

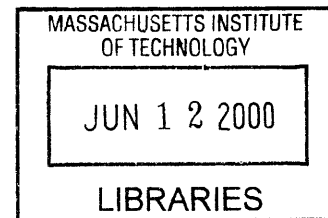
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Rediscovering Place
Enhancing the Built Heritage of Singapore

by
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in
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Rediscovering *Place*

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Abstract

The thesis looks at Conservation in Singapore: how it started, what were its initial goals, how these changed over years, and the impacts of the same. These questions are dealt with by studying the three conservation districts of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam, which were the original settlements for the three main populations namely, the Chinese, Indian and Malay respectively. The one thing common to all these different populations is the history of Singapore and the built fabric which represent this history. The three areas represent the unique cultures, lifestyles and traditions of the different populations that give these areas the character they possessed until conservation came about. The built fabric has been saved, but does it represent the true essence of *Place*?

The three districts have undergone rapid changes in the last two decades and the process is questionable. It has resulted in socio-cultural and economic imbalances largely due to a strong hand by the State. The thesis along with these issues, also addresses the question of whether the conservation effort is catering to the right people. Finally, based on the analysis of these impacts, current guidelines and policies, the thesis proposes strategies for making these conservation districts culturally more significant & at the same time economically feasible.

Thesis Advisors

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Prasanna

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My God

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Introduction

Singapore is a unique City/State that has undergone rapid transformation in the last three decades after becoming independent in 1965. From almost total neglect of heritage in the early years of economic development after gaining independence, Singapore has seen a rapid surge of conservation activities over the last decade. This thesis is a story of the urban conservation in Singapore: how it started, what was its initial goals, how they have changed over time and the impacts of the same on the historic built fabric of Singapore.

The three conservation districts under study in this thesis: Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam were the original settlements for the three main populations namely, the Chinese, Indian and Malay respectively. These areas stand for the history, the traditions and the culture that these populations value for memories from the past and also as a thread to the past for the younger generations. The one thing common to all these different populations is the history of Singapore and the built fabric which represent this history. The three areas have the same built fabric of shop-houses, which were used both for residential and commercial uses in all the three areas, but each representing their unique cultures in the same built form with their own lifestyles and traditions that gave these areas the character they possessed till conservation came by. The three areas came under major physical change, as the immediate goals of the authorities was to build a new Singapore, which would be modern like the rest of the world and to get rid of the rapidly degrading fabric of the historic districts. This involved the clearing of slums, rebuilding of obsolete properties and comprehensive planning for traffic and circulation systems in the central areas. So there was large-scale displacement of people, their trades, life styles and the social structure. The physical fabric was emptied off its life and restored. The built fabric has been saved, but does it represent the true essence of Place with out people living there? The thesis addresses the questions of how the areas have changed over the last decade, as a result of conservation policies and whom it has been serving, the locals or the tourists. So far conservation in Singapore seems to be more focused towards satisfying the tourist, rather than the local people who should be the main target population that conservation should cater to.

Conservation was happening too rapidly in Singapore and it was part of a larger urban renewal plan in building a new national identity driven by a very strong state involvement. Singapore is a Country that has been built by the bold visions, brave decisions and efficient implementation by the Government. This thesis will address the role of such a strong state hand in the conservation efforts, their motivation and the consequences of the same. All said and done, the Authority did go astray from their original intentions and the goals became more economically oriented over time and the real reasons for conservation seem to have been lost somewhere along the way. The thesis will look at how things went wrong and why, by analyzing the existing conditions of the three conservation districts as of today. The three areas are getting absorbed by the business district slowly for office spaces and nearly all the old trades and activities have disappeared.

Adaptive reuse' which was the main implementation policy of the URA has not been done in the true sense. Most of Chinatown is occupied by private office spaces, which has resulted in today's dull, lifeless streets, which is a sharp contrast from the memories of the past which people still value so

questions as to what should be preserved, for whom and how? Only if these are clearly defined can any strategy make these areas more valuable to the local people first, as a result of which tourism can be a by-product in the long run.

My thesis makes a decision that these areas have an intrinsic value which is very valuable for Singapore and its people and looks at different strategies and recommendations for changes in policies and for the management of these areas that will achieve a much larger objective than just preserving the physical fabric, but will also make it culturally more significant and economically viable by realigning the interests and goals and by making conservation more attractive to private owners and organizations through incentives. The recommendations aim at making the conservation districts culturally more significant, not only to the different ethnic communities, but also for the identity of Singapore itself and economically viable by making these areas more useful for the local people first and by treating it as a special area which has more than just financial value.



Fig 1. Regional Map of South East Asia

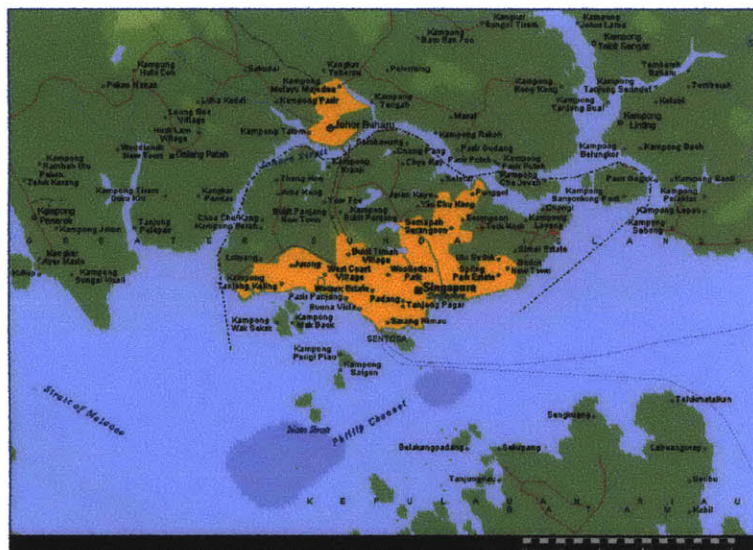


Fig 2. Map of Singapore

CHAPTER 1 Colonial Beginnings to Post independence

Documentation of Singapore's history can be traced back to the AD1330 with reference to China and the Mongol leaders, known by the name of "Temasek" meaning the sea town. Though Singapore's history only dates back to AD 1819 for popular consumption, it has been speculated that contact between China and Singapore had been maintained even in the Sung Dynasty (960-1297) for then, as now, Singapore's strategic position on the high seas was significant.

The name 'Singapura' or 'Simhapura' first appeared in the 'Sejarah Melayu' (Malay Annals) which were written in AD 1535. The legend attributes the name to Sang Nila Utama, son of Rajah Chulan of India and the daughter of the God of the sea, who saw a beast on the island and mistook it for a lion. (Singha in Sanskrit means Lion and Pura a town)' The king was succeeded by four generation till 1391 A. D. According to written records, a walled city with imposing buildings and temples was developed though very little archaeological information exists today regarding its physical forms and structures. Later on, there were continuous conflicts with the Javanese State of Majapahit and though Singapore was never conquered, the King Sri Sultan Iskandar Shah decided to abandon the island and move north. He founded the city of Malacca in 1393, which for the next few hundred years became the richest trading hub along the straits of Malacca. In contrast, Singapore disintegrated into much wasteland inhabited only by fishermen and pirates.

Modern day Singapore (See Fig. 1 & 2) was founded with the arrival of the British to Singapore in the early 1800's in search of a port to

service their vessels as well as to stop further Dutch advancement of settlements in the East Indies. The English hold on the island was established in 1819 through the role of Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant Governor of Bencoolen and an agent of the East India Company. On 30 January 1819 he signed an agreement with the local Malay chief, Temenggong Abdul Rahman, to protect the island in return for permission to establish a British trading post on the island.

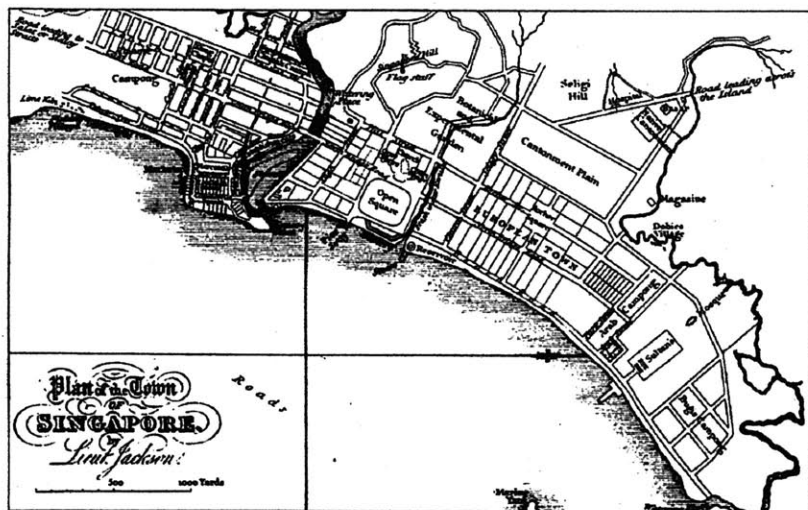


Fig 3. Raffles Town Plan of 1822-3 by Lt. Jackson

Raffles was later responsible for the first blueprint for the development of the town of Singapore in 1822. The plan “focused on the remodeling of the town according to principles which would facilitate public administration and maximize mercantile interest, inscribe public order in space, and cater for the accommodation of the principal races in

separate quarters.² Raffles plan (See Fig. 3) though not completely implemented, was far reaching basically defining the urban fabric of the city that still exists today. Also its importance lies in its relevance in addressing critical issues of public administration, order and economic growth for a rapidly growing and diverse population in a colony city.³ Singapore continued to grow over the next few decades, attracting traders and labour migrants from china, India and other Southeast Asian Countries. The population grew from the initial 150 Malay fishermen at the time Raffle’s first landing to 10,000 immigrants in 1824. Migration gave the settlement a distinctively plural character. While the Malays were the dominant ethnic group in 1824, the Chinese soon assumed numerical dominance by 1836 and accounted for 63% of the total population in 1881.

In 1826, as part of the Straits Settlement Singapore, was under the control of British India. By 1867, the Straits Settlement became a Crown Colony, under the jurisdiction of the colonial office of London. Since Raffles first landing, the economical development and population growth was immense. As a port it had a major role in the trade between Europe and East Asia, especially after the advent of the steamship and the opening of the Suez Canal in the 1960’s. The prosperity attracted immigrants from the region that established the current cultural mix that characterizes Singapore. This prosperity continued for decades with its peak from 1873 to 1913.⁴ Singapore’s political struggles continued with World War II and the Japanese takeover of the City that lasted three years. British military administration governed afterwards and led to the dissolve of the Straits Settlement and the establishment of Singapore as its own Crown Colony in 1946. Desires for increasing amounts of self-government was attained in 1959. Following that, in 1963, a merger was

² Perry, Martin, Lily Kong & Brenda Yeoh. Singapore: A Developmental City State. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., England, 1997. P.26-27

³ Ibid., p.30

¹ Jaypal, Maya. Old Singapore, Oxford University Press, Oxford and Newyork, 1992, p.1

established between Malaya, Singapore and Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei forming Malaysia. But in 1965 Singapore finally attained independence and became a sovereign democratic and independent Nation.

The Immigrants in Singapore

The uniqueness of Singapore's character lies in the mix of the various multicultural immigrant populations. All the customs and lifestyles have interacted and molded over the decades to bring forth a new identity which is essentially 'Singaporean'. Still maintaining the differences in each and enriching each other to form a distinct plural quality for Singapore.

The original inhabitants of the island in 1819 when Raffles set foot in Singapore, were Malay fisherman (See Fig. 4) and a few Chinese labourers engaged in the agricultural plantations in the interiors of the island. The local Malay population was soon joined in by immigrants from Malacca, Sumatra, Java, the Riau Archipelago and other eastern islands. They came in mainly as fishermen, woodcutters, boatmen, carpenters, policemen, watchmen, drivers and household servants. They settled down in the Kampong Glam near the Kallang and Rochor rivers, along the tidal swamps near the river mouth, the Kampong Malaca area and in Telok Blangah, where the followers of Temenggong of Johore settled. The Malays dominated the population till 1836 (See Table 1), when Chinese immigrants assumed the dominance in the ethnic mix of Singapore.



Fig 4. Malay Village, Images of what Raffles saw on Arrival

⁴ Balachander, S.B. ed. Singapore 1997, Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1997. P. 30

Table 1

Distribution of Population (Cities for People, 1990)

Year	Chinese		Malays		Indians		Others		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
1824	3,317	31.0	6,413	60.2	756	7.1	179	1.7	10,683
1830	6,555	39.4	7,640	45.9	1,913	11.5	526	3.2	16,634
1836	13,749	45.9	12,538	41.7	2,932	9.9	765	2.6	29,984
1840	17,704	50.0	13,200	37.3	3,375	9.5	1,110	3.1	35,389
1849	27,988	52.9	17,039	32.3	6,284	11.9	1,580	3.0	52,891
1860	50,043	61.2	17,202	19.8	12,973	15.9	2,516	3.1	81,734
1871	54,572	56.8	26,141	27.1	10,313	11.9	3,790	4.0	94,816
1881	86,766	63.0	33,012	24.0	12,086	8.8	5,858	4.3	137,722
1891	121,908	67.1	35,956	19.7	16,000	8.8	7,727	4.3	181,602
1901	164,041	72.1	35,986	15.8	17,047	7.8	9,768	4.3	226,842
1911	219,577	72.4	41,806	13.8	27,755	9.2	14,183	4.7	303,321
1921	315,151	75.3	53,595	12.8	32,314	7.7	17,298	4.2	418,358
1931	418,640	75.1	65,014	11.7	50,811	9.1	23,280	4.2	557,745
1947	729,473	77.8	113,803	12.1	68,967	7.4	25,901	2.8	938,144
1957	1,090,595	75.4	197,060	13.6	124,084	8.6	34,190	2.4	1,445,929
*1970	1,580,769	76.2	311,175	15.0	145,215	7.0	37,341	1.8	2,074,500
*1980	1,890,083	78.3	347,602	14.4	152,076	6.3	24,139	1.0	2,413,900
*1990	2,343,743	77.7	435,312	14.1	214,164	7.1	33,180	1.1	3,016,400
*1999	2,998,072	77.0	545,104	14.0	295,914	7.6	54,510	1.4	3,893,600

* Source: from <http://www.Singstat.gov.sg>

The first immigrants among the Chinese settlers came to Singapore soon after Raffles discovered it in 1819. The early immigrants came from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien in southeast China and comprised of five major dialect groups: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hylams (Hainanese). They brought with them a wide spectrum of occupations ranging from merchants, shopkeepers, agriculturists, artisans and manual laborers of all sorts and also a system of organizations such as the trade guilds, temples dedicated to Chinese deities and societies. These provided an institutional structure to support the social, cultural and recreational activities of the immigrant population and to give them access to provisions like medical care, job protection, education, entertainment and facilities for religious ceremonies. The Chinese, who Raffles thought would always make up for the largest single group, were given the whole of the area south of the river beyond Boat Quay and Commercial Square. The Chinese population settled down in the Chinatown area south of the Singapore river in the area that Raffles marked out as the Chinese Kampung'. But soon the population shot up and they spread out into the Tanjong Pagar area and also to the north of the river which was originally marked in Raffles plan as 'European town'. Much of the Old Singapore fabric that remains today in the form of Shop houses was a contribution by this migrant community. The shop houses came from Southern China via Malacca by the Straits-born Chinese. The Chinese begun to live in two-storey shop houses built in rows using brick pillars and clay tiles for the roof which served both living and working quarters. Till today the Chinese have been the dominant population in Singapore.

Another major immigrant population that made Singapore its home was the Indian population, who like the Chinese was among the first migrants to Singapore. The very first were probably the Indians from Penang where a sizeable population had grown after the founding of

Penang in 1786. Singapore was also a part of the larger system of colonial network the hub of which lay in India by the British. So in 1824 after the Anglo-Dutch treaty made way for the exchange of Malacca for Bencoolen the Indian convict laborers were brought into Singapore. These convict labourers later were instrumental in completing many roads, government buildings and other infrastructure. Soon others came in search of fortunes in foreign land mainly from South Indian cities. The Indians were particularly well known in textiles, wholesaling and retailing of goods, money lending and also working around the port and railway areas. The Indian population first started settling down in the Chulia Kampong on the south bank of the river further upstream from Boat Quay at Chulia and Market streets, High street and Arab street in Kampong Glam, but Serangoon Road became the strong foothold for this community by the 1880s.

Among the smaller minority groups, there were the Europeans and Eurasians, who never grew over 1 or 2% and then there were the Arabs, Jews, Armenians and the Japanese who made this Singapore the cosmopolitan city their home. This mix of population has remained rather stable over the years with the Chinese still maintaining their dominance in the mix. (See Fig. 5) Within these ethnicity's there are then four religious groups that further define the mix of cultures within Singapore, these being, Buddhism and Taoism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.



Fig 5. Portraits of a Diverse Population

Post Independence 'Singapore'

" To move backwards is unthinkable; to stand still is to court ruin. We must move forward and upward. We must climb up the education ladder, up towards better technology, towards higher skills, towards better management, towards higher productivity".

-Lee Kuan Yew, Prime minister of Singapore, National Day Message, The Strait Times, 10th august 1980.

' Nation Building' was the key word in the Post independence period of Singapore. The Peoples Action Party (PAP) saw the need to build a single identity as a means of achieving national integration. This meant that each of the major races- Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (CMIO's)- were 'Separate but equal' and encouraged acceptance of the co-existence of different religious practices, customs and traditions of the different communities 'without discrimination for any particular community'.⁵ This later played a major role in shaping public policy in many disciplines of life in the post independence years.

Singapore became unexpectedly an independent city-state in 1965. It lacked natural resources and had no hinterland. The Nation building process required a set of development policies to ensure its economic survival. The decision was to use urban development as an instrument for realizing the national goal and objectives. Urban development thereafter became an integral part of the overall development strategy.⁶ Singapore was a planned city right from the beginning when Raffles laid out the city plan in 1822. Specific areas were

⁵ Chan, H.C. and Evers, H.d. National Identity and Nation Building in Singapore, Chopmen Enterprises. P.123.

allocated for government buildings, religious worship, commerce and education. Separate residential areas were assigned according to ethnic or religious groupings like the Chinese, Indians, Malays and Europeans. The plan also provided for a network of roads and for regulated linear sub-divisions of shop-houses linked by covered passageways. This feature of shop-houses development continued to dominate the Singapore urban landscape until the 60s. Even today, the imprint of Raffle's plan is still clearly visible in the heart of the city.

Faced with the post war population boom and the problem in the city characterized by slums and squatters (See Fig 6-9), the newly independent state of Singapore launched a massive housing program to provide adequate housing for its rapidly growing population. The need for urban renewal and economic growth became a key priority of the government. The mission was to develop Singapore into a global city with total business capabilities by attracting foreign investments, developing local enterprises as well as promoting outward investment in the region.⁷

Fig 6



Fig 7



⁶ Lim, William, S W. *Cities for People- Reflection of a southeast Asian Architect*. Select Books Pte LTD, Singapore 1990

⁷ Balachander...op.cit., p.27



Fig 8



Fig 9

Fig 6-9. Urban squalor- The Streets of Chinatown, 1930s

As a result of these goals, the urban renewal policy of 1964 was recognized by the establishment of the Urban Renewal Department of the Housing and Development Board (HDB).

The aim in the early years was to provide a “healthier environment for the population of Singapore as well as to make better usage of the land for commercial, industrial, residential and recreational uses”.⁸ This involved the clearing of slums, rebuilding of obsolete properties and comprehensive planning for traffic and circulation systems in central areas. Urban conservation in those early years was hardly even thought of, largely because redevelopment took precedence as the means by which Singapore could be propelled towards “growth and progress, providing not only environmental improvement, but also better employment and investment opportunities”.⁹

The planning agenda was dictated by the needs to be met due to the rapidly developing economy, which gave a rise to the need for housing, transportation and other social services. Also the mindset at the time for redevelopment was that slums and squatters were the breeding ground for diseases, crime, poverty and communism and hence deserved to be cleared out. Moreover conservation was a luxury the state could not think of affording. As the efforts gained momentum, the URA was constituted in 1974 as a separate statutory board to take over the functions of renewal and redevelopment.

⁸ HDB Annual Report 1963. P.27

⁹ URA Annual Report, 1974/75. P.7.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA)

The URA's initial goals were very defined along with the previously quoted ones by the HDB: The construction of more open space and landscaped pedestrian malls particularly in the central city area: and the preservation of Singapore's historical and architectural heritage.¹⁰ It also recognized the fact that Urban Renewal did not mean just mean demolition of old buildings and creation of new ones and stressed on the elements of rebuilding, rehabilitation and conservation. The goals were clear and hopeful, but the early years of the URA were still spent on demolition of old buildings, clearance of slums, resettlement of population in large numbers from the central city area and erection of new buildings, dictated by the concern to maximize the redevelopment potential of scarce land. The only effort towards conservation was the establishment of the Preservation of Monuments Board in 1971 that identified a few buildings as national monuments and its success was very limited.

The first efforts towards conservation by the URA started in 1976 when they initiated studies involving the rehabilitation of whole areas. But it was not until 1984 when Emerald hill and Pernakan Hill were converted into Landscaped pedestrian malls that any visible results were seen for distinctive areas. Following the success of these projects, detailed study was done for Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam and the Singapore River in 1985. This aimed at conserving the city's historic districts, which were rich in cultural and architectural heritage. All this was made official through the Master plan in 1988, which also included the conservation plans for the four areas mentioned and also for the civic and cultural districts and emerald hill. (See Fig 10). In the same year the

URA also released manuals and guidelines for Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. The effort aimed at enabling the public to understand the historical character planning and architectural intentions in each district and to assist them in conserving their properties. This was further recognized when the planning act was substantially amended and the URA was made the national conservation and central planning authority in 1989. The tasks of the URA were identified as identifying buildings and areas of historical interest for conservation: preparing of conservation master plan: and guiding the implementation of conservation by public and private sectors.

