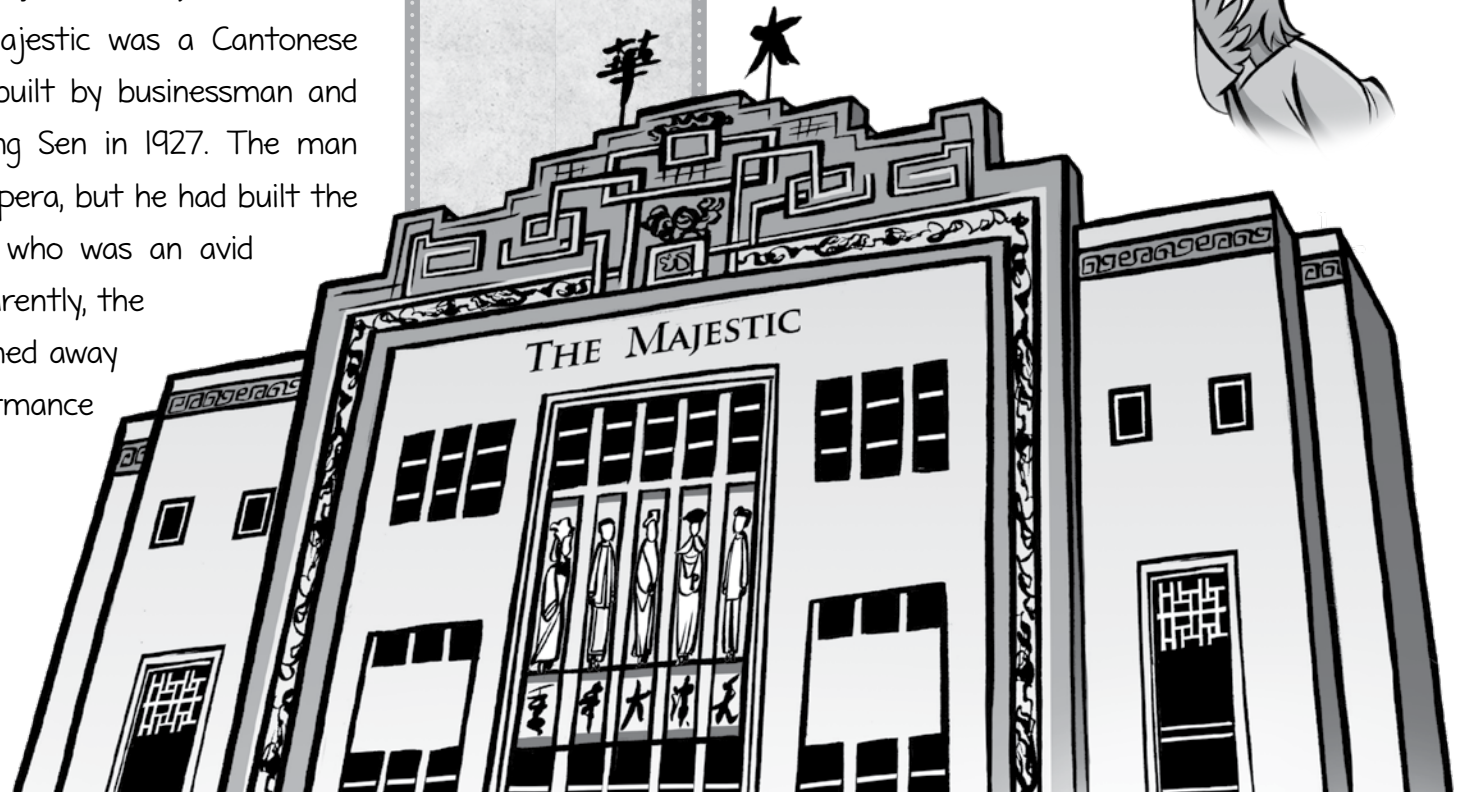
In its heyday, The Majestic was a Cantonese opera house. It was built by businessman and philanthropist Eu Tong Sen in 1927. The man himself had enjoyed opera, but he had built the theatre for his wife who was an avid opera fan. Why? Apparently, the poor woman was turned away from an opera performance elsewhere!

The theatre ended up being a hit, attracting the most glamorous opera stars from China!