The reasons behind this conservation efforts have been debated and criticized by many over the years which we will discuss in the next chapter, but in the urban development process, Singapore introduced and implemented successfully many important innovations. These included"

1. The Massive public housing program of the housing and development board (HDB) together with the home-ownership scheme (See Table 2). By 1980 housing of a good standard had been provided for about 70% of the population and 62 % of such housing units were owner-occupied. Today after 35 years, the HDB has built about 800,000 flats housing 90% of the population. Of the people living in HDB flats, nine out of ten own their own homes.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2-3

¹¹ Cities for People...op.cit., p. 150

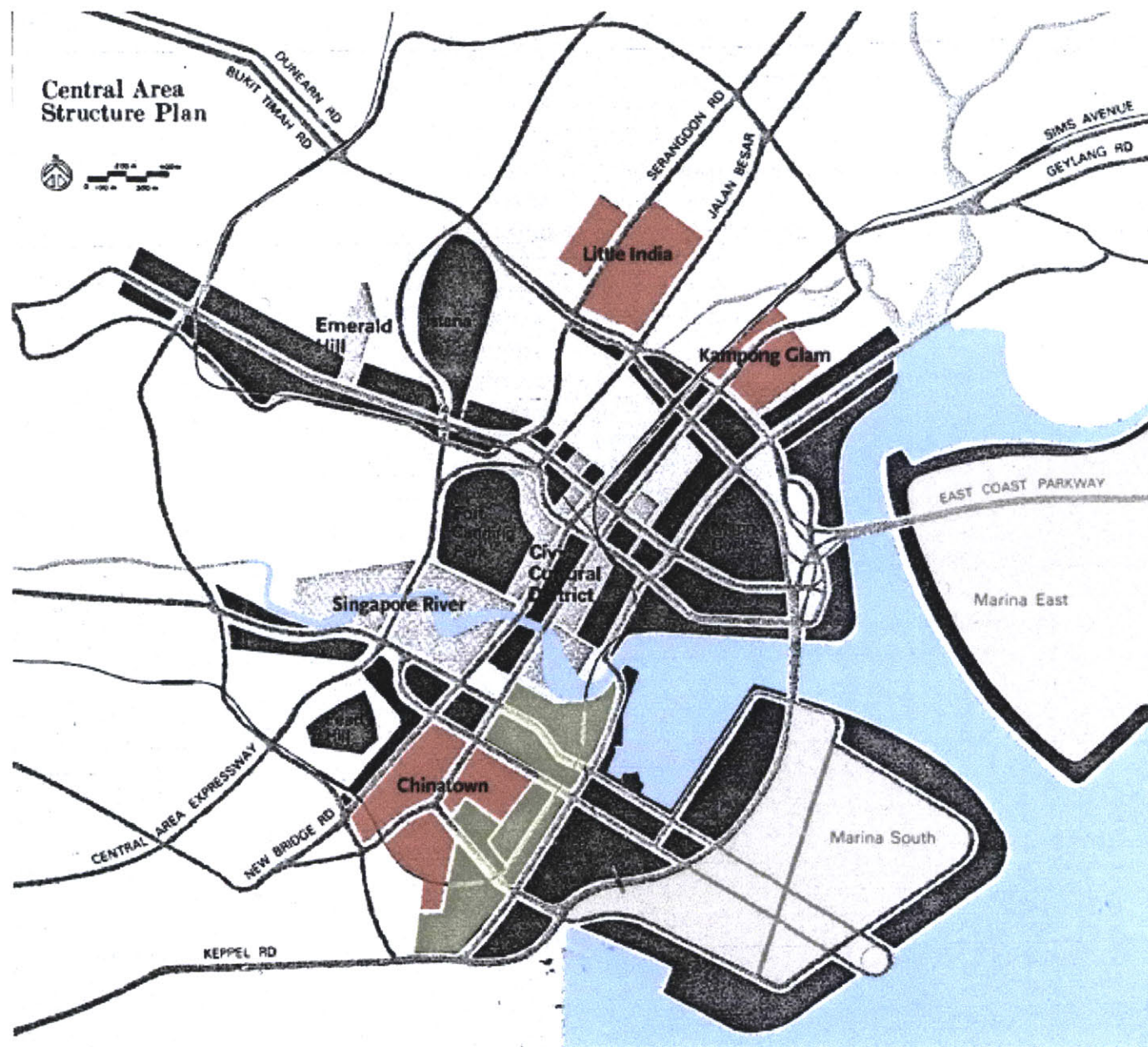


Fig 10. Map of Conservation Sites in the Central Area

Table 2

Public Housing Data

Year	Public Housing Total Dwellings	% of population in Public Housing	% of Owner Occupied Public Housing Units
1960	21,968	-	-
1970	118,544	34.6	-
1980	370,044	73	-
1990	632,821	87	-
1995	700,060	86	90
1998	790,898	90	96-97

* Source: From Urban Planning in Singapore, Ole Johan Dale, 1999

Home Ownership Scheme (1964)¹²

In 1964, the government introduced the Home Ownership Scheme to give citizens an asset in the country; a means of financial security and to hedge against inflation as it protects against rising rents. Home ownership also helps to contribute to the overall economic, social and political stability of the country.

To make it easy to buy and own a flat, HDB introduced these measures:

- From 1968, the Central Provident Fund (Amendment) Act allows buyers to use their Central Provident Fund savings for the 20% down payment and monthly repayment of the mortgage loan.
- The income ceiling is frequently reviewed such that every 9 out of 10 Singaporeans are eligible to enjoy the benefits of public housing. At present, the income ceiling is \$8,000 for a nuclear family and \$12,000 for an extended family.

¹² HDB web site – <http://www.hdb.gov.sg>

- Buyers could choose to repay the mortgage loans over 5, 10, 15, 20 or even 25 years. Interest rates charged by HDB are much lower than market rates.

1. The Land Acquisition Act 1966 (See section Below for key points) and its subsequent amendments together with the coastal land reclamation projects allowed for an adequate land-bank for long term land-use planning.

Key Points of Land Acquisition Act of 1966¹³

- The powers of land acquisition were widened to enable private development considered beneficial to the community to overcome obstruction by owners of small pieces of land incapable of meaningful development individually. The Government could not acquire such pieces, clear them, and after integrating them into larger sites, alienate them to private individuals or corporations for development in accordance with an overall urban renewal plan.

- Landowners were now prevented from appropriating to themselves any benefit of enhanced values of their properties resulting from developments executed at public expense within 7 years of the gazette notification.

- A more expeditious procedure was provided for taking possession of land in cases of urgency instead of being restricted to waste and arable lands only as provided under the previous legislation. At the direction of the Minister, possession could be effected on the expiration of 7 days after service of notice on the owners of land gazetted as so needed. In extreme urgency, possession could even be taken before the land has been gazetted but the gazatte notification must follow within 7 days after the date of possession.

¹³ Cities for People...op.cit., p.

- Appeals or disputes pertaining to such acquisitions were now to be heard by an appeals board instead of by the courts of law. Provisions were also made for a less formal and more expeditious procedure for settling compensation claims. These were in line with precedents in the UK and Australia where questions of this nature were placed before administrative tribunals rather than the courts of law.
2. The area licensing scheme (ALS), implemented in 1975, with the newly-constructed expressway, the high taxes on privately-owned vehicles and the improved bus services ensured adequate accessibility for the efficient functioning of the central business district (CBD) for the eighties.
 3. The planting of thousands of trees, the widening of sidewalks and the effective control of pollution economically achieved general environmental improvement.
 4. The establishment of highly efficient self-financing, infrastructure services ranging from the supply of telephones, of electricity and of water, to the collection of garbage.
 5. The URA land sale program provided opportunities for the development of numerous major projects. These in turn generated billions of dollars in property investments from the private sector, both local and foreign, thus creating tens of thousands of new job opportunities.

CHAPTER 2 The Beginning of Conservation – Reasons and Goals

Like discussed earlier, the reasons for conservation initiatives in the 80s have long been an area of dispute. Singapore's economy before independence revolved around its trade and the British military complex. Raw materials of the region like rubber, tin, and other primary commodities were shipped to Singapore, reprocessed, packaged and then exported. But after it became independent in 1965, there was tremendous economic transformation between the 70s and 80s under the leadership of its Prime Minister Lee Kaun Yew and there was an impressive increase in the average growth rate. Three major industries were identified as the key players- the primary industry of manufacturing acted as a catalyst for the rest of the economy. The importance of transport and communication along with financial and business services in order to sustain the manufacturing industry were recognized and there was a steady rise in the GDP from 11.5% in 1960 to 23.2% in 1985. In the midst of all this economic prosperity was another important factor, which was given credit for the economic upheaval, was the 'Tourism Industry'. By the 1980s tourism contributed to 16% of Singapore's foreign exchange earnings. It had become the third largest industry sector after manufacturing and transport and communication.¹⁴

However, this rapid growth in the tourism industry took a plunge in 1983. For the first time since 1965, there was a 3.5% drop in tourist arrivals from the previous year. Also the number of tourists coming to Singapore for business shot up beyond those who came there for recreational purposes. (See Table 3 & 4) Singapore seemed to have suddenly lost its tourist appeal. So revitalizing this industry became an

Visitor Arrivals to Singapore

Year	Total Number	% change	World Tourism Growth (%)
1970	579,284	27.1	3.0
1971	703,089	21.4	6.7
1972	880,200	25.2	8.8
1973	1,134,493	28.9	3.8
1974	1,233,854	8.8	2.8
1975	1,324,312	7.3	5.2
1976	1,492,218	12.7	4.9
1977	1,681,985	12.7	7.3
1978	2,047,224	8.9	6.5
1979	2,247,091	9.8	4.0
1980	2,562,085	14.0	3.8
1981	2,828,622	10.4	1.2
1982	2,956,690	4.5	-1.3
1983	2,853,577	-3.5	-0.5

Table 3

* Source: Tourism Task Force Report, 1984)

Purpose of Visit 1979-83

Purpose of Visit	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Holiday	63.5	64.2	65.7	65.7	62.9
Business	11.8	11.7	11.8	12.4	13.2
Business & Pleasure	7	6.5	6.0	5.6	5.6
In Transit	10.8	9.8	9.0	8.8	9.8
Others	6.9	7.8	7.3	7.5	8.5

Table 4

* Source: Tourism Task Force Report, 1984)

¹⁴ Dale, Ole Johan, *Urban Planning in Singapore- The Transformation of a City*. Oxford University Press, Malaysia, 1999. P.39.

Important agenda. A task force was set up to in 1984 to study the reasons behind this effect on the Tourism industry. The task force went on to realize that the impact was a result of the 'Modernization' program which the government achieving at a real fast pace.

" We have removed aspects of our oriental mystique and charm which are best symbolized in old buildings, traditional activities and roadside activities"
- Report of Tourism Task Force, November 1984, Singapore.

Singapore which once possessed a visual history of migration, seasonal celebrations and cross cultural relations at the regions major crossroads was slowly getting near the anonymity prevalent around the world.¹⁵ It was this attribution to the lack of color and increasing antiseptic urban fabric that triggered off the very initial efforts in Conservation. Until this point in time, the importance of preserving an entire built fabric as opposed to a single building was never though off. But they realized that just the preservation of isolated buildings, which were of major historic significance as well as those associated with the colonial rule and the upper class was insufficient to create a unique city with its own cultural identity and historical continuity. Therefore it was critical that entire districts with buildings associated with common man, which was the vernacular landscape had to be conserved to retain the history, architectural style and ambiance of the area. So began the efforts of urban conservation in Singapore, focusing on the living experiences of a wider spectrum of the population.

So began the efforts of urban conservation in Singapore, focusing on the living experiences of a wider spectrum of the population. The very first conservation project done was at Emerald hill where the

fabric was converted into a landscaped pedestrian mall in 1984. Following this in 1985 detailed studies were undertaken for Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam and the Singapore River areas. Along with these, the civic and cultural districts were also earmarked to be developed into a major historical, cultural and retail center and also as a venue to hold national events and ceremonies. All these plans were released as part of the master plan in 1988 to the public along with the conservation manuals and guidelines for Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. The manuals was aimed at making the public understand the historical character and planning of Architectural intentions in each district and also to assist them in conserving these properties. In 1989 the URA was made the official for National Conservation and central Planning Authority. The goals added were those of identifying buildings and areas of historical interest for conservation: preparing a conservation master plan: and guiding the implementation of conservation by the public and private sectors.¹⁶ So they designated another 10 areas as conservation areas in 1988 and 10 more in 1989.

The aim was to bring back the 'Asian Identity which had been lost to a large extent due to the large scale demolition in the effort to 'Modernize'. Conservation of these projects was a way of ensuring that the city got back its old charm, which was the key resolution to bringing the tourists back into Singapore. Adaptive Re-use became the key tool for conservation, the URA invited various consultants and seeked their advice on how they should approach it and also held conferences to chart their course of action. As a result the need to conserve not only the built fabric but also the activities of the people living in it became clear.

¹⁵ Maclaren, Fergus T. Discerning Authenticity- The Historic Representation of Asia's Urban Heritage.

¹⁶ Planning Act of 1990, Singapore. Sections 10(6), 13, 14 & 25

So Conservation meant“ Preservation, enhancement, or restoration of:

- a) The character or appearance of a conservation area: or
1. The trades, crafts, customs and other traditional activities carried on in a conservation area.¹⁷ Everything in Conservation at this point was aimed towards bringing back the tourist and not much was thought about how the locals could benefit from it.

The URA played a major role in this effort based on all the reports brought out by the Tourism board and the ministry of trade and industry. It adopted two approaches:

1. It undertook the responsibility of restoration in areas like Tanjong Pagar and Kreta Ayer, which had already been cleared up for demolition. It was easier for them to deal with these areas as pilot projects as they dint have to deal with people living there as it had already been taken care of and they could start almost immediately.
2. They also worked with private owners of these shop-houses to restore their own buildings or by tendering them out.

Both these approaches somewhere along the way made a lot of mistakes in the way they were handled. The URA first started dealing with Chinatown as it was the most popular destination in Singapore and the other areas designated as conservation districts were to be dealt with after the interventions in Chinatown. But for the purpose of this thesis the three areas considered for study are Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. Concept plans for all these three areas were drawn out with the following objectives.

1. To retain and enhance the existing activities which are a part of the historical and cultural heritage

2. To restore buildings of historical and architectural significance
3. To improve the general physical environment
4. To retain traditional trades while consolidating the area with new, compatible ones.
5. To introduce appropriate new features to enhance further the identity of he place
6. To involve both public and private sectors in carrying out the conservation projects.

Each of the different areas has been effected in different ways and to different degrees due to the conservation efforts by the URA. In all the interventions made, the state had the final say and was the main arbiter of whether changes are considered desirable or not in these areas.

“Power to shape the city” should be vested In the hands of the government: only when “ Standards” have been set do the people-“ Shopowners, residents, the ebb and flow of human traffic”-play a major role in determining the success of conservation efforts.

-Liu Thai Ker, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Planner, URA

The business Times, 29/30 august 1992.

The absolute power that the government and the authority held has been advantageous and often quite unsuccessful in different circumstances. The public opinion was almost non existent. We will study these individually case by case in the next few sections.

¹⁷ Planning Act of 1990, Singapore. Sections 3

The Three Conservation Districts

Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam

Chinatown

"The first thing that the new arrivals to Chinatown did was to thank their Gods for their safe passage at the Temples, mosques and shrines along the river and coastline at Tanjong Pagar and Telok Ayer. Then they would search for their relatives or clan associations, in the hope that they would provide food and lodging or perhaps even some work. Those running away from hardship who couldn't afford their passage, came as indentured labourers; they would be housed in lodging quarters, or 'Kenhs' in Pagoda Street, some of which were also opium dens.

In the old days, there were many shrines on every street of Chinatown. Some were more popular than the others, but every month there was sure to be a birthday celebration of some Chinese God, complete with opera or puppet show, street dinner, mediums marching with flags and ladders, swords and baskets of offerings. Operas could be watched for free because the temple usually sponsored the troupes.

My Chinatown memories, like the Chinatown they recall, are not neat and ordered - that's just not how it happens - they come in all shapes and sizes, from all directions ... the pungent smell off bales of rubber stored in warehouses ... what seemed like hundreds of old ladies squatting and sorting through sacks of onions and potatoes before sending them off to the markets around the island ... going climbing with friends at the steps of Kramat Habib Noh, the Muslim shrine at Tanjong Pagar, to give thanks for prayers that were answered; we did so in the old Malay way, by offering yellow saffron rice, and were surprised to find Chinese and other non-Muslims doing the same thing".

-Geraldene Lowe Ismail, Chinatown Memories. The Singapore Heritage Society, Singapore, 1998. Pg. 26,36 & 49.

These are a few memories of Chinatown shared by many. Raffles anticipated the growth of the Chinese population and designated the area to the south of Boat Quay as a 'Chinese Kampong'. This was the Telok Ayer area of today, but the Chinese population increased rapidly over the next few years. There were also a significant number of South Indians, especially Muslims, evidenced by the presence of The Nagore Durgha Shrine and Al Abrar Mosque in Telok Ayer and Jamae Mosque and Sri Mariamma Temple on South Bridge Road. As the population increased the settlement started growing out into the Kreta Ayer area in the 1860s. (See Fig 11).

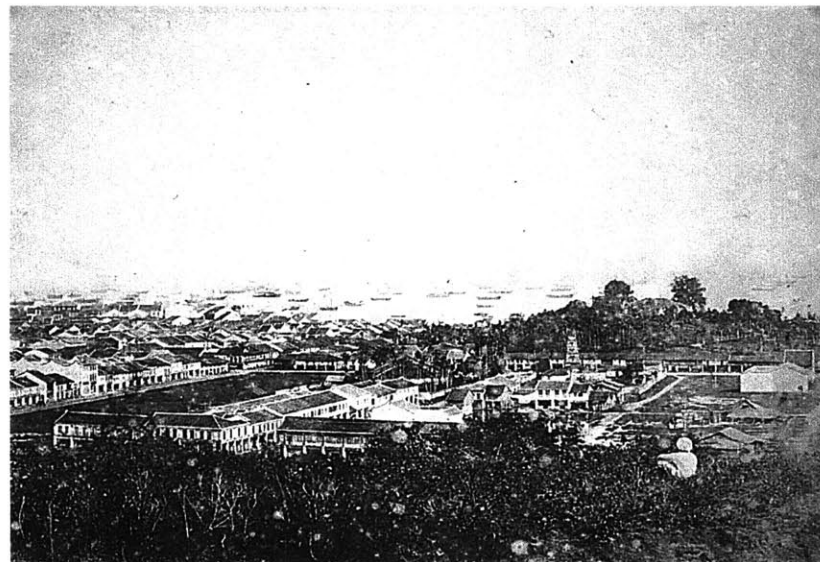


Fig 11. Chinatown from Pearl's Hill, early 1860s

From these scattered developments, the present Chinatown grew out. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had a great impact on the urban growth of Singapore. The dock activities in Tanjong Pagar were expanded and as a result the growth of the city came back south instead of going north. More roads were built and two tramways were introduced between the old town and harbour. All these developments led to a further increase in population from 50,043 in 1860 to 164,041 in 1901. So the expansion logically expanded into Tanjong Pagar and then Bukit Pasoh from the already densely populated Telok Ayer.



Fig 12. Junction of Cross St. & South Bridge Rd., Chinatown 1890s

Chinatowns built fabric was mainly all shop-houses with many local markets, temples and lodging houses serving the Chinese population. Chinatown was from the beginning a cosmos of activity and never had a quiet moment. The immigrants who settled here were of

many different professions. There were key makers, umbrella makers, knife sharpeners, watch makers, stool makers, clog makers, Sign carvers who made sign boards of Chinese calligraphy, bakers, barbers, letter writers, coolies, rickshaw pullers, medicine men, snake charmers, people selling almanacs, astrological texts, plastic goods and sweets on the streets and many, many more. There was so much of street activity along with the commercial trades on the ground floor of the shop houses with the people living on the upper floors of the two to three storey shop-houses. Different streets were known for specific needs and wants of the living population in this area. A lot of this was based on how these trades complimented each other and supported each other as people could get all their needs for a job between these co-existing trades. There were also the brothels, funeral homes, opera houses and teahouses. Chinatown was a place of 'Endless Activity', where the laborers toiled during the day, slept, eat and gambled in the streets after work. There was always a frantic pace of activity all around the clock with peddlers, storytellers and noodle sellers gathering amidst the laborers and Tongkang people.

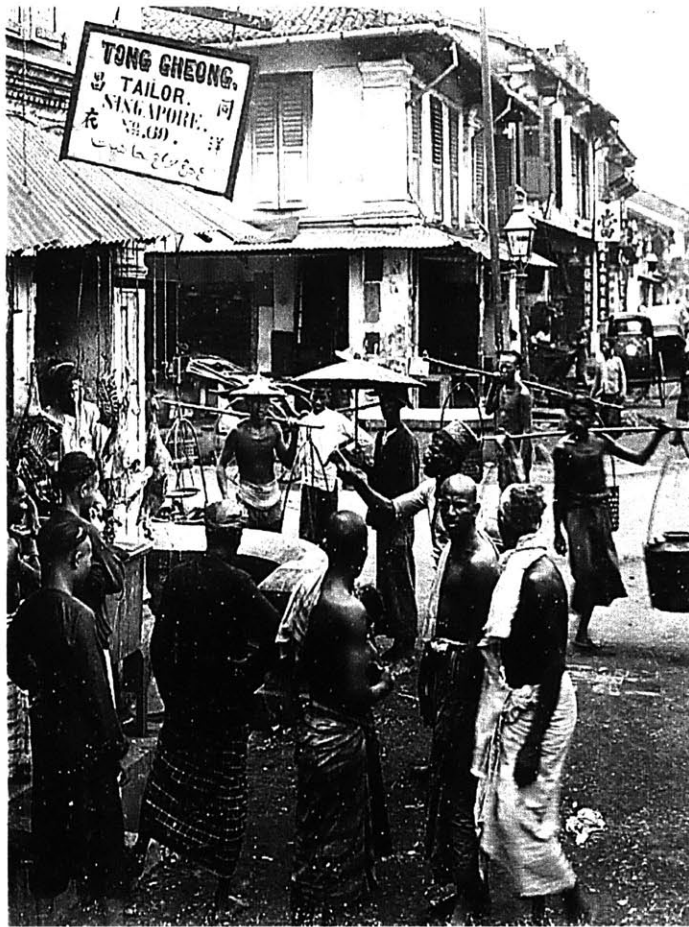


Fig 13. China Street, Early 1900s



Fig 14. Street Markets on Smith Street, 1959

Food was a major activity in Chinatown. There were many street hawkers selling different provincial varieties of food where the working men would go eat their meals, as many were bachelors when they arrived. The streets were a melange of wonderful fragrances and people used to wait in queues in front of their favorite vendors. (See Fig 14) Not that everything was very clean. There were no covered drains and so were home for many mice running in between the street vendor's carts. The local street markets were the most active places all through the day and late into the night, almost until the markets opened in the early morning. They used to sell all kind of food, livestock and perishables that were bought fresh each day by the housewives and servants. Some of the night markets sold shoes, books and other daily needs, which attracted huge crowds. Overtime it became a favorite haunt to both the locals and tourists who were searching for bargains and traditional medicines.