Besides The Majestic, Eu Tong Sen also owned many other properties in the vicinity, which explains why the street is named after him.

If you're ever in the area, make sure to check out the various Cantonese opera scenes that decorate the building's facade. See if you can spot the flying dragons!

*Flying dragons?
That's so cool!*



2) Jamae Mosque

Jamae Mosque was built in the 1830s by the Chulias who came from southern India's Coromandel Coast. Behind the main building of the mosque is a shrine housing the tomb of prominent, local Indian Muslim religious leader Muhammad Salih Valiullah. The tomb is almost two hundred years old, which is older than the mosque itself!

Even so, Jamae Mosque is one of the oldest mosques in Singapore and was gazetted in November 1974 as a national monument.

FASCINATING FACTS

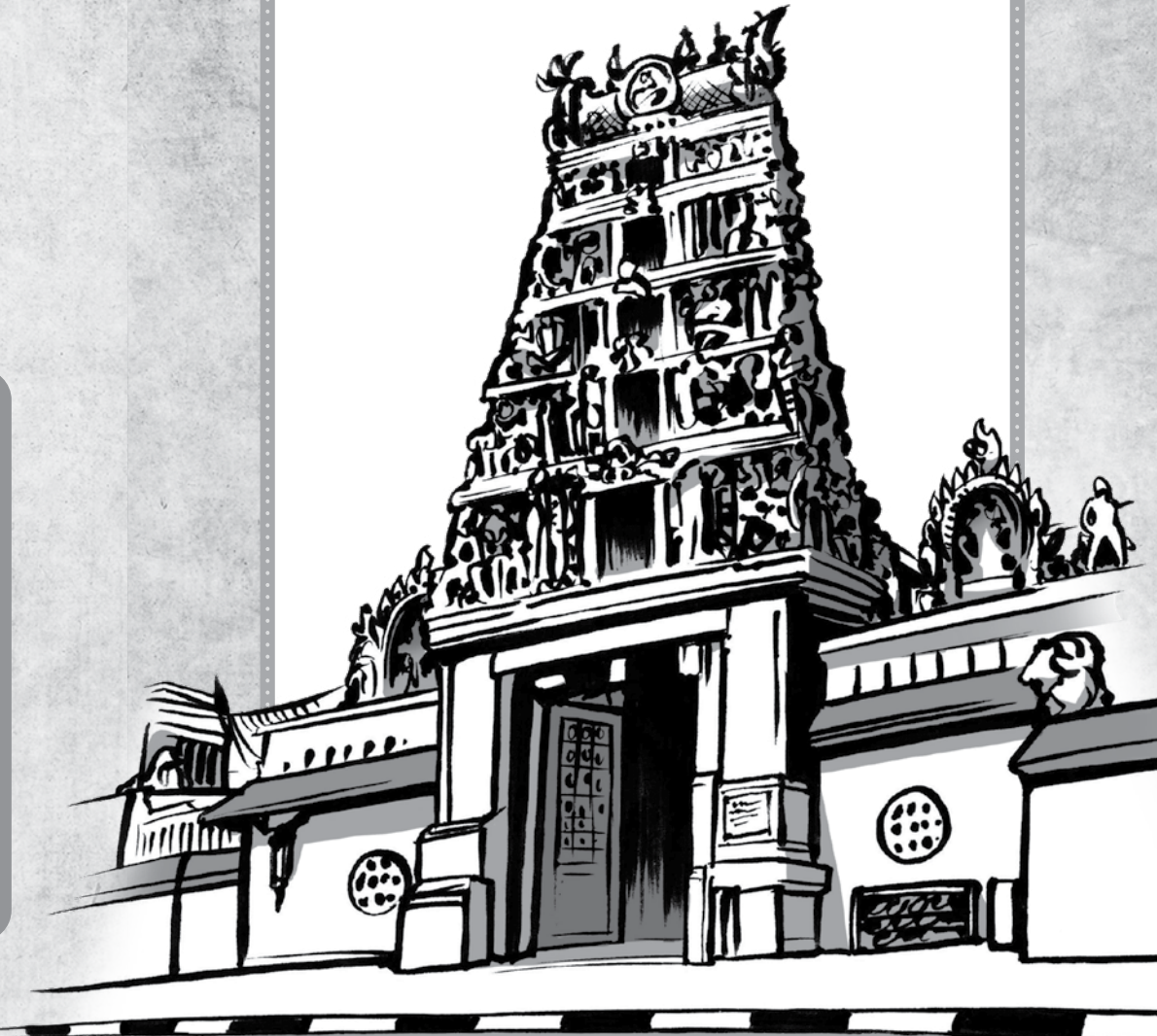
Until the 1950s, the mosque also had another name— Paalkaara Kadai Palli (Tamil for “Milkman’s Shop Mosque”). The fact that Tamil people once milked cows in the street near the temple might have had something to do with this interesting moniker!



*Now that's what
I call a moo-ving
piece of history!*

3) Sri Mariamman Temple

Established in 1827, this is Singapore's oldest Hindu temple and a national monument! It was founded by Narayana Pillay, the Tamil pioneer who accompanied Raffles to Singapore.



The statue of the goddess Mariamman that you see in the temple today is the original one installed by Narayana Pillay all those years ago. **COOL!**

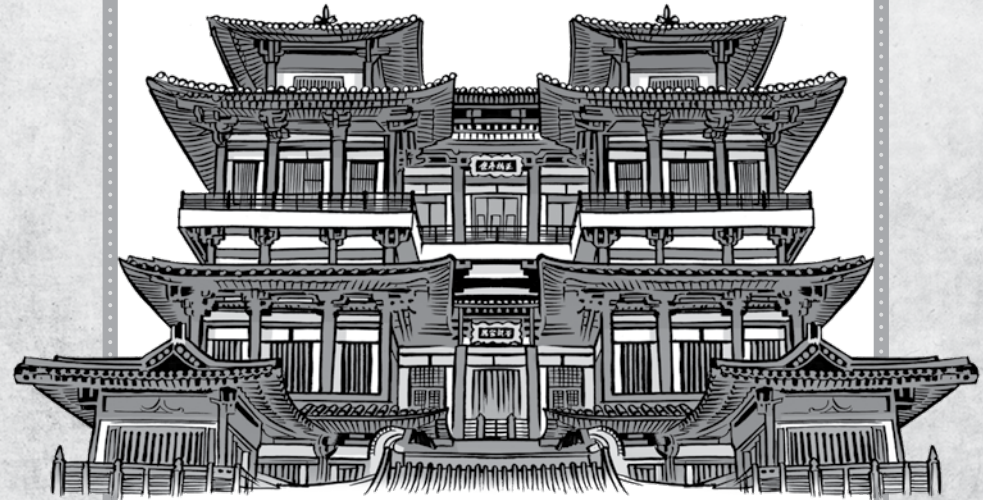
CHINATOWN CHARACTERS

Narayana Pillay (also known as Naraina Pillai) was a man of many firsts! He was one of the first Indians who came to Singapore with Raffles in 1819. He worked as a chief clerk at the treasury for a while, then he eventually moved on and opened the very first brick company in Singapore. That's not all. Narayana Pillay was also Singapore's first indian building contractor. What a trailblazer!



Why did the wall collapse?

It wanted to brick free!



4) Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum

When Buddha passed away in Kushinagar, India, a left canine tooth was left behind.

The tooth, which the Buddhists believe belongs to Buddha, is now displayed at the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum, which explains its name!

Built in 2007, this landmark also features various exhibits on Buddhist art and history. When you visit this beautiful temple, get set to travel back in time and learn all about this religion dating back thousands of years!

Telok Ayer

Did you know Telok Ayer Street used to be right by the sea? It should come as no surprise that in Malay, “Telok” means bay and “Ayer” means water.

Many early immigrants set foot in this area when they first arrived in Singapore in boats and sampans. To thank the gods for their safe arrival, they would build places of worship here.

Today, you can find many buildings related to the different Chinese clans and dialect groups along Telok Ayer Street. It is also a street that reflects Singapore’s religious diversity. There is a church, mosque, shrine as well as temples that have been around for more than a century!



That's why some people call Telok Ayer Street the Street of Diversity!

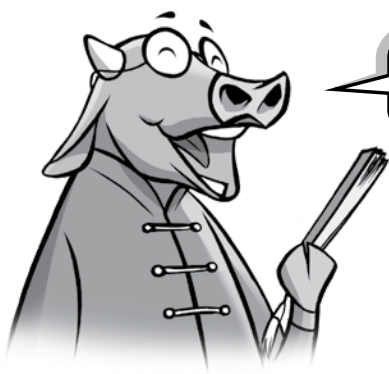
CLAN YOU DO IT?