The cacophony of Chinatown was very distinct, there were people bellowing, hawkers hollering, taxis tooting, whistles and rattles, the 'tok-tok' of vendors. There was a huge assortment of moving vehicles-all sorts of carts on wheels, which were pulled or pushed, pedaled or sometimes folded and carried. Large loads were piled high on butcher bikes, but for height of the load, no one could match the broom- and -brush vendors who simply pedalled without being able to see past the pile on their cart, and everyone just managed to scuttle out of the way to avoid an accident.¹⁸ (See Fig 15)



Fig 15. Hawker Stalls, New Bridge Road, 1960



Fig 16. Chinese New Year shopping, as late as 1983

The festival celebrations were when the whole city area came alive. The Chinese New Year was the biggest one. The streets were lined with hawkers and celebrations started in the evening and went on for many hours into the night (See Fig 16). There was a lot of noise and chaos, fireworks, water sports and a lot of food stalls. Then there was the dragon boat festival, festival of hungry ghosts, the moon cake festival and the festivals celebrated by the Indians. Chinatown was the home for the Mariamma Temple, which was the very first Hindu temple in Singapore in 1984.

In over a century of development since 1820, Chinatown had become an overpopulated area with very questionable health conditions. As the population continued to grow, the shop-houses were getting more and more crowded. There were times when there were about 80 people in one shop-house making it very unhealthy and badly cramped. The "Five

¹⁸ Chinatown Memories. Geraldene Lowe Ismail, The Singapore Heritage Society, 1998.

Foot Way' covered corridors in the front of these shop-houses, Which Raffles had made a law in order to protect against the severe weather of Singapore with the heat and rain, became an extension to the living spaces. Families confined to small cubicles used these five-foot ways as a common area. Here Children played, meals were eaten and friends met and chatted. An enormous variety of economic activities were also conducted on the five-foot way. With high unemployment there was a dependency on hawking and petty trade for a living.¹⁹ (See Fig 17)

This situation became a concern for the colonial government after the war. The living conditions in the overcrowded, divided and subdivided shop-houses in the area were documented under the auspices of the Social Welfare Department of the colonial government in the early 1950s namely, the Goh Keng Swee Report²⁰ and Barrington Kaye's Upper Nanking Street.²¹ They reported of the overcrowding, poverty, and slum-like housing conditions throughout the center of the city. The two- three storey shop-houses which were originally intended to house one or two families, were subdivided by a maze of interior partitions into cubicles, the majority of which were without windows and in permanent semi darkness. Most of the cubicles were 9sq.mts and in one such cubicle-dark, confined, insanitary, and without comfort lived a family with seven or more persons.

With political independence in 1965, this condition of overcrowding became one that was not acceptable to the new Government, which was intent on improving the material conditions of

the newly independent people. Related to this goal, it wanted to get rid of the squatter-type attap dwellings and, what was considered, slum areas-all which were looked upon as unbecoming of the new forward marching nation. The poor living conditions hindered the plans of the government to create a new environment, which could be used as a base for economic activity in the region. Singapore was to become a 'Global City': a clean and green Singapore. This meant acceptance of large-scale clearance program to the newly elected government.



Fig 17. Life along the five-foot way

¹⁹ Liu, Gretchen M. Singapore- A Pictorial History 1819-2000. National Heritage Board, Singapore, 1999

²⁰ Swee, Goh Keng. Urban Incomes and Housing: A Report on the Social Survey of Singapore, 1953-54. Singapore Government Printing Office, 1958.

²¹ Kaye, Barrington. Upper Nanking Street. Singapore: A Sociological Study of Chinese households living in a Densely Populated Area. Singapore: University of Malaysia Press, 1960

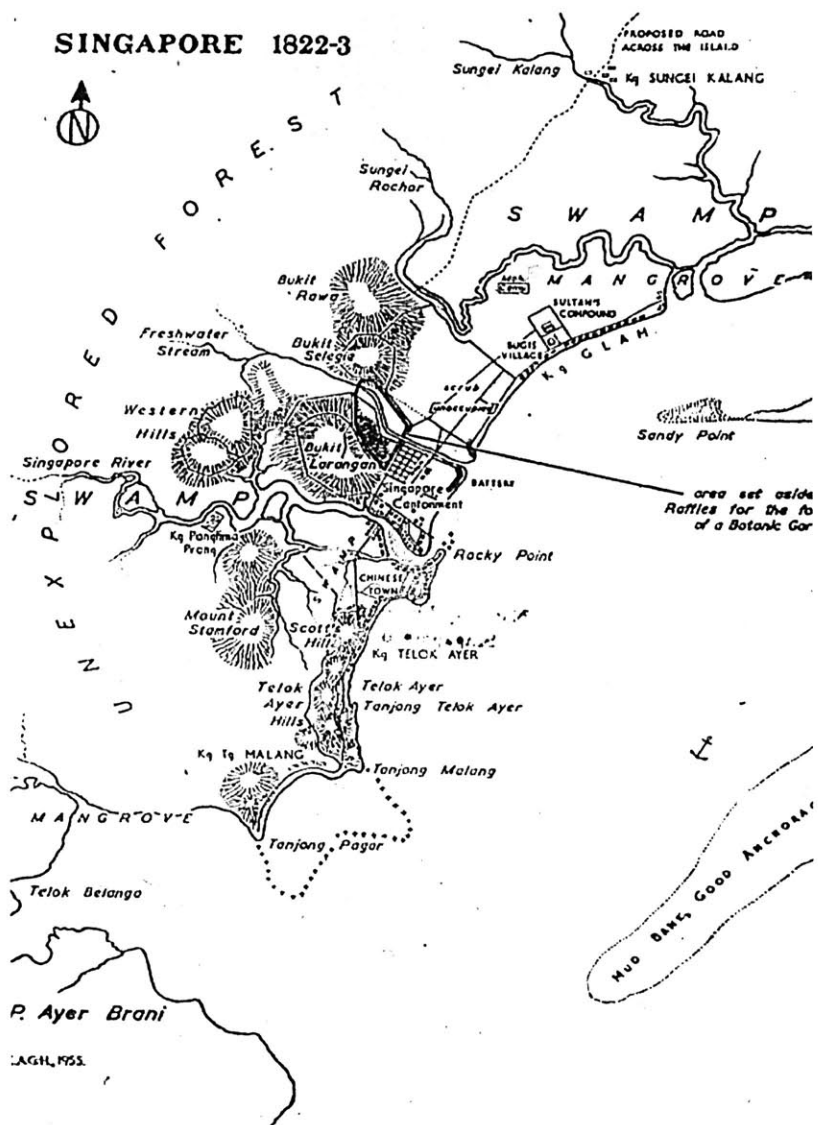


Fig 18. Singapore Town Survey, 1822-23

So Chinatown came under the jurisdiction of the Housing and Development Board and the Urban Renewal Authority. The Ministry of Environment also removed the street hawkers that thronged the area through the Hawkers Clearance Program. The result was a substantial change in the physical environment of Chinatown. Along with all this the Government was highly aware of the amount of land that was available in the Small Island of Singapore which was only 581 km. Sq. in 1959 and did not want to waste any of this scarce commodity. They had to plan for many years to come and for the growing population and be ahead of time. So they began the rapid redevelopment of the area. The traditional city center was seen as a real estate asset whereby private investment could be tapped to provide the space to accommodate the burgeoning growth of the city. Everything old had to go, they flattened all the surrounding hills (See Fig 18) to make way for land to build housing and then began resettling people from the shop-houses, after which they could be bulldozed to the ground making way for new and modern buildings with modern facilities.

This process was first started in Chinatown and hence the effects of it are more drastic here. Between 1965 and the early 80s, the Land acquisition act gave the Government unprecedented power to acquire any parcel of land which could be used for any kind of public purpose or National development, including acquisition on behalf of private developers. The rate of compensation was also decided by the state itself, violating the common laws that govern property rights. The state provided the planning and development control framework - it was both the major entrepreneur and landowner. So there was a lot of land bought up by moving out people who lived there in large no's, too many and too quickly. The land thus pooled by the government was sold to private developers, who were to build and manage the major part of commercial real estate, constructed either on privately owned land or land sold by the

government through the urban renewal sale of sites program. In this process many of the trades were all displaced when people had to move out and so failed to survive without having the support of complimentary trades by which they had lived all these years. Many of the demolished shop-houses were replaced by HDB public housing (See Fig 19). The HDB in response to the demolition of the shop-houses claimed that the majority of the acquired private lands comprised of dilapidated properties or neglected land where squatters had mushroomed and the government saw no reason why the owners should enjoy the enhanced land values, without any effort being put in by them.²²



Fig 19. HDB flats under construction on the edge of Chinatown
Late 1960s

²² Chua, B.H. Not Depoliticized but Ideologically Successful: The Public Housing Program in Singapore. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 1991, 15(1), P. 24-41

“In fact, such radical expropriation makes any ownership provisional: any terrain can be claimed by the state for any reason. (Certain sites have been requisitioned two or three times over the past 30 years). “ During a period of just twenty years, from 1965 to 1988, well over 1200 sites were selected for expropriation and nearly 270,000 families were displaced, i.e., about a third of the country’s population”.

-Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau. S, M, L, XL, 1995.

So after Chinatown was marked as a conservation district in 1988 to achieve two main goals: Preserving of Heritage and generation of tourist income The area consisted of about 23 ha of land and this was further divided into four sub districts:

1. Telok Ayer - The main landing point for 19th century immigrant laborers; distinctive for the number of Chinese trading companies set up here as well as prominent landmarks such as the Thian Hock Keng Temple, the Nagore Durgha Shrine and the Hokkien Huay Kuan.
2. Kreta Ayer – A commercial area centered around Trengganu and Pagoda streets where the largest day and night street market used to be held until the early 1980s and the site of the Jamae Mosque and Sri Mariamman Temple, both gazetted national monuments.
3. Tanjong Pagar – Formerly a residential area for laborers working in the port nearby.
4. Bukit Pasoh – Also formerly a residential area and also the site of a recreational club for wealthy Chinese merchants.

By then about 53% was privately owned and the other 47% was owned by the Government largely due to the land acquisition act. But it did not seem to stop there, the URA, which was now the authority in charge again made mistakes. They again adopted two wrong methods of conservation.

The Shop-houses in Chinatown were occupied by small merchants and shopkeepers who had sublet these from the big merchants who had now moved out into large residences. The shopkeepers in turn rented the rooms or any useful space out to other workers and coolies. Because the workers were usually single males, the practice of sharing a room and splitting the rent by a group of men was very common. The rents were really low as they were under rent control and the landlords had no incentives to do the upkeep of these structures, which were fast approaching a state of dilapidation. So the Government came up with a plan in order to phase out the rent control. They gave the landlord twelve months to fully restore the shop-houses using their own funds or the government would take over the ownership of the shop-houses and restore it.²³ In the late 80s the average cost of restoring a single shop-house was hardly affordable by the poor residents nor did the owners want to do it, as it was a lot of money. So the URA was able to get possession of a lot of the fabric. Once the restoration was done, then the next big question was what to do with the restored fabric.

The areas of Tanjong Pagar prior to being designated as part of the Chinatown conservation district was all emptied out and ready to be brought down. Tanjong Pagar was originally developed around the 1860s and was very rich in architecture and history. Its unique vernacular architecture with facade and detail design had come from Chinese and western traditions. The conservation earmarked about 22s shop-houses, both two and three storey with in an area of 4.1ha. 'In 1981 it appeared the area was about to give way to "Progress". It was earmarked for public housing by the HDB and clearance of the site was initiated. Several shop-houses, which by present day criteria would be judged capable of renovation, were judged at that time to be structurally unsound and

demolished. The population had progressively been moved out to new towns around the island".²⁴ But the URA and the Singapore Government had one good thing to start all this effort, they always wanted the best advice they could get, and most of the time they did. It was on their suggestion that the beautiful shop-houses of Tanjong Pagar still stand today. Also the success they had at Emerald hill was another motivation. So as soon as the URA wanted to start out on their restoration program, Tanjong Pagar was perfect as a pilot projects as it had already been emptied of its residents and they could make a quick intervention. So they went in and fixed a lot of the fabric and making it available for the 'Adaptive reuse' purposes. To demonstrate what could be done, the URA embarked upon the restoration of the first set of 32 shop-houses in the end of 1987. These structures were then put out for sale under the guidelines of use set forth by the URA. Initially, the guidelines allowed only for commercial, food or entertainment on the ground floors and residential or office space on the upper floors. But due to the poor response in the beginning this was flexed a bit and they began to allow offices also on the ground floor. This was a terrible mistake. This took away any chances of bringing in street activity and making the place vibrant like before, but with new uses.

Later when the URA put out the shop-houses outside of this first pilot project out for tender, investor's interests were keen; the first 38 shop-houses on 27 parcels attracted 84 bids, in December of 1987. The average tender price was S\$153/sq.ft. Or S\$ 153,000 per shop-house unit. By the time the final seven shop-houses were awarded in August 1989, which attracted 126 bids, the average tender price had risen to S\$260/sq.ft. When it was apparent that large profits could be made,

²³ In conversation with Robertson E. Collins, Singapore, Jan 2000.

²⁴ Powell, Robert, "Urban Renewal & conservation in a Rapidly developing Country: The Singapore Experience". The Singapore Institute of Planners Journal, Singapore, Nov/Dec 1992. No. 175

developers had moved in quickly. Prices of old shop-houses escalated and a new problem surfaced. Conservation was happening too quickly. There was no research or analyzing about what to do with this newly available wealth of historic fabric, which was the only history Singapore had just managed to save at the nick of time, whatever may be the reasons. Like the designer in Singapore Jonathan Bonsey points out “I think Tanjong Pagar is a wonderful idea, immaculately executed, but I think it fails in its objectives”. The neighborhood has become a hub for creative driven industries such as advertising, architecture and design. Since the office spaces dominate this area, it is usually a ghost town after 7 in the night. A sharp contrast to what the area stood for- a place of endless activity’. This was just the beginning; soon the URA restored about 26 shop-houses in the Kreta Ayer district in December of 1991. The URA had spent about S\$5M on restoration and sold it for about S\$1M per unit. And this continued with sales later on and there was a huge influx of new yuppie owners into the newly restored shop-houses, gentrifying the whole area.

Now Chinatown is reduced to only a few streets in each of the districts of Chinatown. This is where the tourists go and wander around and the only streets even locals rarely visit. The move towards modern commercial uses is most visible today in the Telok Ayer the oldest part of Chinatown, where offices spillover from the nearby Central Business Districts (CBD). Unable to match the higher rentals that offices can pay, many trades and occupants have moved out of this area too like the rest of Chinatown. The rents here are about \$3.50 per sq.ft for the shop-houses compared to \$7 or \$8 just a quarter mile away in the CBD. The only shops, which have remained, are the restaurants that are supported by the office spaces around and the tourists.

The only instances of residential land-use which still exists is in the Bukit Pasoh area, but here too the commercial activities are gradually creeping in bringing in more offices due to the steep rise in rents and property prices. Residential use barely exists in Tanjong Pagar, which once had a mix of housing, social associations and commercial activities. The influx of offices and streets filled with pubs are what remain today. The only area that still survives today as the heart of Chinatown is the Kreta Ayer District, a few streets specifically. It still retains a rich traditional character by bringing back some old trades.



Fig 20. Telok Ayer Road



Fig 22. Duxton Road, Tanjong Pagar



Fig 21. Bukit Pasoh Road



Fig 23. Trengannu Street, Kreta Ayer

Little India

Little India is unique among the three areas marked as conservation districts, in that it was not earmarked in Raffle's town plan of 1828. The Indians being among the first immigrants had been allotted the area around what is today called Chulia Street, which was on the south bank of the river further upstream from Boat Quay. But like all vibrant natural urban settlements, it emerged and was able to sustain its own momentum of development in sync with the changing social, economic and political circumstances of the area itself and of Singapore as a whole.

Although Little India was not part of Raffles' plan of 1822, a road noted as "The Road leading Across the Island" was present in another official map from the same year. This was later named as Serangoon Road. This road signified the need for a road to connect the early settlements in the south with Serangoon Harbour in the North because it was the point from where linkages were to be established to the lumbering and quarrying activities from across the Straits in Johore and Pulau Ubin. The road opened up the area along its length for subsequent rapid development. A map of 1836 showed cultivated fields on either side of the road and by early 1840s sugar plantations were added to the already existing paddy and "Sireh" (Beetle nut) fields. The Rochor Canal was cut in order to irrigate these fields. The labourers at this time were mainly Chinese immigrants.

The early 1840s also saw the completion of the racecourse, which was the focus of the European community and later it drew some families into setting up their residences in the area. Concurrently cattle trading had taken root and had developed as one of the major economic activities of the area. As the cattle were not used only for milk and meat

but also as a source of productive power of transportation and driving simple machines, the cattle trade in turn attracted other economic activities into the area such as, wheat grinding, gingly oil production, pineapple preserving enterprises. Soon the Cattle trade began to replace the agricultural activities as the main source of economy in the area.



Fig 24. Serangoon Road, Mid 1800s

Besides being a major economic activity generator, cattle trade brought about a major social change to the area: It brought about a concentration and therefore, a high visibility of Indians to the area. Indians dominated the trade from ownership to labourers. The number of building plans submitted for the area during the 1870s and 1880s were from Indians further reflecting the concentration of the Indian community in the area. By 1880 the urban configuration of the Race Course area had reached its present form, there were only two roads that completely bisected the tract of swampy land between Serangoon road and Jalan

Besar: Dunlop and Syed Alwi . By the close of the century, new comers engaged in the non-cattle-related industry, particularly in the construction sector further augmented the Indian population. By this time Serangoon road due to its concentration of the Indian community had become the area of reception and absorption area for new immigrants. As the population expanded, it generated its own demands for retail and service activities to cater to the ethnically specific needs of the population. So the beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of commercial life in this area. This later on replaced the cattle trade to be the chief component of Little India. The commercial activity grew significantly each year and Indians predominantly registered these. There were also Chinese and Eurasian merchants. Most of these commercial and retail activities were housed in newly constructed shop-houses and there was also larger commercial construction to accommodate larger facilities like water distillers, saw mills and markets. So the area was drained in order to build more roads for better access.

The cattle trade began to see its last days when there was a worldwide breakout of the rinderpest disease in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Due to this there was an absolute ban on the importation of cattle, goats and sheep from South India. The Municipal ordinance of 1936 further checked the trade's activities due to its strict enforcement of health and sanitation conditions. The decline in cattle trade made more room for residences and shop-houses by converting the stables. The 1940s transformed the area into a commercial-residential community with an ethnically mixed population with a very high concentration of Indians. The stability of the area was disrupted during the Second World War. Some of the established Indian Entrepreneurs sold their businesses to their workers and left Singapore. The workers, who bought them and managed to survive the war were able to consolidate, even prosper in the trades during the 1950s. It is to these persistent residents and tradesmen

that Serangoon Road owes its survival as the Indian community area. The change of property did not bring in changes in that the trades remained the same. Thus when the Japanese period passed by, Serangoon Road as a communal center continued proving the Indian community to be a tough, resilient and adaptive to the highly demanding pace and life-style of Singapore. However, the days of active construction were over. By the 1960s many of the Indians living in the area moved out into the HDB public housing or private houses due to upward social mobility. This resulted in the present Little India, which is predominantly a commercial center catering to the Indians Island wide; with rudimentary converted dormitories for the Indian labourers who work in these commercial enterprises.²⁵



Fig 25. Serangoon Road, 2000

At the onset of being named as one of the conservation districts in 1988, Little India covered a land area of about 16ha of which 65% was privately owned and the government owned 35%. There are about 860 shop-house structures of which about 640 are privately owned and about 220 government owned. This was very much unlike the ownership in Chinatown which had a higher percentage of government owned land. The area is also home for many religious buildings: the Veeramakaliman Temple, the Sree Lakshminarayana Temple, the Kampong Kapor Methodist Church and the Abdul Gaffor Mosque. The Indian population though being a minority in the total population of Singapore, was highly diverse. The community was compartmentalized by occupational, religious, educational, and linguistic differences, and caste, as well as place of origin. They were mainly two groups, the North Indian versus the South Indian and the Hindu versus the Muslim population.²⁵ Out of these the South Indian Hindu's formed the majority. The population of Serangoon Road also reflects and maintains a pattern of extremely rich ethnic and community heterogeneity.



Fig 26. Buffalo Road – Catering to specific needs of the Indian Population

²⁵ Urban Redevelopment Authority, Singapore, Historic Districts in the Central Area, A manual for LITTLE INDIA Conservation Area, July 1988

²⁶ Siddiqui, Sharon & Puru Shotam, Nirmala, Singapore's Little India- Past, Present and Future. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. 1982

The commercial center catered to the everyday life necessities, as well as community festivals and associated activities, of the larger Indian population, which had settled in other areas of Singapore and also peninsular Malaya. The immigrant population initially was predominantly male. Singapore might have been strange to the new comers, but in Serangoon Road they found the much needed familiar comforts. In the early 1900s itself it was called the Second Madras, the city from where most of the South Indian population came. The working population tended to live on the premises, as it was indicated by the Architecture of the time. The residential quarters were generally built over the Cattle quarters in a style that has been carried forward to the shop-house use of building space today.