Ever wondered what Chinese clans and associations in Singapore do? The colourful shophouses in Chinatown are home to many of them. While we know they exist, our understanding of them may not be very deep. Some people may think they are linked to secret societies and gangsters (**gulp!**), while others believe they are just social clubs for the elderly to gather to chat and drink tea.

In the past, clans played a key role in helping Chinese immigrants settle down in Singapore. As the clans expanded, they went beyond helping members in their daily lives by lives, going as far as setting up essential services such as schools and hospitals.



Today, the clans and associations continue to be active in the community. They promote Chinese heritage and culture by conducting classes for those who wish to listen and speak in dialect, or learn about traditional music, lion dance and martial arts like wushu. They also organise events and activities related to Chinese festivals (see page 121).



I guess clan meetings are not clan-destine after all!



Maybe I can convince them to promote the chicken dance...

Now that you have a better understanding of what clans do, let's explore Singapore's Street of Diversity!

Ying Fo Fui Kun

Founded in 1822, Ying Fo Fui Kun is home to Singapore's oldest Hakka clan association.

Back then, the association offered support to Hakka immigrants who were fresh off the boat. It helped them to find accommodation and jobs so they could adapt to their new lives in Singapore. The building also had a free medical clinic and school.



About the Author

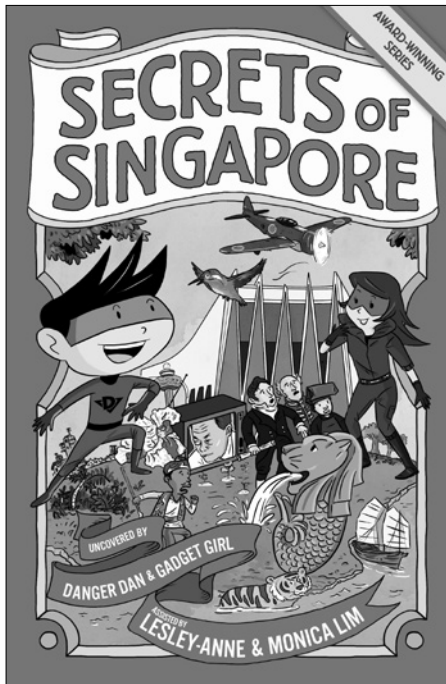


Catherine Nadira Tan has more than 15 years of experience in communications. She has written for a vast range of industries, from healthcare and education to construction and hospitality. Her first book, *Secrets of Singapore: National Gallery*, took first place in the category for English children's books at the Popular Readers' Choice Awards 2020.

About the Illustrator



Elvin Ching is an illustrator and storyboard artist in Singapore. He is the illustrator of several Danger Dan and Gadget Girl books and the Secrets of Singapore series; his cover for *Secrets of Singapore: National Museum* won best children's book cover at the Popular Reader's Choice Awards 2017. He likes to create his own little comics in his free time and has so many comics at home that he hasn't found time to read them all yet!

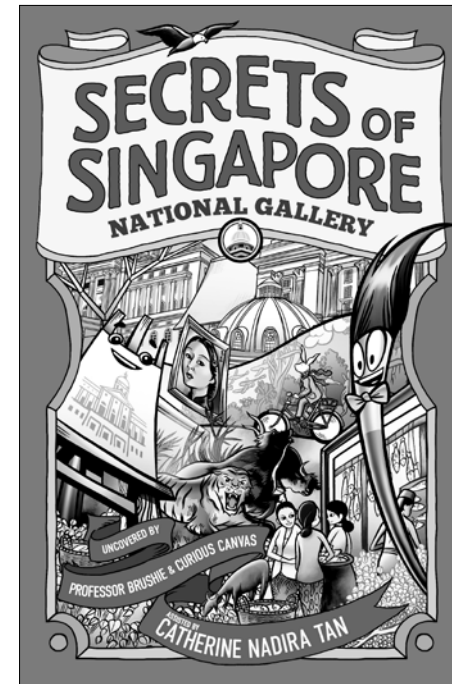


In *Secrets of Singapore*, Danger Dan and Gadget Girl uncover the nation's past, from the time of Sang Nila Utama in 1299 to independence in 1965. But wait, there's more!

They also investigate intriguing areas seldom found in your history books (shhhh!), like cinemas, airports, sports and, of course, food! Join the superhero duo as they unearth fascinating facts like:

- Which animals have escaped from the Singapore Zoo?
- How long was the very first MRT ride?
- Where can you see a tiger car? (And what on earth is a tiger car??)

The answers to these burning questions and much more in Danger Dan and Gadget Girl's guide to Singapore's past.

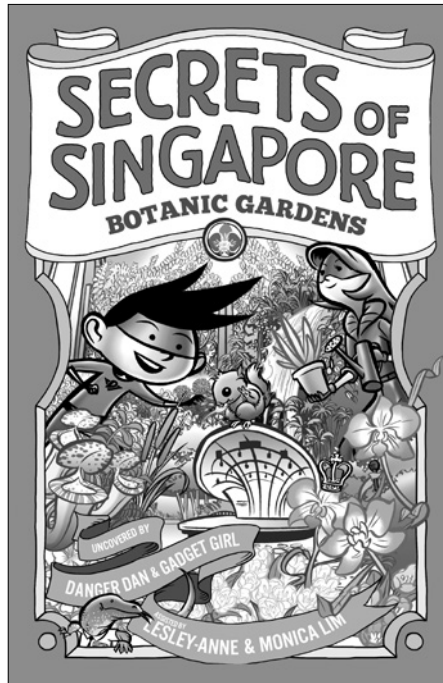


In *Secrets of Singapore: National Gallery*, join Professor Brushie and Curious Canvas to discover a time when the building had a split personality! Learn about the chocolate ceiling and the BIG SECRET LIFT that carries the Gallery's precious masterpieces. Find out why you can't touch the EXHIBITS and why artworks are scared of light!

And there's more...

What is a gallery sitter? Why are there black lines on the floor? And did you say chocolate ceiling?!

Time to brush up on your art facts and draw back the curtains on National Gallery Singapore!



In *Secrets of Singapore: Botanic Gardens*, Danger Dan and Gadget Girl go out on a limb to uproot the Singapore Botanic Gardens' deepest, darkest secrets.

Within the lush grounds, the superhero duo find a tree so famous that its portrait can be found in any Singaporean's wallet, as well as an orchid older and taller than any human alive. Flying back 140 years into the past, they also discover that the Botanic Gardens used to be home to a mixed bag of critters, including a tapir who dreamed of being a rock. Not a rock star. Just a rock. #achievablegoals

There's more! Danger Dan and Gadget Girl realise that the botanical world is more twisted than they think. As it turns out, strawberries are only pretending to be berries, tomatoes can't decide whether they are fruits or vegetables, and sunflowers are really evil at heart.

Trek through the Singapore Botanic Gardens with Danger Dan and Gadget Girl. You will never look at your plant pals the same way again!

“Unravel the mysteries of Chinatown and discover the secrets that give this place its unique charm... Informative and easy-to-read, this book enables the reader to have a greater sense of appreciation for Singapore’s history.”

—Jurveen Kaur, English teacher

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME AND RETRACE THE FOOTSTEPS OF SINGAPORE’S EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRANTS.

IN *SECRETS OF SINGAPORE: CHINATOWN*, JOIN BEST BUDDIES MOO AND CLUCK AS THEY DISCOVER THAT EVERYONE CELEBRATES CHINESE NEW YEAR A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY. THINGS GET SPOOKY WHEN THEY DISCOVER A STREET OF DEATH {GASP!}, UNEARTH A TOMB {NOT LITERALLY} AND REALISE WHY PEOPLE AVOID THE SWIMMING POOL DURING THE HUNGRY GHOST MONTH. #SHUDDER

THAT’S NOT ALL...

WHY DID PEOPLE PAY OTHERS TO WRITE LETTERS FOR THEM? AND DID THE SAMSUI WOMEN’S HEADGEAR COME IN RED ONLY?



IT’S TIME TO BEEF UP YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THIS HISTORIC DISTRICT. DON’T MAKE EGG-SCUSES AND CHICKEN OUT!



MIDDLE GRADE

ISBN 978-981-49-0118-5



9 789814 901185

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