Shop-houses full of Indians staying there. When I say staying means they are taking a bed each and staying there. They pay five to ten dollars which exists in two or three houses.

-Sharon Siddiqui & Nirmala Purshotam. Little India-Past, Present, Future.

By the 1930s there were all kinds of commercial migrants into the area due to the stabilizing population: Astrologers, goldsmiths, garland makers, paanwallas, sari and textile retailers, tailors, milk vendors, Dhobis, parrot fortune tellers, bakers, money lenders, spice grinders, provision stores keepers, and slowly also the first of the Indian food establishments. All these were a result of the stabilizing family population once the ratio of men to women increased with the newly married bachelors bringing back their wives with them to Singapore.

Even in the 1980s a large percentage of people residing in the area were people who worked in the establishments of Little India. They were provided with food and lodging by the employers to a large extent. So they were also the users of these facilities for their daily needs. The

other users of the facilities are the other south Asian people living on the island elsewhere and lastly the tourists. Unlike Chinatown, the basic premise that in order to sell or produce Indian wares, one has to set shop in a recognized Indian community space was recognized from the early years due to which Serangoon road still exists in its present form, delivering its intricate network of interdependent community ties. The Five-foot ways in Little India are kept alive due to the shops spilling out into them and also by the smaller trades like the fortunetellers, garland makers etc. These small trades apart from requiring very little space, also allows them to cut back on rents which, considering the very low profit margins of their business, is a significant factor for the continuation of their trades. The high demand for labour and the need to maintain a life style relative to the low remuneration has resulted to a great extent in keeping Serangoon Road as a place to provide low cost food and lodging, which in turn allows for small scale industries to continue and survive.

Another large player in contributing to the success of Little India is the presence of a strong peoples representative group- the Hindu Endowment Board (HEB). The British first established the HEB as early as 1906 as the Mohamadan and Hindu Endowments Board (MHEB) after they felt the need to bring the places of worship under an endowment instead of being run by individuals. The officials of this board were all British till 1948 when representatives from both the Muslim and Hindu communities were included. Then they were made in charge of the day to day affairs of the temples and it was then that the temple properties were developed into proper buildings. In 1968, the administration of the Hindu endowments was transferred to the Hindu Endowment Board (HEB)²⁷. Since then the HEB has been the representative of the Indian community in many matters. It has played an active role in deciding how things

should work for the community and in organizing the festivals of the Indian people by getting necessary permits from the Government.

The Festivals of Little India are another vibrant activity. Among the well known ones which are Deepavali, Thaipusam, pongal and Navarathri. During the celebrations of these festivals, Indians from all over the island congregate to celebrate the festivities mostly originating from the temples and then spilling on to the roads. There are roads blocked up to set up street markets and the whole of Serangoon Road is bustling with activity.



Fig 27. Festival market for 'pongal'

²⁷ HEB, Sri Mariamma Temple – A Glorious Monument, Singapore, May 1996



Fig 28. 'Thai Pusam' Festival celebrations

The very first involvement of the URA for the Conservation effort came in early 1991, when the URA put up 15 restored shop-houses for bid. There were 84 bids that came in, but at relatively lower prices than those for similar properties elsewhere. The bid prices ranged from \$2206 psm to \$5603 psm. These were much lower than similar properties in Chinatown and Tanjong Pagar. These houses had been restored for a price of \$3M by the URA and they were expecting to generate about 9.5M through sales. Another major development for Little India was the Little India Arcade at the beginning of Serangoon Road on the land that was owned by the Hindu Endowment Board. The HEB tied up with DBS Land for a 20 M project to restore and redevelop a 42,000sq.ft site which consisted of three two storey blocks of pre-war terrace shop-houses. The HEB had a 60% stake in this development and it played a big role in bringing back the existing tenants as they understood that the existing tenants knew how to make it work like they had done so far. All the small trades were also brought back and this is today's Little India Arcade.

But the Conservation efforts have a few drawbacks here too, but not to the extent of Chinatown. The URA identified a core area in Little India and developed specific guidelines for built fabric within this core area and for the fabric outside. But there are many complaints by the shopkeepers ranging from the narrowness of the door sizes to restrictions against neon signs and from rentals to the use of shop-houses as residences. The use of shop-houses is absolutely critical for the success of this district as the hired staff there depends on accommodation from their employers and also it has been restricted to do any kind of cooking in the shop-houses which again hindered the needs of the working staff. The rents are also slowly rising because of the restoration that has taken place, though there are efforts being made to keep the rents down especially for the smaller trade practices. The URA's response was that there has been a misunderstanding about the shop-houses not being able to be used as residences on the upper floors. The URA guidelines clearly say that the shop-houses can be used either for retail or residences. So there is clearly a misunderstanding and it needs to be resolved. There is also a lot of distress among the shopkeepers on the inner lanes about not being able to use appropriate signs to attract customers. There has been a fall in the business of these shops on the inner roads. The URA again responded that it only requires that the architectural details of the structures were not covered up.

The Little India Arcade project has been successful to a certain extent due to the existence of the HEB. It is a prime shopping center with 103 units of retail shops, kiosks, food stalls, restaurants and offices. In the beginning when it opened in 95, tenants were facing poor business. The tenants were still unable to pay their rents due to the poor business. The rents ranged from \$8-\$7 per sq.ft depending on the location and the Kiosks had to pay a rent of \$300 per month. But the business has picked up a little bit and what is more important is that small trades have been

kept alive due to nominal rents. But still, tenants are a bit unhappy about not being able to make any profits due to the rise in rents from before and poor business added. There has been a hint of making things too 'touristy' like in Chinatown and something needs to be done soon in order to avoid the place from becoming like the deserted streets of Chinatown.

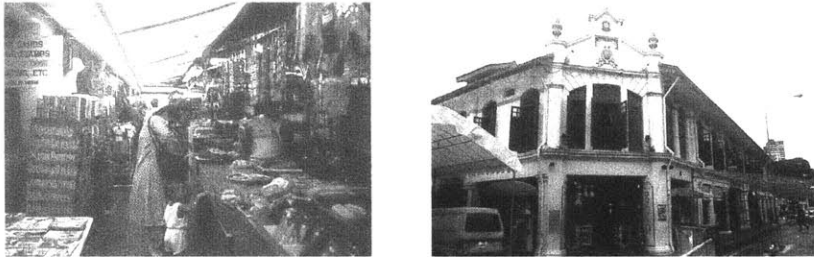


Fig 29. Little India Arcade

The opening of large air-conditioned retail super stores like Mustafa Center is a big force here. The store caters to every need of a customer and also at prices much cheaper than anywhere else in Singapore. Being so close to the conservation district makes it a major reason for the poor business the older shops are doing. So the incentives and discounts in rents becomes even more crucial for it to sustain itself.

The demolition of shop-houses had started here too before being recognized for conservation. The presence of some private high rise right in the middle of the old built fabric clearly stands out.

Little India still is very popular to the south Asian community for their needs and the flavor it offers far from home. The weekends are the most crowded when people come to do their shopping and go to the temples and of course to get their favorite food items in the many restaurants of Little India.



Fig 30. Mustafa Center

Kampong Glam

Kampong Glam was derived from the Gelam tree which grew in abundance in the area and whose bark was used for caulking boats by the boat builders who lived in the village. The settlement of Kampong Glam is older than modern Singapore. It was already in existence at the mouth of Rochor River at the time Raffles' arrival in 1819. This was also the historic seat of Malay Royalty in Singapore and measured about 22.9 ha to the east of the European town that Raffles had marked out on his town plan of 1822, between the Rochor River and the Sea. Raffles recommended this area for the Muslim traders and merchants from the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, Java, Arabia and Madamant based on their ethnic and economic status.²⁸

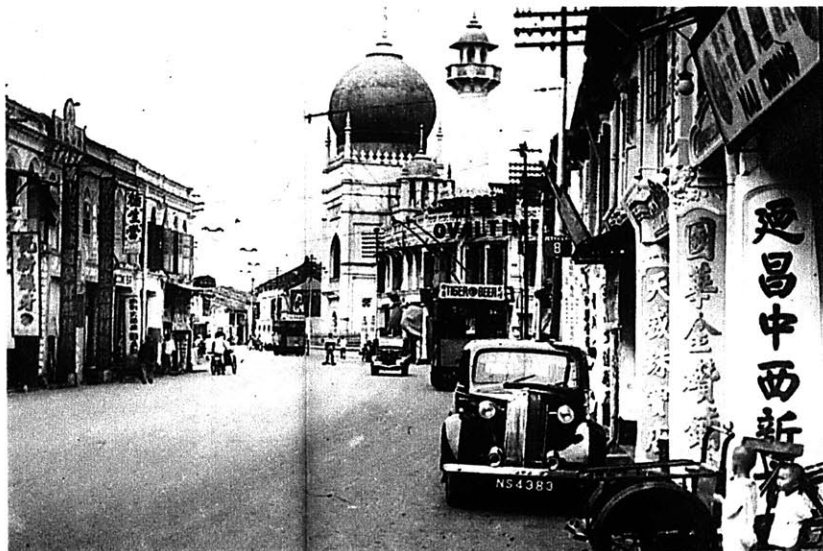


Fig 31. Kampong Glam environs

²⁸ Urban Redevelopment Authority, Singapore, Historic Districts in the Central Area, A manual for KAMPONG GLAM Conservation Area, July 1988

Raffles in 1819 signed a treaty with Sultan Hussain permitting the British to set up a trading port in Singapore. But in 1824 the sovereignty of the whole of Singapore and the adjacent islands within ten geographical miles was ceded to the East Indian Company, the British allocated Kampong Glam as Sultan Hussains personal accommodation. They also made a provision in 1823 for the Sultan to build a Mosque near his New Palace. This Mosque was completed in 1824 and served the Muslim community for 100 years, until the construction of the present structure began in 1928. But after the Sultans death in 1835, a legal dispute arose among the family over the ownership of the estate and in 1904 the British enacted an ordinance which provided the descendants of the Sultan Hussain with income of \$750,000 derived from the Kampong Glam estate. So in 1905, the estate reverted to the State.



Fig 32. Malay Kampongs, 1890s

The second half of the 19th century was characterized by the rapid growth of immigrant communities, initially largely from Sumatra and later from other parts of Indonesia and Malaya. These migrants settled amongst their own ethnic or locality groupings. This gave rise to different "mini-Kampongs" in the area such as Kampong Malacca, Kampong Java and Kampong Bugis. There was also a small but very successful community of Arab traders who achieved enormous financial success in both trade and property development. They were also held in religious

esteem and served as Imams serving Kampong Glam's Muslim Community. They also established and managed several charitable endowments for the Mosques and religious Schools. The influence of the Arabs was registered in the street names like Arab street, Bussorah street, Muscat street and Baghdad street that were all named after Arabian Streets that were allocated in the early 1910s.

The trades found in Kampong Glam were highly specialized due to the various immigrant groups. They were well known for sandal making, copper crafts work, stone masonry and tomb carving. Besides the Mosque and the Sultans Palace or Istana' there were two other notable structures- the Palladian influenced house built in 1920s called Sultan Gate and a Bungalow called Pondok Java, a drama house of Javanese immigrants which exist in a state of disrepair at present and are to be restored by the URA.

In the early 20th century, due to the expansion of commercial activities and the increase in the number of immigrants who settled in the area, Kampong Glam underwent major physical changes with the construction of new shop-houses and residential buildings. There was overcrowding and the wealthier Arab families began moving out to other parts of the island. As a result of the keen competition for land the Malay community of Kampong Glam moved out en-mass in the early 1920s to the Geylang Serai and Kampong Yunos areas, both having been designated resettlement areas by the government.



Fig 33. Streets of Kampong Glam



Fig 34. Arab Street Markets



Fig 35. Petain Road, 1960

So by the 1920s the Kampong Glam as today was in place. Even today the Muslim population is the majority in the area particularly on today's Bussorah Street. On Arab Street the most vibrant parts of Kampong Glam today, the Muslim traders shared side by side with the Chinese and Indian retailers. The elegant, Moorish-influenced Sultan Mosque, rebuild in 1924, continues to be an important beacon for Singapore Muslims (See Fig 36). There are Muslims from all over the Island and Islamic visitors from neighboring nations coming here all round the year. During the fasting month of Ramadan, this place comes alive with a lot of people coming there to pray and the streets are filled with stalls selling cake and sweetmeat.

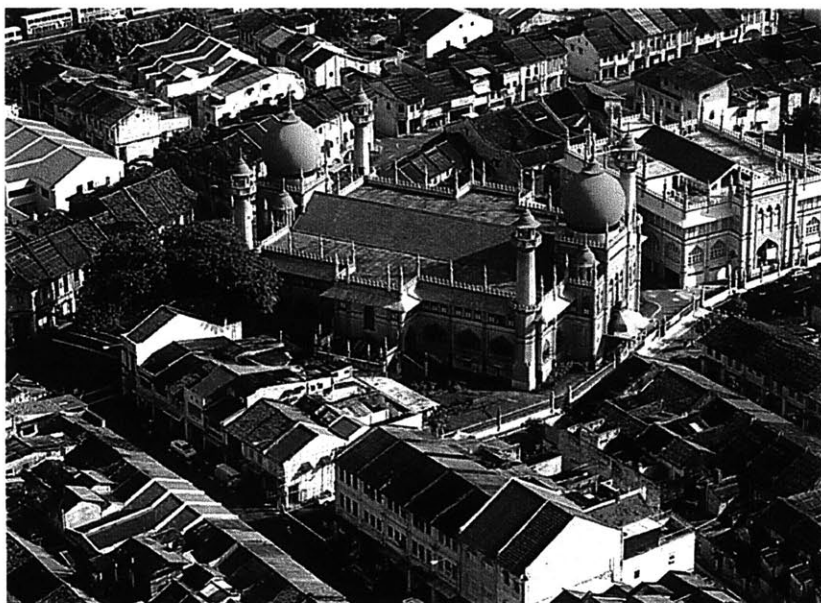


Fig 36. The Heart of Kampong Glam, Sultan Mosque

Soon after independence, housing and education were top priorities - and Kampong Glam's Crawford was chosen as one of two pilot projects for Urban Renewal. The area was known as precinct NI and when demolition began in 1966, 1,828 families and businesses had to be relocated from the 90-acre site. Only the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque was spared at the time.²⁹ The Crawford area was occupied by Javanese, Boyanese, Malays, Chinese and some Muslim Indians. There was lot of resistance showed by the Malay community and there were wide spread violence and fighting. In order to bring back calm, a goodwill committees were set up to promote racial harmony and these developed into today's Citizens consultative Committees. The families were given a compensation of about \$300 in order to move out. The situation here was also much like Chinatown. The shop-houses used to be congested with more that 10 people in one house with poor living conditions and the tenants were not paying rents leading to disrepair of the structures. Slowly people wanted to move out to the estates. A lot of road infrastructure was undertaken in the early 1980s and also the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) was made available to the site. There was a lot o road widening done bringing down shop-houses by relocating the people to housing estates.

Soon after Kampong Glam was gazetted a conservation area, the government first dealt with the ordinance made by the British to the Sultans family which paid the family \$750,000 a year. They made way for the \$12M conservation project for Kampong Glam by capping the revenue to be paid to the late Sultan Hussains family. It was reduced to \$250,000 with immediate effect in 1991. The argument made was that it needed massive conservation efforts before it could bring in any revenue and more than 80% of the area came under the ordinance. Also the ordinance

²⁹ Perkins, Jane. Kampong Glam – Spirit of a Community. Times Publishing, Singapore 1984

did not require the family to enable or entitle nor to make any contribution towards these investments. So any increase in the revenue due to the conservation efforts were not to be enjoyed by the Sultans family and hence this reduction in payment.³⁰ Soon after, they started restoring shop-houses and other structures, but the one much in debate is the restoration of the fabric on Bussorah Street in 1993. (See fig 37 & 38) It was converted into a landscaped mall with pedestrian sidewalks, lighting and signs. This street leading up to the Sultan Mosque was to be the center of activity in the area, but is a dead and soulless street with no signs of life around. The street was mainly a residential with two story shop-houses dating back to 1840s. Muslims were always flocking to the street to break their fast at its food stalls every year during the month of Ramadan.



Fig 37. Bussorah Street – No Takers, 2000

³⁰ The straits Times. Government Puts Cap on Income for Late Sultans Family. 13th march 1991, Pg.24



Fig 38. The Bussorah Street Project

After the plan for the mall was put out, these were moved out to the next street, Kandahar lane to make way for the mall. The street provided magnificent views of the mosque and the URAs intentions was to make this mall a place where pedestrians could walk freely soaking the atmosphere and the stalls. But there is no trace of this vision. The street looks like a new development, untouched and sterile. Another effect of this was the displacement of the existing residents who were asked to vacate in a month's time. The rents after restoration went up and they could no longer afford to come back there. The mall was ready in 1997 and still there is no activity on the street. The URA says that it is going to leave the trades to be decided by the market forces. There is a huge speculation again in this area being insensitive to the needs of the locals and caters too much to the tourists. The hope is that it will not become another shopping mall, but will retain its historical integrity and flavor.

Arab Street is the most vibrant street in Kampong Glam with its many stores selling fabric, straw baskets, and many more traditional crafts of the area. (See Fig 39) It has become the hub for designers from everywhere to look for threads, fabric, buttons etc. There are 620 conservation buildings in Kampong Glam 's gha area and about 60% have been restored. Like in little India, the private owners were not given deadlines to complete the restoration of the shop-houses and also the guidelines for the use were restricted to have shops on the lower floor and residences or offices above. The Istana Kampong Glam is going to be turned into a heritage park and a festival street with a showhouse of Malay architecture and furniture, art and craft.

Kampong Glam like Chinatown is similarly attractive to office owners who want to be close to the city, but don't want to be paying the rents of the CBD. Rentals in Kampong Glam are between \$4 - \$4.50/sq.ft. The possible offices that find the area attractive are public relation

companies, advertising firms, design firms and publishing firms. A lot of the Malay population prefer going to Geylang for their shopping needs and to meet up with friends over the weekends instead of coming here. Their reasons are many, from not authentic enough to more residential concentration in Geylang, traditional markets and meeting places, which give it a lot more character.



Fig 39. The Five-foot ways on Arab Street

CHAPTER 3 Review of Guidelines and Development Plans

The preservation and conservation selection criteria are based on architectural and historical significance, rarity and the value of the projects visual enhancement to the surrounding environment. In legal terms preservation indicates that a monument must be restored and maintained to its original appearance, inside and out, while 'conservation' is more lenient, permitting alternative uses and more modernization, within carefully scripted guidelines. The entire building must be restored, including all original exterior and façade elements, and no renovations, alterations or additions may commence without first obtaining the necessary approvals. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) oversees all conservation efforts and also serves as the executive arm of the Preservation of Monuments Board.

The very first manual of guidelines for the three areas of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam were brought out in 1988 by the URA after designating these three areas as conservation districts. Manual covers the conservation plan for the area and development guidelines. The plan and guidelines are more or less similar for the three areas. The objectives of the concept plan as stated by the manuals are:³¹

- 1 To retain and enhance the existing activities which are a part of the historical and cultural heritage
- 2 To restore buildings of historical and architectural significance.
- 3 To improve the general physical environment.
- 4 To retain traditional trades and activities while consolidating the area with new, compatible ones.

1. ³¹ URA. Singapore, Historic Districts in the Central Area, Manual for CHINATOWN, LITTLE INDIA & KAMPONG GLAM Conservation Areas, July 1988

- 5 To introduce appropriate new features to further enhance the identity of the place.
- 6 To involve both public and private sectors in carrying out conservation projects.

The manuals go further by identifying the conservation districts, its boundaries and core areas. The core areas here are being the area containing the greatest density of ethnic based activities and buildings of historic and architectural importance. So each of the areas has designated core areas within the designated conservation districts (**See Plate 1&2, pg. 49-50**) There are also vacant sites, squatter sites and sites architecturally poor quality buildings are identified which could undergo redevelopment under specific envelope controls for each site. The concept plan also identifies creation of festival plazas, pedestrian streets, infrastructure, signage and adaptive reuse of old shop-houses. The reuse again has different specifications for the shop-houses within the core areas and for the fabric outside the core area.

Within the designated core area, the uses or the first storey have been specified as retail shops or eating establishments, with a special encouragement for ethnic based activities of each area. The upper floors are either be residences or offices. Activities such as western fast food, motor workshops and warehouses are not allowed within the core area, as they do not enhance the ethnic character.

Outside of these designated core areas, any viable commercial use is allowed except for pollutive trades like motor workshops, tyre and battery shops and the final decision on the activities within the districts is to be left to the market forces. While traditional enterprises are encouraged, they are not mandatory. The development guidelines are applicable to all the structures within these areas other than the gazetted

national monuments. In addition to this there are guidelines for new construction, new additions taking care of the scale, height, type of materials, colors, and roofs that has to be used while restoring these buildings.

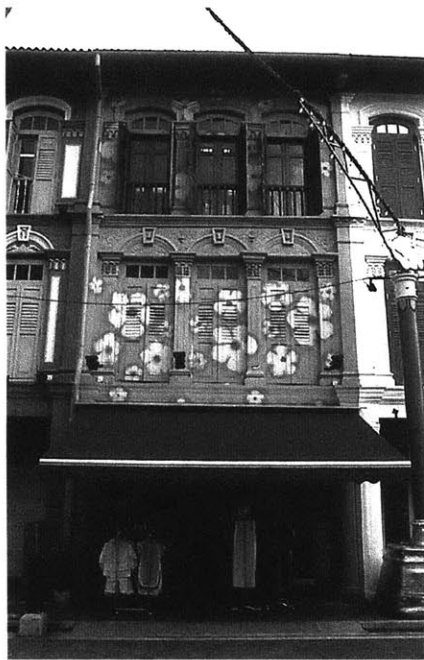


Fig 39. Insensitive Colours

The guidelines are therefore very flexible and broad taking care of the physical aspects of the building and not so much of what happens in the restored structures. The guidelines for use also have been modified over time as discussed earlier. There are specific guidelines for each structure or group of architecturally like structures in the conservation area. So owners who want to conserve their buildings have to go by these specifications for any alterations and modifications. There are constantly a few complaints on the guidelines especially about use, signage and also about how every little alteration has to be approved by the authority. Also

the guidelines on exterior paint colors need to be a bit more stringent. There are signs of very flamboyant, bright colors which don't fit the character of the place and make it look like a structure in a theme park. There has been a tendency to over-conserve on one hand, dressing up buildings in colours and details which are coarse and unauthentic, while on the other hand creating an overall baldness erasing the patina of age.³²

Analysis of Land-use and Ownership- The master plans of 1985 & 1998

The Changes in the land-use of the Conservation districts has largely been attributed to market forces by the URA. But there exist several other reasons for the conditions in the land-use allocation and zoning, which result in the dead, boring spaces of today. It is a huge change from what the places were in the past and how they have been clinically zoned into sterile, clean spaces of today. The original goals stated above have not been achieved.

The only existing information that anyone can obtain from the URA is:

1. The existing conditions of ownership and land-use in 1988 (which are now out of print) (See Plate 3&4, pg.52&55))
2. Master plan of 1985 (See Plate 5&6, pg.51&54)
3. Master plan of 1998 (See Plate 7&8, pg.53&56)

The Master plans indicate the visions of the URA in these two years for the conservation districts. Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam were well known for their vibrant streets due to an economic landscape dominated by small family businesses with different traditional activities and trades that created a huge diversity in these conservation

³² Powell, Robert. Erasing Memory, Inventing Tradition, Rewriting History: Planning as a Tool of Ideology.

districts. The areas grew out organically and were not by any rigorous zoning by-laws. The Economic activities on the streets were trades that related to one certain use, located together, catering to all aspects of that particular use. For example, Sago lane in China Towns Kreta Ayer district was the street of the dead. It had many death houses where chronically ill and old people stayed till the end of their lives. The shops on the street supported these homes by selling funeral clothes, flowers, appliances, and paper models of automobiles and houses, which were offered to the dead for a comfortable existence in the New World.³³ Pagoda street was well known for its street markets which sold a wide range of every day needs, like clothes, shoes, books, toys, bags etc. the morning markets which sold food, live stock and perishables were located on Trengganu Street, sago street and Banda Streets of Chinatown. It was these various activities in the shop-houses and on the streets that created the spirit or the intangible quality of life on the streets of the past and the individual buildings became just a backdrop to the these activities. The attitude for conservation in Singapore has so long been to preserve the built physical fabric, rather than what went on in these spaces. Some of the most vibrant parts of Chinatown and Kampong Glam have been lost as a result of this. There is no doubt that the physical fabric has been restored really well, but the whole reasoning and the initial goals for conserving these areas have been lost.

While Singapore was still a self ruling state within the Malay federation, there were many recommendations made for the development of Singapore, but the most influential one of them all was by the UN Mission comprising of Koenisberger, Abrams and Kobe in 1963: Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore. The report spelled out in detail the

³³ Archives and Oral History Department. Chinatown- an album of a Singapore Community. Times books International, 1983

need for urban renewal, new housing and redevelopment dismissing a plan by the earlier master plan of 1955 as being 'a plan for a medium sized town with rural hinterland, not a plan for a metropolis' This report is still restricted in Singapore, but its key recommendations have been published in Rem Koolhaas's book SMLXL. He writes in great detail about the policies in the report whereby;³⁴

'The entire operation ambiguously combines the fulfillment of some basic human needs with the systematic erosion of others, traditions, fixity, continuity Where what is taken away in a convulsion of uprooting, a state of permanent disorder'.³⁵

The existing conditions of 1988 clearly show this mix in trades and the heavy mix of land-use in the three areas, where there is no distinction of a clear boundary for different uses. This was even after the process of clearing and resettlement had started soon after independence. There are no land-use and ownership plans for the Tanjong Pagar area, as it had already been cleared out to be demolished. But the plans for the rest of the conservation districts all echo the same vibrant mix in uses. It was primarily commercial uses on the ground floors with residences above and there was no separation of these two uses.

There is a very drastic change in the two master plans of 1985 and 1998, which clearly indicate the changing attitude over time by the authority in Singapore. The 1985 master plan looks at rezoning the commercial activities on to the main roads and making the interiors all residential. A lot of uses recognized in the previous master plan of 1985 were disregarded as not being valuable in the master plan of 1998. To

³⁴ Powell, Robert. Erasing Memory, Inventing Tradition, Rewriting History: Planning as a Tool of Ideology.

quote one such example is the case of Rochor Development guide plan (DGP) of 1994. On Colemans's 1839 map of Singapore the area north of the Kampong Glam bounded by the Rochor River is marked as 'The Tombs of the Malay Princes'. Today if one visits the site one finds tombstones which are draped in yellow cloth, which is the colour reserved for Malay royalty. In the 1994 analysis of this area by the URA it was marked as an 'Incompatible Use' and assessed as being one of the 'weaknesses and constraints' which reduces the areas potential for redevelopment. In two words the nation's history dating back to the time of Raffles and the 1819 negotiations with the native Temengong who occupied the Singapore River before the arrival of the British East India Company, has been confined to the archives and erased from Sight.³⁵ There was a proposal made for building high-density public housing of a 3.5 FAR in its place to create more value. But what they fail to realize is the value these little things have on the memory of a place. In the earlier publication of the URA, the Manual for Kampong Glam conservation zone, this area was earmarked for a 'future park' which shows that the thinking of the authority was also the same as to preserve the historical continuity elements in the landscape.

The Master Plan of 1998 for the three areas is predominantly commercial with almost no residential uses in the conservation districts. The plan also has a category of land-use called commercial/residential and this too is almost non-existent in the three areas. The focus has changed. The area was zoned fully for commercial uses as that was more profitable and residential use was not encouraged. But there are no existing conditions of land-use and ownership available to the public as of today nor how it has been changing since the conservation policies came

³⁵ Koolhaas, Rem & Mall, Bruce. SMLXL. 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1995.

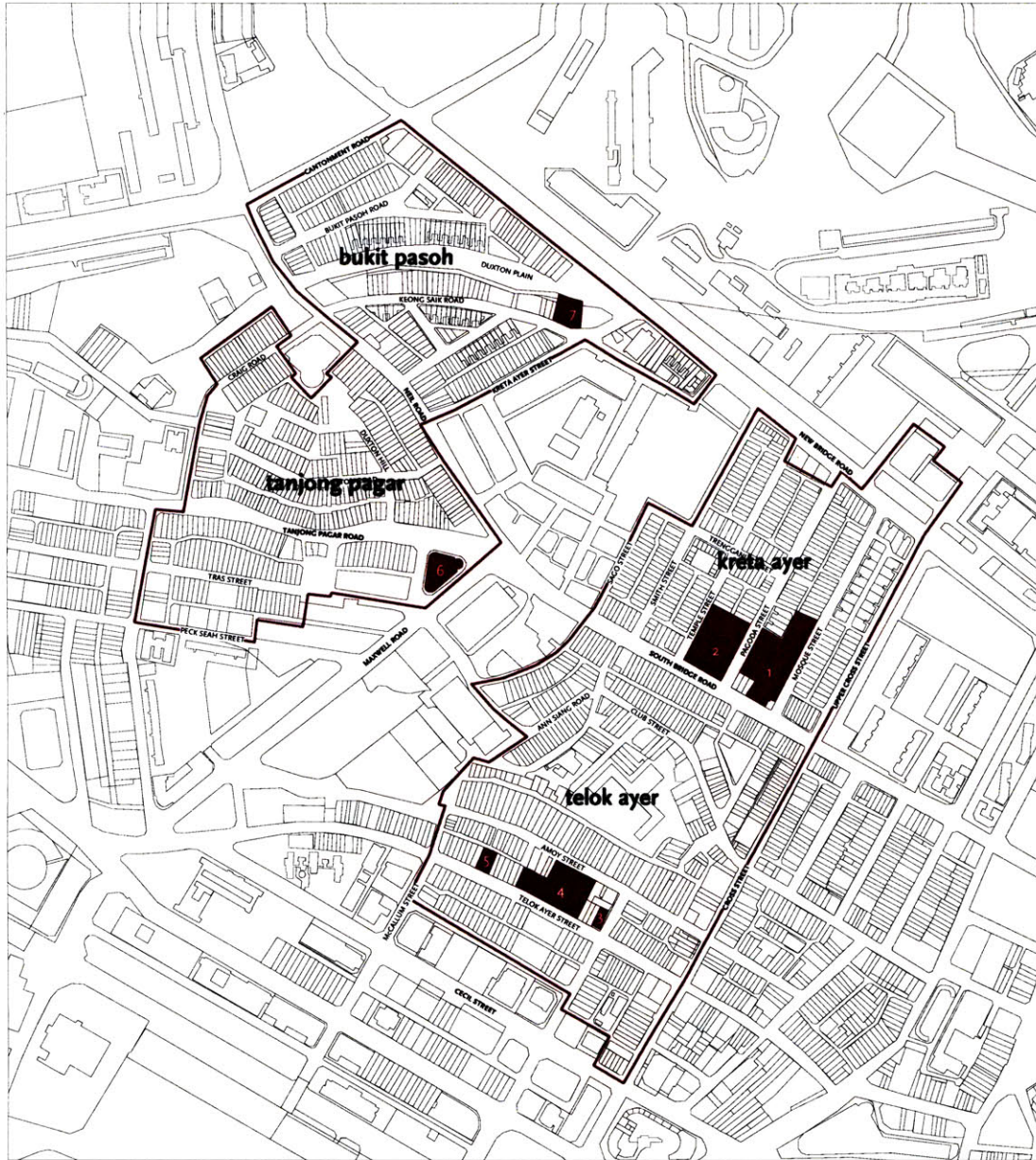
into place. The only available numbers are the existing conditions for the whole development guide plan for each area such as Outram Planning area where Chinatown is located and Rochor Planning area, where Little India and Kampong Glam are located. These guide plans give the existing condition figures in 1995. The existing figures for the individual conservation districts were given as approximate percentages by the URA as it is not their policy to give out such information, which is not published. Some of the key figures that are available have been summed up below (See Table 5)

The Master plan of 1998 also has proposals to bring in better access and infrastructure to the area, by bring in the mass transit system closer for better use and also locates land for creating festival plazas in the three areas. The other big problem of parking is also addressed to alleviate the poor business in parts of Chinatown due to lack of parking facilities and public access.

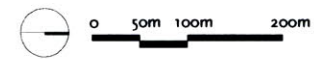
³⁶ Powell, Robert. Erasing Memory, Inventing Tradition, Rewriting History: Planning as a Tool of Ideology.

	Landuse in %				Ownership	
	Residential	Commercial	Inst./Cul. Use	Other	Private	Government
Existing Conditions - 1988						
Chinatown (23 Ha)	7%	32.4%	15.10%	45.10%	53%	47%
Little India (16 Ha)	21.5%	51.1%	9.2%	18.1%	65%	35%
Kampong Glam (9 Ha)	9.7%	48.9%	9.2%	32.2%	80%	20%
Master Plan- 1985						
Chinatown	50.8%	29.1%	11.9%	8.2%		
Little India	68.6%	21.4%	3.8%	65.0%		
Kampong Glam	50.8%	22.9%	10.3%	16.0%		
Master Plan- 1998						
Chinatown	16.1%	67.1%	7.6%	6.8%		
Little India	0.0%	85.7%	5.7%	8.6%		
Kampong Glam	0.0%	71.4%	21.3%	7.3%		

Table 5. Land-use & Ownership Summary

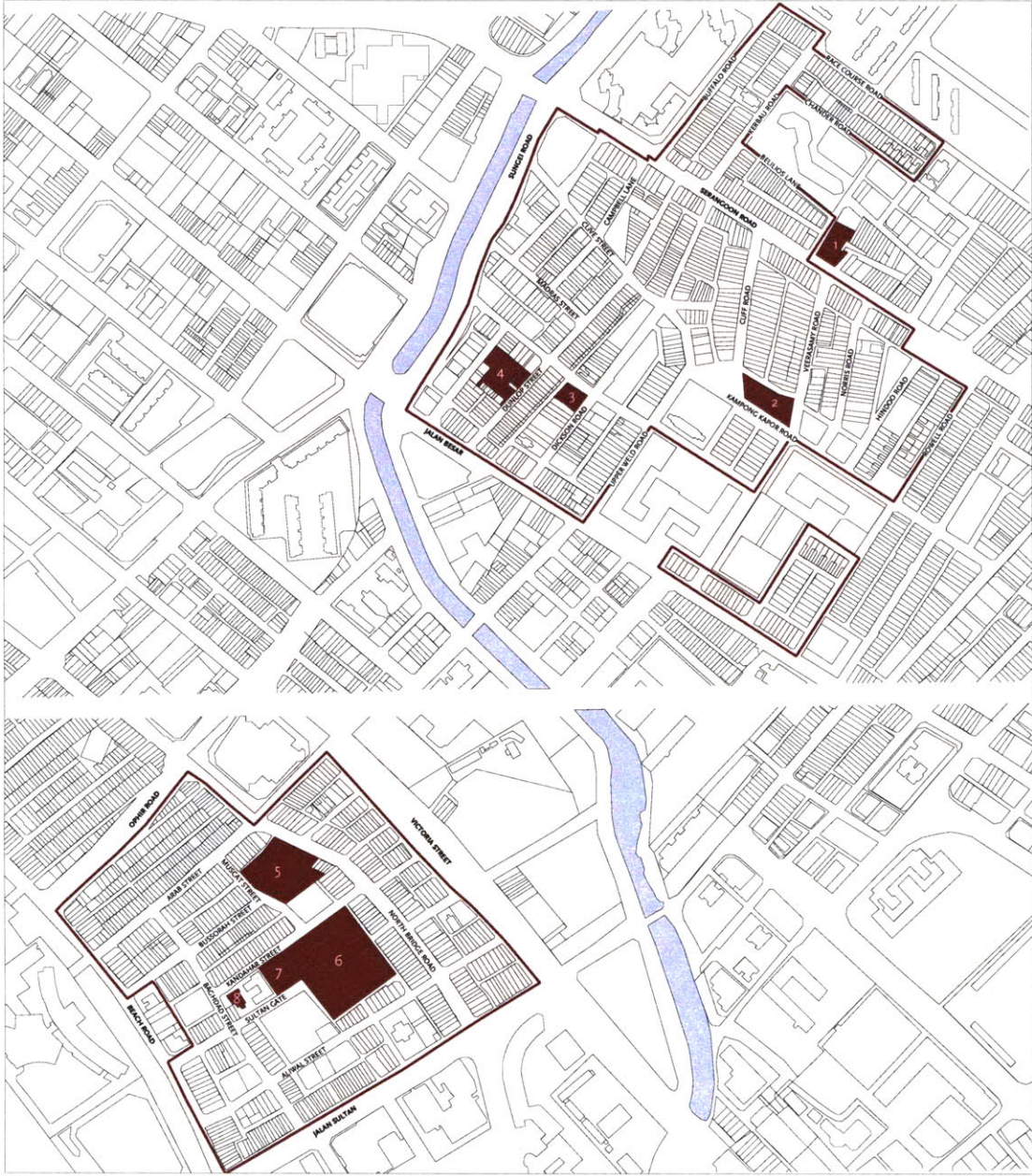


1. Jamae Mosque
2. Sri Mariamman Temple
3. Nagore Durgha Shrine
4. Thian Hock Keng Temple
5. Al-Abrar Mosque
6. Fairfield Methodist Church
7. Sri Vinayagar Temple



INSTITUTIONS

Historic District
chinatown



1. Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple
2. Kampong Kapor Methodist Church
3. Church of the True Light
4. Abdul Gaffoor Mosque
5. Sultan Mosque
6. Istana Kampong Glam
7. Sultan Gate
8. Podonk Java



INSTITUTIONS

Historic District
little india & kampong glam



LEGEND

- Residential Use (50.8%)
- Commercial Use (29.1%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (11.9%)
- Open Space (4.7%)
- Other (3.5%)



**PROPOSED MASTER PLAN
1985**

Historic District
chinatown



LEGEND

- Residential Use
- Food Establishments
- General Services
- General Trades
- Special Trades
- Institutional/Cultural Use
- Other



**EXISTING BUILDING USE PLAN
1988**

Historic District
chinatown



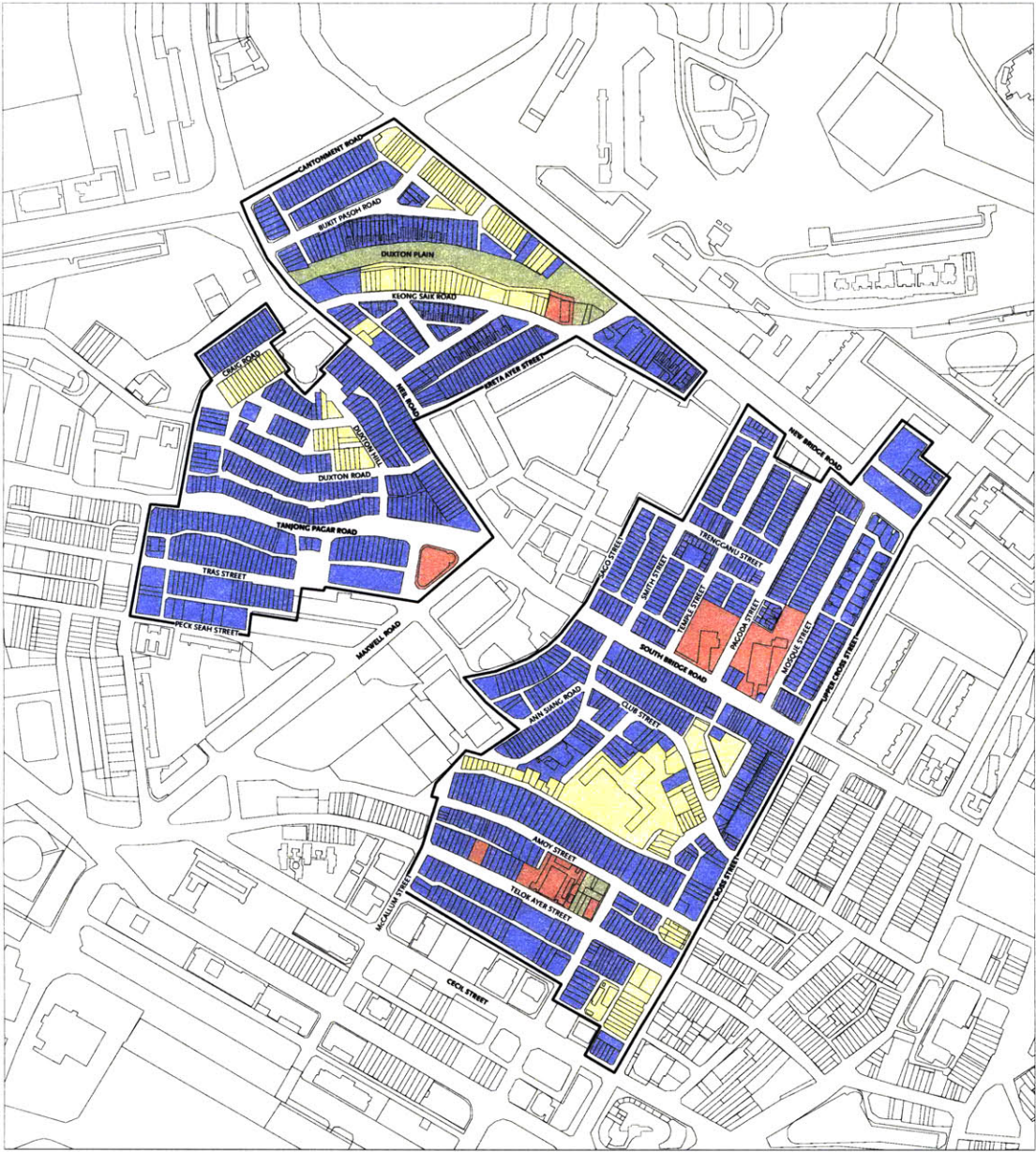
LEGEND

- Residential Use (7.0%)
- Commercial Use (32.4%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (15.4%)
- Other (45.1%)



**EXISTING BUILDING USE PLAN
1988**

Historic District
chinatown



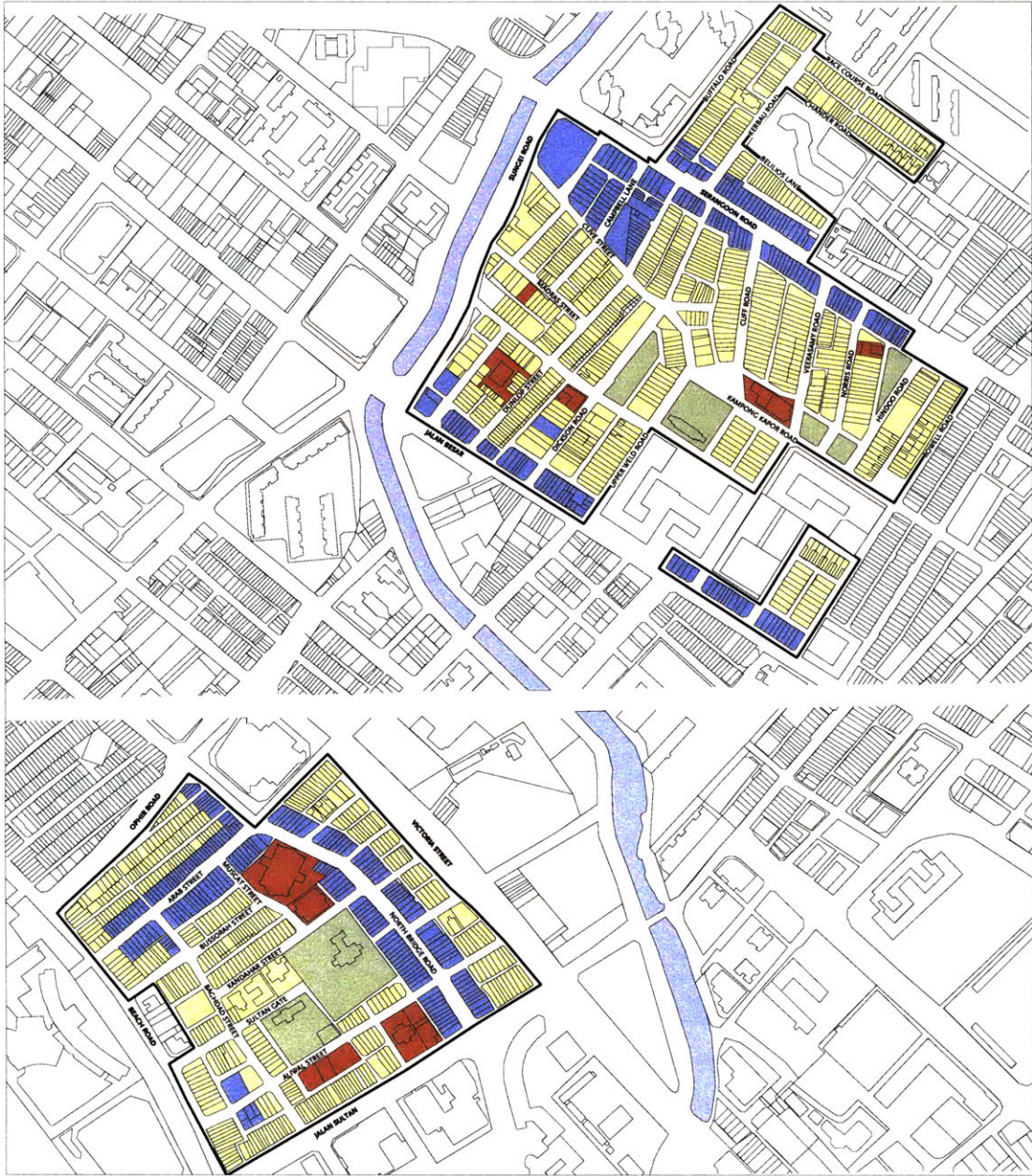
LEGEND

- Residential Use (16.3%)
- Commercial Use (69.1%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (7.7%)
- Open Space (4.0%)
- Other (2.9%)



**PROPOSED MASTER PLAN
1998**

Historic District
chinatown



LEGEND - LITTLE INDIA

- Residential Use (68.6%)
- Commercial Use (21.1%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (3.8%)
- Open Space (5.6%)
- Other (0.9%)

LEGEND - KAMPONG GLAM

- Residential Use (50.8%)
- Commercial Use (22.9%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (10.3%)
- Open Space (13.1%)
- Other (2.9%)



**PROPOSED MASTER PLAN
1985**

Historic District
little india & kampong glam



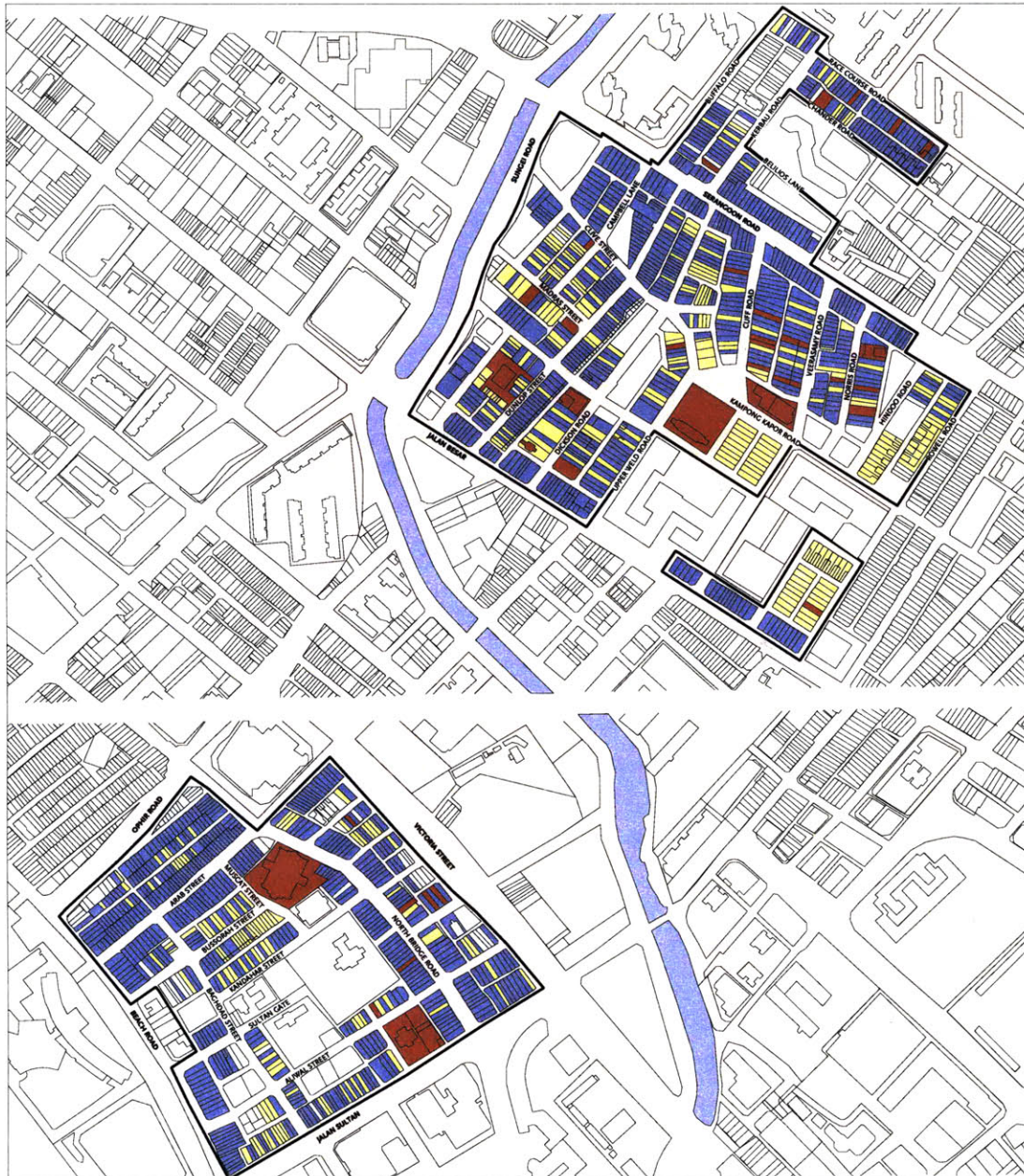
LEGEND

- Residential Use
- Food Establishments
- General Services
- General Trades
- Special Trades
- Institutional/Cultural Use
- Other



**EXISTING BUILDING USE PLAN
1988**

Historic District
little india & kampong glam



LEGEND - LITTLE INDIA

- Residential Use (21.5%)
- Commercial Use (51.1%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (9.2%)
- Open Space (0%)
- Other (18.1%)

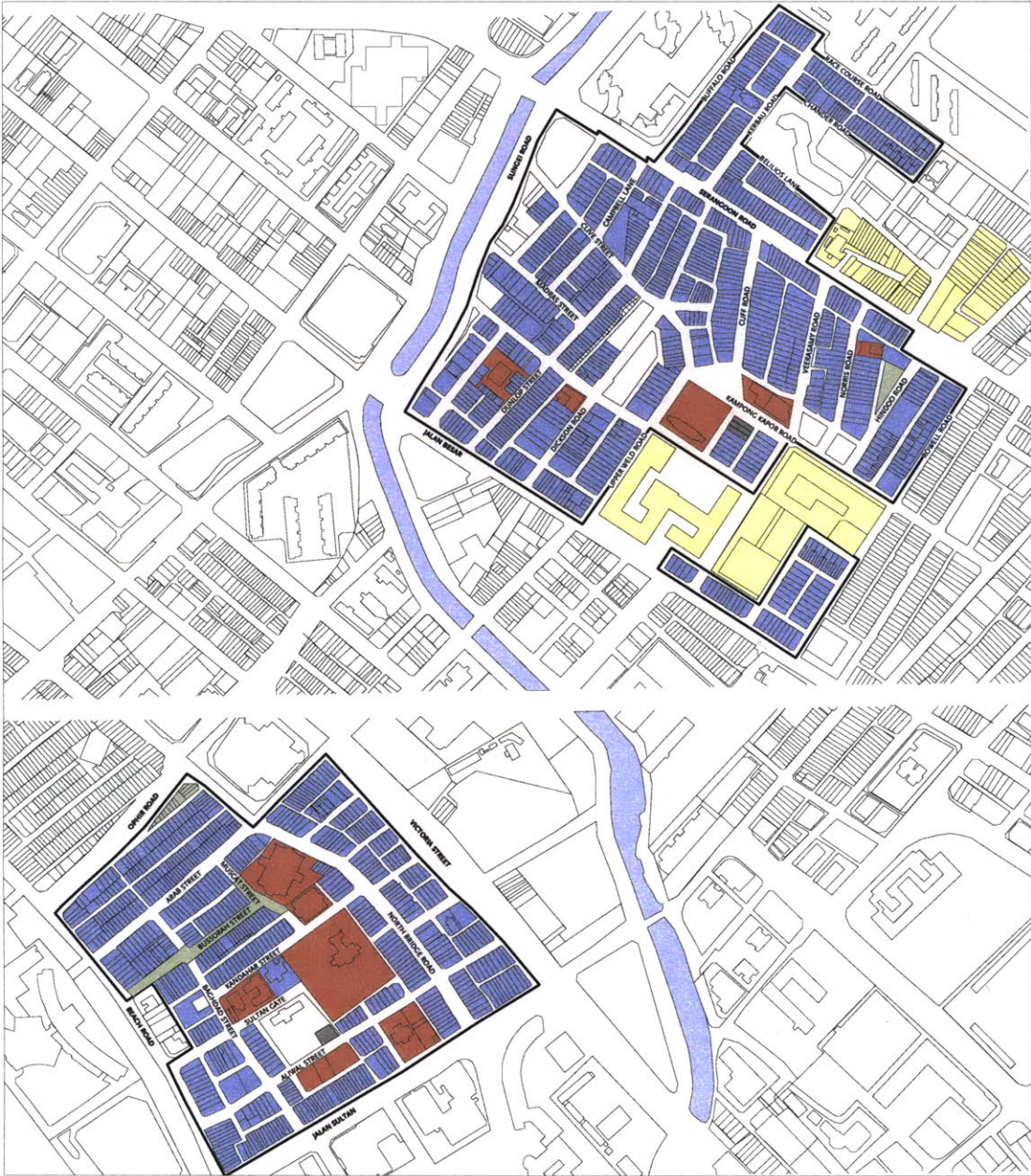
LEGEND - KAMPONG GLAM

- Residential Use (9.7%)
- Commercial Use (48.9%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (9.2%)
- Open Space (0%)
- Other (32.2%)



**PROPOSED MASTER PLAN
1988**

Historic District
little india & kampong glam



LEGEND - LITTLE INDIA

- Residential Use (0%)
- Commercial Use (85.7%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (5.7%)
- Open Space (0.8%)
- Other (7.8%)

LEGEND - KAMPONG GLAM

- Residential Use (0%)
- Commercial Use (71.4%)
- Institutional/Cultural Use (21.3%)
- Open Space (4.6%)
- Other (2.7%)



**PROPOSED MASTER PLAN
1998**

Historic District
little india & kampong glam

The Built Fabric- Singapore's Shop-houses

Shop-houses reflect the country's journey through the last 180 years. They grew, like Singapore, from humble, hardworking origins: The very utilitarian Chinese shop-house with living and working quarters together, brought to Singapore from Southern China via Malacca by the Straits-born Chinese. The earliest shop-houses were simple, unadorned timber buildings with attap roofs. They were narrow, small-scale terraced houses, which offered protection from the heat and rain to passersby, as they are linked with the five-foot way corridors. Its predominance owes much to Raffles' early planning proposals which provided for a network of roads with streets at right angles, the subdivision of land into lots and public spaces and shop-houses of specified widths linked by the covered five-footway "for the sake of regularity and conformity". These pre-industrial urban units are typical of 19th and 20th century local architecture. They represent a distinctive cultural identity of the way people lived and offer younger generations of Singaporeans a link with their past.

Constructed between 1840 and 1960, shop-houses are typically two or three storeys (which started in the early 1900s) high and are built in contiguous blocks. Traditionally, the ground floor housed the business premises, which was usually small-scale; family-run commercial operations, while the upper storeys were residential. The shop-houses were elongated with a narrow frontage, the standard width of the building ranged between 4 to 6 meters, with a depth of at least two to three times the width. The upper storeys featured timber floors with timber joists spanning the party walls. The front rooms face the street and receive light from large window openings. The rear receives light and ventilation from the air-wells, rear court or from the clerestory openings under jack roofs, which top many roof ridges in all the five different shop-house types.

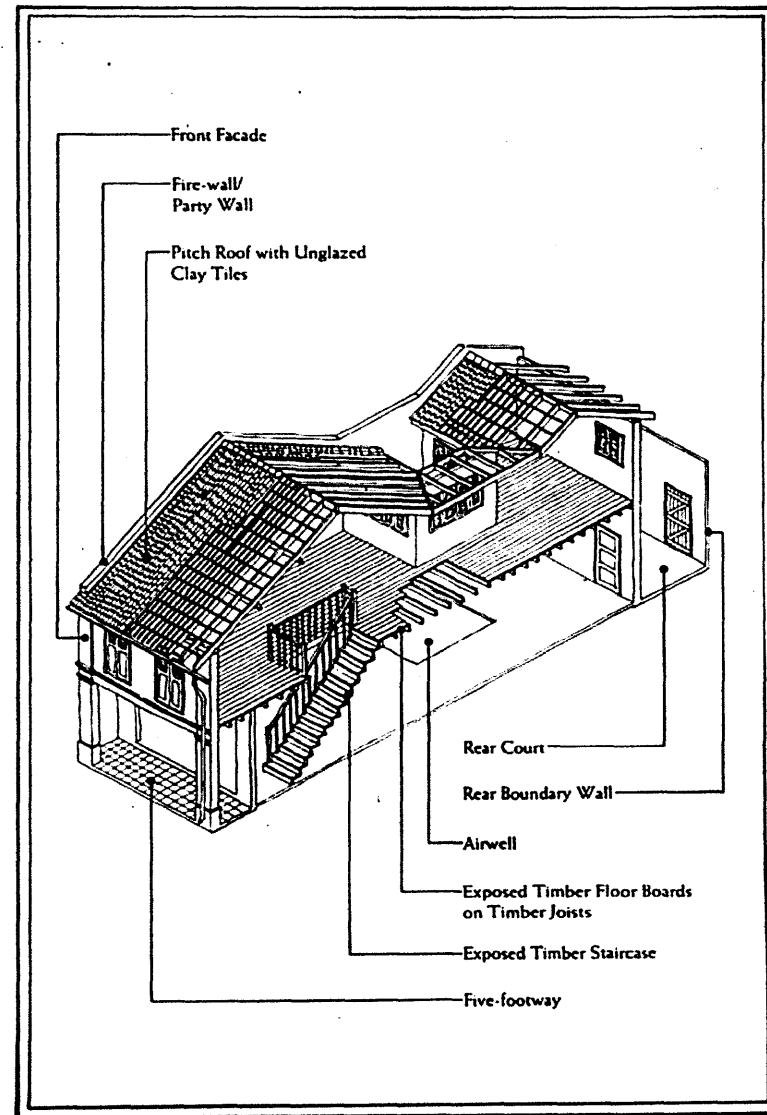


Fig 41. Axonometric of typical Shop House

These functions and features gave rise to a very basic plan. Any changes in the floor plans were a result of the differences in the size and depth of the original land plots. Some shop-houses which were extremely elongated would contain two air-wells. Those that were shorter in depth had either one or now air-wells at all.³⁷ (See Fig 42&43)



Fig 42 & 43. Interior and exterior façade of typical Shop House

Some distinguishing characteristics of shop-houses are clay tiled pitched roof and timber flooring in the upper storeys. Other unique design features, such as an internal airwell, high ceilings, overlapping roof tile and built in vents, were adopted to minimize the discomfort of the tropical climate. Because shop-houses were traditionally built in

1. ³⁷ Hamilton, Susan. "Houses as History". Silver Kris, April 1995. Pg.58-62

blocks, or rows, each house shares its outer walls with its neighbors. These dividers, called party walls, rise slightly above the roof, breaking the block into individual lots. Party walls also act as firewalls, a concept, which dates back to ancient China. Constructed of bricks and mortar, they are effective in preventing the lateral spread of fire.

There are five shop-house styles identifiable in Singapore: Early, First transitional, Late, second Transitional and Art Deco. Each of these styles has distinctive characteristics that correspond to the culture and history of the era in which it was constructed. They are also a result of the changing economic and technological circumstances, tastes and fashions.

Shop-houses; The Identity of the Multi-cultural Society

"Urban Landscapes are the storehouses of personal memories ...natural features such as streets, buildings and patterns of settlement frame the lives of many people. Decades of 'urban renewal' and redevelopment of a savage kind have taught many communities that when the urban landscape is battered, important collective memories are obliterated"

- Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 1995. MIT Press, Cambridge

The one common bond that the different multi-cultural communities share are the 19th century shop-houses, which was the predominant built form of Singapore. The three areas of study, all have the same five different kinds of shop-houses in their built fabric, but they all housed different groups of people. People, who had different backgrounds, religions, lifestyles, food habits, social gatherings and different needs in this multiethnic society. But still, the very same built fabric catered to all their daily needs of space, to live all their ways of life and to celebrate each of their own religious, social and cultural activities.

This condition is unique to Singapore. The whole premise of the built form taking the shape of the use is completely defied here. Instead the same form of space is adapted by different groups of people to their needs. So it forms a common ground and identity for all the various communities, which gives a unique Singaporean identity to space. It is the different uses that the different populations bring to this space, that makes it so vibrant.

So the question of conserving this very valuable part of history that most people of Singapore share is single valid enough reason and also the most important one. The built fabric with its cultural heritage is most valuable to the local people who identify themselves with the Singapore as place and its history. It is these people who celebrate these areas as part of their past which is important to them. The shop-houses not only give an identity to the local people of Singapore, but to Singapore itself. They are the only structures in Singapore that set it apart from being like the urban fabric of any other place. This rich built heritage gives Singapore a strong identity of what it started with and also contrasts the amount of progress it has made in such a short time with the tall skyline of Singapore behind it. So saving the past identity and memories will only make Singapore an even more dynamic city.

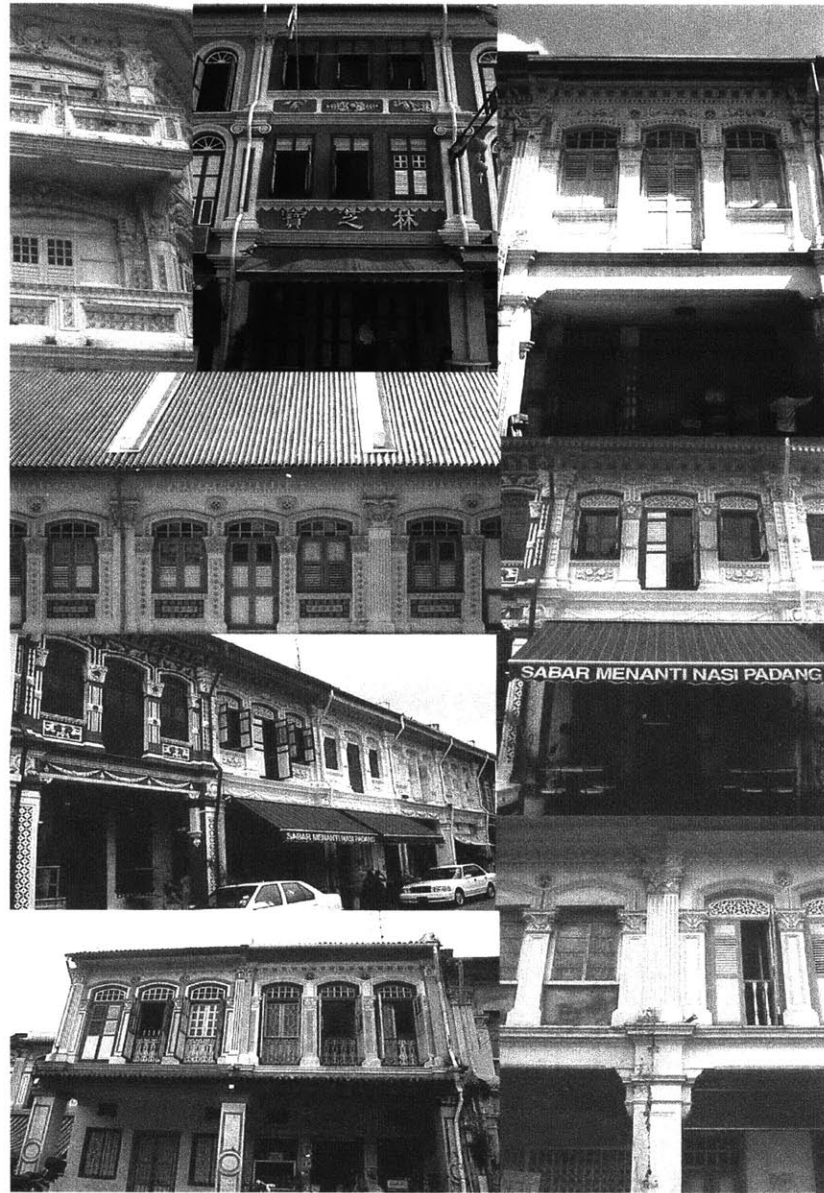


Fig 44. Typical Shop Houses

CHAPTER 4 Analysis of Impacts

The conservation effort in Singapore is clearly a very unusual one that was characterized by a heavy hand of involvement from the state and its associated authorities through out process from beginning to the end. It is also very young, being just about 12 years in process. The days of experimenting different methodologies each time is still very much on and so the degree of effect on different conservation districts is clearly different. I would like to sum up some of these effects, whether good or bad on the three areas of study in general to give an overall picture of conservation efforts done here.

1. The Early Years of Mass Evacuation and Resettlement into Public Housing

In the early 1960s, about 360,000 people or close to one-third of the total population of Singapore, were accommodated in the old city of about less than 600 hectares which was about 1% of the islands total land area. The conditions were obviously horrific and were degrading at a rapid rate due to the growing population and crowding of what space was available. Since indoor space as inadequate, the street had become an enlarged public living space shared by vehicles, residents and visitors. Clearly, Singapore has risen to housing standards like no where else in the world in a short span of time from these conditions. The only way this vision of housing people in better living environments with clean and healthy facilities, was conceivable by the government at the time was by rejuvenating the old core of the city by making better economic use of the land by rebuilding the city completely in stages. Thus, massive clearance was one of the founding stones of the renewal program. The HDB achieved these goals dramatically. (See Fig. 45&46)



Fig 45. HDB Housing Estate – Center City



Fig 46. HDB Housing Estate

They built about 110,000 units of low-cost flats between 1960 and 1970 and 250,000 units between 1971 and 1980. The total from 1960 to 1985 was about 87% of the total housing production, resulting in 84% of the population living in public housing. In 1990, the total number of dwelling units increased to 627,000 and about 87% of Singapore's population were living in HDB Flats. By 1996, 86 % was living in 706,000 HDB Flats.³⁸ Out of these, about 80% were homeownership units. At present more than 90% of public housing units are owner occupied, largely achieved by rising income levels. This is unmatched anywhere else in the world. Coming back to the conservation areas, which represented the core city, was indeed cleared out and demolished for urban renewal until they realized the importance of keeping them largely because of its tourist value. Whatever the reasons, the good thing which came out of it was *that* 'just enough of the old fabric had been saved in the nick of time' to represent a reasonable amount of built fabric from the past.

The result of this rapid urban renewal program was the relocation process. This Large-scale resettlement of families and commercial establishments raises basic questions of public policy. Among the more important issues are the extent to which those effected can fulfil their needs and wants (financial, social and psychological) in terms of re-housing, employment, and neighborhood, family, as well as friendship ties after experiencing forced change. An observer of slums may only see that they are noisy, overcrowded tenement houses, lacking proper sanitation facilities. But the residents have a different perception of the place.³⁹ An important thing to note here was that people were cleared out of these districts, but were taken care of and not moved to another crowded temporary housing structure. They were all moved to

³⁸ Dale, Ole Johan, *Urban Planning in Singapore- The Transformation of a City*. Oxford University Press, Malaysia, 1999.

better living spaces into the newly constructed public housing around the core areas and in the suburbs, with better facilities and infrastructure. But the social fabric was destroyed in a very short period of time. People had to live a very different lifestyle too suddenly and too late in the lives of the older population. The move to high rise, the break up of ethnic groups, the inaccessibility to the various trades they depended on and the markets were all very disturbing initially as it wasn't done in stages and it was too quickly implemented for the people to digest and accept it.

Local studies done by the HDB and the students of the National University of Singapore in 1968, 1973 & 1980, on the impact of resettlement on the living conditions of HDB dwellers. The studies showed that there was a high level of satisfaction with regard to the built environment, but more than half of the people in the 1980 survey said that they had fewer contacts with friends and relatives after relocation. Also two-thirds of the sample said that their financial positions were not good as before largely of higher housing expenses, utilities and transport expenses to and from work or school.⁴⁰ Resettlement also brought about an alteration in the pattern of socio-economic organization and social cohesion. The old clan, ethnic and racial enclaves were broken down in order to build the new nation of Singapore. The people who were resettled had to pay the cost in both social and economic terms. A large number of businesses were resettled along with the residents and most of these could not readjust to the new environment with new customers and much higher overhead costs. The competition to re-establish themselves without the associated trades was difficult and a lot of the small trades have gone out of business. There is a possibility of these

³⁹ *Urban Planning in Singapore...op.cit.*,

⁴⁰ Yeh, Stephen H.K. *Public Housing in Singapore*, Singapore University Press, Singapore. 1975

trades to have survived if they had been brought back together like earlier, but in better facilities to continue to survive by supporting each other.

As a result of the resettlement, the empty structures had to be given a use and instead of bringing back residential use and better accommodated retail facilities, the authority has indeed made some mistakes in flexing the rules to allow the use of the shop-houses for offices. This has resulted in a very clean, sterile and deserted environment, which is a sharp contrast from the past. Like some people say, 'the oomph of these districts have been restored right out of it' (See Fig.47-50). But to sum up the whole resettlement process, the physical living conditions were definitely better than before and the program was among the few in the world which solved the squatter and slum problem for its people. But there were other prices that were paid in the bargain, of loosing a social network and in a lot of cases their jobs and their way of living. So the success has been in preserving the physical built fabric, but fails in keeping the spirit of what made these places and what they were.



Fig 47 & 48. Temple Street



Fig 49 & 50. Sagoo Lane



The danger of the present policy is that the existing occupiers-residents, shopkeepers, others- are expendable while the buildings are retained for commercial uses. Buildings and spaces, however, are only tangible crystallizations of intangible qualities: The customs, rituals and timeless patterns derive from the way people live, eat, greet each other, and socially interact. Take away these intangible qualities whilst retaining the physical form, and the link with the past is broken.

- Ole Johan Dale, *Urban Planning in Singapore- the transformation of a city*

Another important outcome of the public housing was a more homogenized society. Before Independence the various ethnic groups were compartmentalized (by race, clan, origin, etc) and they lived side by side and seldom interacted with each other except in the market place. The cultural interface was kept to a minimum. The colonial government never created a sense of belonging to a place named Singapore. But the new PAP government saw the urgent need of creating a new identity for Singapore and for all the various immigrant populations as belonging to one strong identity of Singapore. Spatially, the former ethnic and dialect concentration have more or less disappeared and have been replaced by new housing estates in which a wide cross-section of all ethnic and dialect groups is represented. The economic restructuring and growth has largely broken through the phenomenon of ethnic and dialect occupational specialization and has resulted in greater social mobility.

Socially and culturally, the population of Singapore is much more homogeneous than before.

2. Government as Planner and Entrepreneur and the Role of the Private Sector

The urban morphology of Singapore today is largely a result of government planning, intervention, and entrepreneurship. Right since the inception of the urban renewal program, the government was determined to change not only the physical environment but also the way people lived and worked.

“And I say without slightest remorse, that we wouldn't be here, we would not have made economic progress, if we had not intervened on very personal matters—who your neighbor is, how you live, the noise you make, how you spit or what language you use. We decide what is right. Never mind what the people think. That's another problem”.

- Lee Kaun Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, National Day Speech, 1986

This was the attitude taken by the PAP government and a lot of Singapore's success is probably a result of this. The political leaders felt that they themselves were capable and honest, and that they alone had the welfare of all Singaporeans as their goal. Therefore, they did not feel obliged to promote competitive politics and a pluralistic democracy.⁴¹ There were clearly elements of paternalism in the way the government operated. The distinctive mark of paternalism, which is actually a set of values and practices, is a moral contract, which exists between the employer and employee or the government and the governed; the former

is to provide for the needs of the latter and, in exchange, the latter owes unconditional loyalty.⁴²

This approach of the government is understandable when you look at the conditions that prevailed at the time of independence. They really wanted to create a sense of nationhood in an immigrant population and this could not be achieved by taking only the economic goals in hand, but by also intervening at the social level of people. Through its statutory boards, the government provided the physical frame for economic and social activities. This consisted of providing land, infrastructure as well as public housing and facilities such as shops, offices, warehouses and industrial buildings, both supporting the housing program and acting as important independent facilities. In the process, a large part of the land, which was in private ownership, was acquired; new land was created through land reclamation and drainage of swamps, and amalgamated to serve development needs. This whole process involved large-scale clearance and resettlement of the occupants, who were mainly farmers or shop-house tenants.

The resettlement process itself was well executed with necessary housing and commercial facilities provided to the resettled, but there was not much sensitivity towards the individual. This may have been the result of the magnitude of the operation and how fast they were out to achieve it. The destiny of families was completely in the hands of the URA and the HDB. All these policies also had an impact on conservation. The one thing which could have made it more successful was if they had taken some public opinion. There was absolutely no say by the public and everything came down to economics. The initial years of being impatient

⁴¹ Vasil, Raj K. "governing Singapore". Singapore, Eastern University Press, 1984

⁴² Victoria Bantung-Hoffarth, 'the future of paternalism in Asia', business review, July 1985, pp.5-9

to achieve progress could be a reason for being insensitive to peoples needs, but it is surprising that even now economics take the front seat even in the very precious conservation districts. The very first public forum was held in response to the STB proposal for Chinatown in Feb 1999. It was lead by the Singapore Heritage Society, which published an article in response to the plans for Chinatown and this stimulated further debate leading to a public forum being held by the STB. This has been a welcome change in the way things are conducted in Singapore, where there has never been any public debates or forums on any policies made by the government. They need to be more open to the needs of the people besides material comforts. Like one of my taxi drivers in Singapore puts it ' Singapore cannot be called communist, but it is 'Capitalistic Communism' which prevails here. They did make errors, but overall, the actions of the government were examples of bold visions, brave decisions and efficient implementation.

The dominance of the government in both, the actual redevelopment implementation and the planning process resulted in the private sector playing a very subsidiary role. The development by the private sector on its own have been limited due to the planning control restraints and also due to the fragmented ownership of land which were about 5-6 meters wide ad 20 meters in depth. Also the rent control made termination and clearance of tenancy virtually impossible. The large-scale acquisition by the government removed most of the land stock from private ownership. Due to the non-availability of land in private ownership, the government land sale program was a huge success. The URA handled all the land sale programs and partnered with private developers in conceiving the project and was a success economically too. But the relationship was such that the government was eventually the dominant partner setting the direction, with the private sector almost unquestionably following. But by the early 90s after the crash in the real

estate industry, the government has been more open to ideas from the private sector for the planning decisions. On the conservation side more specifically, the private partnership is conceived more as an entity to provide ideas, financial resources, entrepreneurship, technical expertise and manpower, while the government initiates, co-ordinates, facilitates and regulates the process.

3. National Identity- The role of conservation districts within the larger context

The conservation districts in Singapore represent the old past and the history of Singapore in today's new dynamic city/state of Singapore. Since independence the efforts of the government to establish a more homogenized society with one single identity for the Chinese, Malay, Indian and other populations. On the social level, these areas were to represent the best of the three different populations, giving the support system to the immigrant populations in Singapore. These areas existed to serve the daily needs of people for their lifestyles, the food they ate, clothes they wore and also the congregation spaces for their festivals and ceremonies.

The law permits the celebration of all major festivals of the three different populations. Streets can be blocked off for specific festivals in specific places as permitted by the authorities keeping the people happy in their newfound homes. The religious centers in the three areas represent the four major religions of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. So these further reinforce the identity of living in harmony regardless of where these religious centers are located. For example, Chinatown has the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore and also two mosques. Both the Hindu and Muslim festivals are celebrated here just like in Little India and in Kampong Glam. So at he social level these areas serve their specific populations for their specific needs and in the larger

picture also represent the co-existence of the different communities with the new identity. But extensive development into theme zones will threaten the latter.

In the beginning the government deliberately encouraged the mix of different populations within these three areas, but now, they are back to creating Chinatown into a very Chinese place and the same for the other two districts. Zoning the places extensively by trade and people may again lead to a not so rich and diverse area.

In Economic terms, the conservation districts draw a major portion of the tourists. So the success of these areas are really important for the tourism industry to prosper. The social and cultural customs practiced by the people is what brings the tourists here and so maintaining the provisions for people to live their lifestyles, to celebrate their festivals and to have spaces to congregate is really important. This in turn will only bring in more tourists, hence keeping the economics alive too.

4. The varying degree of affect in the three different areas.

Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam being the very first conservation projects identified by the URA have each been dealt with very differently. This can be analyzed as due to various reasons. The very first of them is the use of Chinatown for many pilot projects to implement policies. Chinatown was the core of the old city. It was probably the most hit by the extensive growth of population and the most crowded as a result of that. This also led to the degradation of the built fabric over time and so when the government took on the extensive urban renewal program, the first target was Chinatown. By the time Conservation was considered as most needed, large parts of Chinatown had been cleared out and ready to be demolished. So they had a ready mass of built fabric to try out their restoration and then to sell the restored structures out to

private owners. So many of the initial mistakes were made here and the result is that most of Chinatown is occupied by high end design firms, boutiques, saloons, pubs and bars destroying the social fabric of the place from what it is known for. But even after these results from their policies, the URA doesn't seem to have learnt from their mistakes. The Bussorah street mall is another dead project, which is really unsuccessful. The project has been completed since 1997 and still there are no takers for the shop-houses that have been restored really well. But the URA also did learn take back a few things that didn't work in Chinatown, like taking away the one-year dead lines given to owners to restore their shop-houses in Little India and Kampong Glam. So there were no mass evacuations in Little India, but it did happen in Kampong Glam at the very beginning of post independent Singapore. So the order in which the areas were dealt with can be attributed as one of the reasons for the conditions in these areas today.

Another reason related to this may be because of the historical background of these places. In the early 1960s Chinatown was still a huge retail and residential area for the majority of the Chinese population. So the impact on people and their lives was stronger. Little India on the other hand, had grown out of a strong economic base and by the 1960s many of the families living here moved out into the housing estates due to upward social mobility and it had predominantly become a commercial hub catering to the commercial needs for the Indian community from all over the island and for Indians from the neighboring countries. The predominant residential use which existed was the shop-houses which were converted to dormitories to house the employees working in the commercial establishments, who were mostly bachelors and newly arrived immigrants. So it is still very successful commercially compared to the other two areas. Kampong Glam had a different story after the conservation project took over. A large residential and retail population

all moved in to Geylang and the Joo Chiat areas resulting in a very dull atmosphere of today.

The population break up also contributes to the conditions of today in these conservation districts. Singapore has a majority of Chinese population for many decades now and the whole of Singapore is literally a Chinese settlement. So the needs of the Chinese people are catered to in any part of Singapore. The necessity of going to Chinatown for their daily needs and wants has diminished a big deal. Those who go now are people living close by and people of the older generation to meet old friends in the community center there. Whereas for the Indian population their specific community needs for food, clothing, religious festivals etc are catered to only in Little India. So people still see the need to go there once in a while to buy their stock of things they need on a regular basis for their life styles. Also the new immigrants come here to start with, before settling down in their lives and so the users are increased. The Malay population feel they are better off going to the markets in Geylang for their needs as most of the trades and population was dispersed just like in Chinatown.

The proximity to the Central Business District is another major factor. Chinatown & Kampong Glam, both attract offices to relocate in these areas as they are close to the CBD & the rents are very low. So many backend support offices & design firms have occupied most of the old shop-houses.

5. Built Heritage – A Commodity with an Economic Value

The very onset of conservation was triggered off by a plunge in the number of tourists to Singapore resulting in a fall of hotel occupancy rates. It was the Task force appointed by the tourism industry that pointed out that Singapore in the name of 'modernization' had lost its oriental charm and the tourists missed this charm of Singapore. So

tourism was the main reason that conservation started. The initial reasons for conservation itself were hence really narrow. Conserving the built heritage for the locals was just not the intention. While old buildings had previously been demolished, they now became the assets. Conservation and retention of buildings, areas, and traditional trades was given an economic value; the future of tourism depended on these.

Studies done by private consultants further highlighted the need to develop a tourism product. The Pannell Kerr Forster team recommended strongly 'conservation of historical and cultural features to provide a remarkable contrast to the urban setting of this dynamic commercial city/state. Conservation of the suggested areas will provide a focus of attractions, which will bring to life the historical and cultural heritage of the nation. The preliminary economic computations show that the enhancement of Chinatown and the Singapore River as historic preservation districts can increase potential occupancies of hotels by 369,000 room nights in 1988' These were the goals set for conservation. So a tourism development plan was the guidebook.

Tourism is not necessarily evil, but doing something for just tourism's sake is where Singapore has made some mistakes. The problem with this approach is that conservation of the historical areas becomes a form of consumption. The genuine historical and cultural value in terms of people and buildings becomes subsidiary to the commercial needs of the tourist industry, when it should be completely the other way around. Making these places valuable to the local people is where the point of departure should be and the tourism aspect should only be a by-product of this effort in a later stage. It is eventually the local acceptance of the place, which is vital to the tourism aspect, as interchange among the local residents and visitors, is necessary for its ultimate success. If the attitude that 'the built fabric should be retained,

but the people can go' continues, then the areas will lose their present identity, spontaneity and appeal to all levels of the population, and instead become a form of specialty shopping/entertainment district with a certain ethnic flavor. The new scheme of the tourism board in creating theme zones has the danger of doing just that. Another economically driven result was the sale of restored shop-houses as discussed in the earlier sections. The authority stood to make huge profits from selling the shop-houses to private offices and design firms at really high turn around prices after restoration. This has largely led to the places turning into ghost towns, with no people around during the day and absolutely dismal at nights in parts of Chinatown.

6. New Efforts for Revival - The Singapore Tourism Board Proposal

In September of 1998, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) announced their \$97.5m plan to revitalize Chinatown. This project was part of a \$600m plan to turn Singapore into a tourism capital. Ten other areas including the Singapore River, Little India & Kampong Glam, were earmarked to be developed as thematic zones, after the pilot project in Chinatown. The plan for Chinatown, which has been released in detail, promised to "bring out the full flavour of the sights, sounds and smells of the historic site".⁴³ The other authorities involved in the effort are government bodies such as Land Transport Authority, National Parks Board and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Some of the main features of the proposal are:⁴⁴

1. A new village theater - The proposal calls for the construction of a new village theater, which will house a variety of facilities, including a

temple, shops, restaurants and a theatre and spaces for activities like poetry recitals. The STB proposal defines the theater as "a place where people can appreciate and learn more about Chinese culture".⁴⁵ The plan also proposes the construction of elemental gardens.

2. The streets will be induced with hawkers, performers, traditional craftsmen and merchants all year around and there will activities like street performances, puppet making demonstrations, xiang sheng concerts, poetry reading and martial art shows.
3. Five theme elemental gardens will be built in different locations of Chinatown.
4. A new market square along Trengganu Street with wet market stalls selling fresh produce through out the day.
5. A food corridor along Smith Street.
6. Designed street furniture like benches, lampposts, signboards and bus stations with authentic Chinese elements, to give Chinatown a Chinese character.



Fig 51. Village Theater & Street Sign Board

⁴³ Richard Hu, finance minister in, \$97.5m plan to revitalize Chinatown, Straits times, 26, Sep 1998

⁴⁴ Singapore Tourism Board. Enhancing the Chinatown Experience. Singapore 1999



Fig 52. Themed Streets

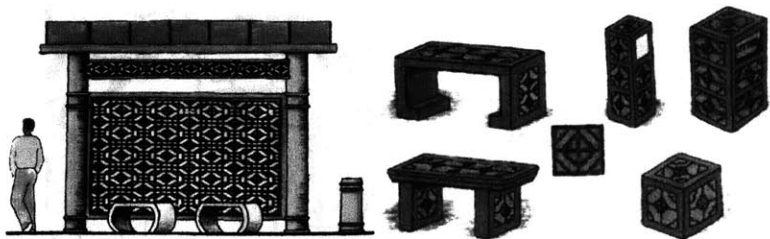


Fig 53. Designed Street Furniture

The proposal has a grave danger of further making Chinatown lose any relevance it has now. Chinatown has already once been artificially truncated of its evolution due to the massive relocation program, draining the area of its life, energy and people. Now, the STB's proposal again is aiming at creating an artificial Chinese environment by re-engineering the environment with themed streets, elemental gardens and streetscapes to provide visitors with visual elements that are meant to give the feeling of being in a special (Chinese) place. The New Village Theater is moving towards being a one-stop shop for a Chinese experience in a structure not typical of Chinatown or of Singapore. It goes further to just reduce the activities into objects on display for visitors. There have been many arguments that this extreme concentration of activities to create an intense Chinese experience threatens the authentic activities that survive in parts of Chinatown. Also the high rental costs in Chinatown questions the affordability of this kind of entertainment other than by a selected strata of Singaporeans and by the tourists. Another argument is to invest funds in structures, which exist already from the past, suited for theaters and existing temples instead of constructing a new theme park with everything in one complex. The idea of signage and street furniture is also very artificial with logos of Chinese pitched curved roofs, which is not an element of the shop-houses in Chinatown. It has just been used in order to create a more Chinese environment and is not the identity of Singapore. In the process of doing that, the cultural diversity of Chinatown is lost also. Chinatown has been home to many diverse trades and also to different cultural groups. The proposal does not respect the celebration of this diversity.

The STB proposal also briefly mentions that more housing will be brought in to support the new effort, but this looks like an after thought as they have no plans as to how they are going to do this and no plans

⁴⁵ Ibid.,p.6.

have been revealed so far. But this is so crucial for any revival of Chinatown as it is the local people, especially the lower middle classes who value the function of these areas and should be catered to. The new plans of the URA to phase out old public housing in the area around Chinatown over the next few years and to bring in private housing is going to just gentrify the area even more and make the property values shoot up. As a result there will be no participation from the middle class and the lower middle class, the mix of which makes any city vibrant due to the different cultures and values each of these groups bring to a city. So the housing problem has to be addresses before making grand plans to attract tourists. An important factor to keep in mind would also be that the tourists also are more and more looking for cultural features which are genuine outgrowths of peoples lives and not for just artificially created products made for the tourist market. There is definitely potential to make revenue for these areas through tourists, but that should not be the only goal. The two factors need not dilute one-another. Making to successful to the people of Singapore will only result in successful tourism. So the funds being used to create them parks should rather be used as incentives for new artistic groups, clans, businesses and to maintain and better use the existing structures.

Chapter 5 Interventions and Strategies

The historic districts of Singapore have undergone massive change in a very short span of time and rebuilding them is an onerous task. It is not so simple as to say do these things and it will be fixed. The most important factor to make any change in the present conditions is to decide the true goals of conservation. True to who is something that the Government, which has such a strong hand in the process has to decide. The following strategies that my thesis will look at are based on one strong premise that, these conservation districts are without any doubt, of great value to the future of Singapore, both for presenting the unique culture of the city/state instead of imitating the rest of the world and also to those local people of Singapore, who will still have tangible and intangible threads to the past through these built structures. Hence these areas have to be treated as being of special value. The government so far has been operating with the attitude that conservation should not be a burden on the government and that it should not be subsidized, but instead will be left to market forces to bring in uses that are relevant to the day of each generation. But this approach clearly has been a failure to a large extent. The Argument is that making these areas very valuable to the local people first will only result in very successful tourism, making it both culturally very significant & economically feasible.

The strategies are recommended after accepting this as the basic premise, but if the government still feels that the tourist dollars are the most important factor and that takes precedence over the values it offers to the local people, then the path of action will be different. But one thing that has to be realized is that, the tourists also come for authentic environments and not theme parks and over time with the present plans for the three districts, it looks like Singapore is going to lose its tourist appeal which existed not so long ago. The conservation districts can be

revitalized, but it needs time and also clear goals. The very first step would be to answer three very important questions:

1. **What are we trying to Conserve?**

- Buildings and monuments
- The urban character
- The way of life of a group of people

2. **Why do we want to Conserve?**

- To keep a part of the heritage intact
- To improve the lives of people living there at present
- To earn money through promoting the area for tourism

3. **Who do we conserve for?**

- Present users
- For future generations
- Potential immigrants
- For Tourists
- For mankind at large

Once we are able to give a coherent set of answers to these questions, it becomes clear as to how we can do it and at what cost we should be willing to do what we have to do. Therefore starting out with a really clear goal is very important. Conservation should be a National decision and it requires a public investment at large to preserve their cultural heritage. Once the value of it is accepted not only in and off itself, but for the identity of a Nation and its people, then sound policies and management guidelines can revitalize a rich past. Some of the strategies and incentives proposed here are not absolute in saying everything will be solved, but can be possible ways in making Singapore Culturally more significant and in the process it can also make it economically sustainable.

Current Incentives offered for Conservation by the URA

1. Direct Incentives: Arts and Culture

There are not many examples of the use of direct incentives to achieve urban design objectives in Singapore, as the government prefers to use other tools to achieve these goals. However, direct incentives are widely used by the National Arts Council to support artistic and cultural activities by private groups. Some of these incentives include:

- * Annual grants for established performing arts groups
- * Seed grants for newly formed groups
- * One-time project grants for projects by various groups including schools and community organizations
- * Various scholarships and bursaries for promising arts students
- * Helps in resettling single aged population to other facilities in order to regain ownership of properties for restoration work

As funding is often the single biggest problem for arts groups in Singapore (as it is in many other countries), the use of direct incentives is an effective method to encourage and sustain the growth of the local arts scene.

2. Indirect Incentives: Historic Preservation

The implementation of Singapore's historic preservation policy is based primarily on a regulatory approach, whereby legislation has been enacted to prevent the demolition of gazetted ("listed") historic buildings and to set out the guidelines and conditions for their restoration and reuse. However, the time frame for the restoration of privately owned historic buildings is left to the discretion of the private owners. To supplement the legislation and catalyze the restoration process, the government has implemented several indirect incentives which are

extended to all owners of gazetted historic buildings (be they from the private or the public sectors). The incentives include:

* **Waiver of Development Charge:** A Development Charge (akin to property tax or capital gains tax in other countries) is levied on all development proposals in Singapore which involve an enhancement in the value of the property being developed¹. These charges are waived for proposals involving the restoration of historic buildings.

* **Waiver of Car Parking Requirements and Car Park Deficiency Charges:** All development proposals in Singapore are subject to mandatory provision of car parking within the individual property boundaries. Failure to provide the required amount of parking results in a "car park deficiency charge" (basically a fine) of several thousand dollars per lot. However, these requirements are waived for gazetted historic buildings, again resulting in savings to the owners. It must be mentioned that many historic buildings within the city area do not have space within their property boundaries to provide the required number of lots, and would thus have automatically been subjected to heavy fines if not for these waivers.

* **Awards and Publicity for Quality Restoration:** To encourage high quality restoration of historic buildings, the government gives out annual "Architectural Heritage Awards" to building owners, architects and contractors involved in exemplary restoration projects. Extensive publicity is also accorded to each winning project⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Chiat, Looi Miinch. MIT paper on Incentives for Conservation

Recommendations

1. Incentives for conservation

There clearly need to be more incentives for making it attractive for owners to preserve and maintain the physical fabric and also uses that could make these areas vibrant once again. Moreover with the steep real estate values, not many can afford these places other than offices and wealthy individuals, who are willing to pay that price to be located so close to the CBD. Better incentives are key in order to undo what has been done to these areas. Incentives as derived by Richard Roddewig, have two specific roles in the preservation process:

1. To generate more rehabilitation of historic structures that would be possible, presumably, through other forms of government action
2. To provide a reasonable economic return to owners of buildings protected and restricted by strong landmark laws.

In part, he argues incentives provide compensation while they counter economic forces or government policies that create high land values and threaten even well maintained historic buildings.⁴⁷ This seems to apply very well to the condition in Singapore. The compensation will also take care of the property value that the owners loose out as a result of their building being designated as historic property. Incentives in general should cover operating and construction costs and can be granted in various forms, financial, legal, development, etc. The Government is that body which has to create these incentives in the best-suited form, so that it takes off the burden of having to be the owner of a large conservation effort. These incentives can be used by individual owners of historic properties, nonprofit organizations or private individuals and corporations. The incentives offered to these different

individuals or groups are different based on their interest in the conservation effort and these need to be explored.

Incentives can be broken down into three levels

1. To the direct owner of the property in the conservation district
 1. Property Tax Deduction
 2. Tax Credits
 3. Transfer of Development Rights
2. To renters, both for residential and commercial uses
 1. Reduced rents for low to middle class income families using cross subsidies
 2. Reduced rents to small trades and vendors using cross subsidies
 3. Reduced of rents and income taxes for a limited period for regular commercial and retail facilities, to establish businesses
3. To investors from outside the conservation districts like local NGOs and private corporations
 1. Tax Credits
 2. Tax exempt bonds
 3. Income tax deductions on donations made to a pool of finances for upkeep of Conservation districts

There are many possibilities, but a few are explored here with brief descriptions

Indirect Incentives

Indirect incentives like direct incentives have a financial effect, but unlike direct incentives, they evolve no direct transfer of money and no state expenditure is recorded. The most important of indirect incentives are tax-based incentives, where specified costs can be

⁴⁷ Schuster, Mark. J. Inciting Preservation

deducted off your taxable income. Tax benefits are the most effective when the costs being subsidized are for a larger cause than just the private owner and it has to cater to a larger public cause. Here the Government doesn't essentially have to put in real cash, but it just avoids the transaction of collecting from the various sources and then giving it back and just grants some incentives to owners who have their properties designated as historic buildings. But still, the taxes foregone represent a cost to the state and don't mean that the incentive is without cost.

1. Property Tax incentives

Property tax incentives reduce local property tax on a property lowering one of its main operating expenses, hues reducing the cost of holding and using that property productively. These incentives take care of the high rehabilitation costs and also help to offset the rising property values and the resulting increase in property tax assessments. These can be offered in many different ways

- a. By lower assessments of property value
- b. Lower property tax rates
 1. Assessment of property at current use, as opposed to use of property for the highest and best use
 2. Complete or partial exemption of property taxes, where the property is accessible to the public

1. Tax Credits & Tax Exempt Bonds

Tax credits can be used in different ways. In case of tax credits being granted to property owners, the owners are allowed to subtract a fixed percentage of expenditures on maintenance and rehabilitation of the historic property from his/her income tax amount. This results in decreasing the net cost of maintaining the property for the owner by providing an indirect financial incentive. So there is cost sharing by the public which helps to pay portion of the owners expenditures in order to

maintain, what is considered to be national wealth. The state also doesn't loose out as the deduction is on the direct maintenance of the property and not on any other source of income, like in an income tax deduction.

In the case of tax credits which are granted to non-profit organizations that are committed to carry on the task of advocating conservation. This helps Non-Profit organizations in raising equity capital for acquisition, construction or rehabilitation in the conservation area by selling the tax credits to a limited partner or a corporation, as they do not owe the state any taxes. Another effective way of raising capital for NGOs is by using tax exempt bonds for the financing of historic districts.

2. Transfer of Development Rights

The owner of a property earmarked as historic is given rights to transfer the development densities that he/she losses as a result of not being able to develop the site to its full potential by bringing it down and constructing a more profitable structure. So they are allowed to use the lost opportunity cost in a more profitable area, by building more than permissible in that particular area and hence offsetting the losses in the under used property elsewhere. Another way of doing this would be to pay taxes on a property in another area after deducting the value of the lost density in the historic district, which will result in lower property taxes for the owner.

2. Rent Subsidies

One very important factor which can bring back life the conservation districts is the introduction of an organic and diverse mix of land use, rather than separating and zoning different uses into different areas. It was this dynamic mix of uses that gave these areas a special character with rich animated streets. It is not necessary that the trades being practiced are the age old, ones which are no longer relevant to today's society, but the important thing is to provide the same use of

space for number of new different activities and uses relevant to today's society. Bringing in a mix of residential, retail and office spaces into the area can achieve this. Small trades which still have relevance today, especially the food vendors, the fresh markets, etc have to be accommodated by bringing in subsidized spaces. Also the most prominent users of these areas are the lower middle and middle classes and hence keeping these populations in the area will also result in making these commercial spaces economically viable. Hence strategies for subsidizing rents for these classes of people has to be introduced, so they can afford to live in the area.

The subsidies can be raised using various sources for bringing in funds to create a pool of finances for the three districts. Some of the possible ways are by bringing in profit earning office uses on the upper floors of residences or commercial spaces, a small portion of their rents going towards the pool of finances to pay for the gap of rent to the owners. Another way of bringing funds in would be by donations made by private corporations and individuals elsewhere in Singapore, who in return can get tax deductions. A small percentage of Hotel room taxes, and Annual grants by the Tourism Board for celebrating events. This pool of finances can also take care of capital repairs in the area on an annual basis and can be managed by a non-profit organization. The organization should have the representation of individuals from residential, commercial & religious uses, headed & managed by a nonprofit or an NGO. By doing this there will be interests represented of all users & will work for each other in making these areas successful.

Singapore's central district seems to be taking the route of all classic downtowns: to dead and desolate streets after office hours. This is due to lack of housing in the area, which would keep the area alive and also keep the commercial activities going on later into the night as a

result of that. But this effect has spread into the conservation districts also after the HDB stopped building public housing in the central area since the early 1980s and also due to the shop-houses in the conservation district largely sold out to office uses. The streets of Chinatown and Kampong Glam are already really deserted in the middle of the day and even worse at nights. So it is even more important to bring back the people to make these areas thrive again. The subsidy pool can be an effective method of doing this.

3. Reduced Rents for other Commercial and Retail Uses

In order to alleviate the poor businesses in the conservation districts, especially Chinatown and Kampong Glam, the tenants must be given a rent reduction for an initial period of time in order to establish their new businesses and build new clientele. The trades in these areas were displaced very suddenly and now bringing them back would be a challenging task. Unless there are big incentives to move back again, the tenants will not feel confident that it could work. So the state has to bear some cost for a short period of time in order to make up for past policies. This burden can also be borne by property owners, as it is temporary and it is in their best interest over a longer period of time.

Whatever may be the incentives, the financial ones are probably the most attractive and can make a big difference. In the case of Singapore, our argument should be that the conservation districts cater to a larger public good creating value for a larger population and so the private owners who have to protect the historic fabric have to get assistance from a larger pool of funds, either by the government or from a public pool of revenues.

In view of the existing political climate in Singapore where direct cash incentives to private property owners are not acceptable, indirect

incentives are useful tools to encourage the restoration of historic buildings and provide compensation and reasonable economic returns to owners who are affected by the gazetting of their properties.

3. Involvement of the Private Sector, local NGOs and Public Opinion

Up until now, all the conservation effort has solely been an effect of policies and controls laid out by the government. There is just no event of public participation and this has to change. They have to be more open to ideas from the private professionals and also the various peoples groups. This will in fact enrich the process of developing the areas and will result in a better environment with some authenticity. The management of these areas should also be handed out to non-governmental organizations to best serve the interests of the people and also the state. The conservation efforts need to address a wide range of issues like Urban Planning, economic management and residential development along with the more important issues of heritage, multi-cultural communities and social memory. So it is important to realize that only one organization like the STB or the URA will not be able to tackle everything. So outside involvement from concerned individuals and groups should be taken up seriously.

A relationship between the State and other sectors of society like nongovernmental organizations, nonprofit organizations, corporate entities and private individuals should be harnessed to promote public good. By building cross sector relationships that will permit risks and costs, as well as benefits and profits, to be shared, organizations involved in historic preservation will address not only the dire problems of funding, but also the challenge of gaining access to the media for the

dissemination of information.⁴⁸ The promotion of multiple partners is of utmost importance.

The very first instance has fortunately just started at the end of 1999, when the tourism Board announced their plans for developing Chinatown into a thematic zone. An article in response to their announcement sparked a lot of enthusiasm and the Singapore Heritage Society took STB to task soon after in the Straits Times and stressed that any major plan for renewal warrants the participation and input from all Singaporeans. This led to the first televised Chinatown debate and later the first forum that had a tremendous representation of local citizens, professionals, academics and the authorities. There were frank and sometimes-heated exchanges from the audiences and eventually STB agreed to put a hold on several aspects of the proposal. The events for public involvement are better late than never. So hopefully there will be more such forums held in trying to revitalize the heritage that is shared by all of Singapore.

The constant feed back to the programs by the authorities would help them in planning what will be successful with the actual users. More over tourists come to see people with different unique cultures, to learn and experience it and not just to look at hollow structures with no life in it. This can only be fulfilled with the changing, but still unique ways of people living there and not by building museums representing real people. So a dialogue would bring forth the best possible uses that will make it more valuable for the local people, that will eventually lead to an area, rich in heritage and identity, which in turn will lead to good tourism.

5. Best Use over a longer period of time, instead of expecting immediate returns

⁴⁸ Riley, Charles A. When Public Meets Private

Once the premise that these areas stand for special values to a larger local population, it becomes easier to realize that the value that Singapore will get over years to come by preserving these areas are invaluable. The present conditions today are mainly due to the fact that these areas have become a target for making quick profits. Giving these areas an economic value make them like commodities and then you just find the best marketing strategy to make it more profitable. This is what has happened in the past and it is important to slow down and strategize new policies which will slowly but surely make these areas successful to the local population, which in turn will also make it a very economically feasible project for the government and the tourism industry at a later period. In many ways making it successful for one, would result in making the other successful too. Like we have discussed before tourism should just be a by-product of good development of these areas for the local people in the first place. Therefore the plans for development of these areas should look at solving the problems for the highest and best use of space over a longer period of time and not look only for immediate success and profits. After all, Cities are products of people's lives built over time and to rebuild that very precious past needs some time and sincere effort.

6. Better Use of Physical Built Fabric & Urban Spaces

The laws that allow for street usage have to be encouraged in the three areas for the same. Use of the five foot ways which was more a public facility in the past has now been appropriated by the private owner and there is no longer a street section which facilitates this interaction. The five foot ways were elements of the past which had many different usage's and this has been destroyed completely, other than on a few main roads in all the three districts. Hence bringing back vendors or uses relevant today have to be adapted and brought back. Making these areas a center for celebrating the community's social, cultural & religious

events will only bring in more people and will also result in being authentic instead of having people perform for the sake of tourists. Hence provisions to block off roads or identifying sites for public gatherings should be implemented. The three areas will then be a real showcase for the new identity that Singapore yearns to be: A place which celebrates its diverse cultural groups, each retaining their own identities and enhancing the whole.

7. Introduction of street Markets

The clearing of the street markets in the 1960s is understandable. There were just too many unhygienic conditions prevailing at that time and it was important to clean up. The street markets were probably the strongest images that one retained from the past. People still miss this in Chinatown. It was one of the most recommended things by the local people. So provision has to be made within these areas to bring the street markets back, may be in phases over time and with strict enforcement rules in order to maintain the condition of these places. The streets were highly degraded in the past due to many reasons as discussed before, but there are possibilities of bringing them back now on some streets which in the past were the locations for the endless street markets of these areas. Another reason for bringing them back is to provide daily needs of the people at a cheaper price that will bring in more locals to use the place. Right now, the only needs the commercial activities cater to are the tourists needs for mementos and souvenirs. There is no reason why the local people should come to these areas and buy things that are available else where for the same price. So bringing back daily needs of the three different populations at comparatively cheaper prices in the three areas is key for its success. Fresh produce, live stock, food vendors, clothing and other durable goods are things that will never go out of use and it will

bring in a lot of participation from the local people and could be a catalyst to introduce other new popular uses.

The hawkers and vendors who were cleared out from the streets have been relocated in the basement of the Kreta Ayer complex and to many, that is the most vibrant part of Chinatown. They need to be brought out to the streets again. The street markets that exist now are the Chinese New Year markets in Chinatown and the markets for Pongal and Hari Raya in Little India and Kampong Glam. But these are temporary and are open for about a week. The popularity of these is testament for the need of such activities. So modest and rational size of street markets should be introduced as soon as possible.

8. **Theme Zones**

The current plans to re-vitalize Chinatown are more or less the general trend that prevails in Singapore's tourism development. The new plans for Chinatown and subsequently for the other conservation districts to be developed, as 'Thematic Zones' is one that causes a lot of furor. The plan is totally against the very spirit of these places, which have a history of evolution and to stand for the rich diversity and culture. The Chinatown blueprint by the STB proposes theme streets in the likes of Food Street, Market Street, Festive Street, Tradition Street and Bazaar Street. The board also has some arguable tenable references to the past of these streets in order to justify their plan, but such clear demarcation with additional explicit signage of the themes will only compartmentalize Chinatown into a clean and neat experience without much of the dynamics that an evolutionary process would bring by. The other inherent danger in the plan is the over stressing of 'Chineseness' of the place. Everything from the bus stops to the small signboards carry logos, which are very Chinese in form, but not relevant to Singapore. This clearly shows disrespect to the history and culture of the place that is reduced to

having no meaning in all the rush to make Chinatown 'Chinese'. The much-needed celebration of Diversity is completely defeated by making these areas so specific.

What Chinatown needs now is funding and support to revitalize and revamp surviving trades and to fill in the residential vacuum, and not superficial decoration and packaging of the place which is dear to the people of Singapore. The funds must be instead diverted to bringing back activities spontaneously instead of containing them in one building like a show. There are many needs and trades that are very useful to the local population especially the lower-middle class and it is mainly this group plans need to be catered to by reworking the rent pricing policies, incentives and by making it affordable to all. There should also be detailed studies of the feasibility the quantity of retail and commercial activities that can survive in these areas and who the target market is. Bringing in obsolete trades of the past forcibly to just represent the past is not going to solve anything, so the mix of residential and commercial that is feasible is what needs to arrive at and then work on policies to implement that. The plans for better access by bringing in the MRT into the three districts should be followed upon and implemented. This would ensure more people to come and use the facilities it provides to its people. The three districts are special in their own ways and what the state needs to do is facilitate better use of these areas by bringing making them more accessible and affordable to the local people.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusions

“Drawings and Paintings have helped store past images for future generations. The new technologies of photography, movies and television have vastly increased the scope for the storing of visual experiences. However, there are no adequate substitutes for the experience provided by the three-dimensional environment.

*Conservation and adaptive re-use of the existing built-environment should reflect the growing importance being accorded to the search for cultural roots as well as for personal and collective identity. The old environment can provide the visual and psychological linkages to the new development areas. Cities take decades or even centuries to evolve and develop. Their physical structures may be new or old as well as ugly or beautiful. **They are alive, because people live, work and die there”.***

- William S.W. Lim, *Cities for People, Reflections of a Southeast Asian Architect*, 1990.

Economic growth is very important to every city and nation and as a result large-scale re-development becomes unavoidable. But however, amidst all this progress and development it is still very important to find ways to be able to preserve and revitalize the old environment. It is really important because this is what keeps the history and memories of the past alive to the future generations to come.

Singapore since Independence has always wanted to grow up too fast and too soon. It has achieved unprecedented growth thanks to these policies, but doing the same with conservation too, has proved itself to be a bit costly. The authorities in Singapore have to step back for a moment and re-asses what they really want to achieve from conserving this rich heritage and whom they want to achieve this for. Singapore has just

about enough of the old historic built fabric, to make it valuable for the people of the country: to tell them the stories of their past and to keep the memories alive. This rich heritage is also the only thread to the past for future generations to know and understand their roots and to recognize their humble beginnings and how they have made progress into being a dynamic and successful country in such a short period of time.

“Old buildings by their presence lend to their surrounding a sense of a sequence of time. A city without old buildings is one without an apparent past and resembles, it has been said, a man suffering from a loss of memory”.

- Kevin Lynch, *What time is this place?* 1972.

The effort of the URA has had two dominant features. Firstly, the conservation effort has been mainly focused on saving the physical built fabric; secondly, the whole conservation effort doesn't seem to be targeting whom it should be catering to, that is the local people. Instead it is more dictated by the economic activities, in particular, economic activities related to the tourism industry. In terms of the first, there is no doubt that the effort to conserve the physical fabric is a huge success, it was really important to clean up the grim and disease ridden streets and make it livable, but the fact that there was not much done to bring back people living into these areas has been a huge mistake. The built fabric is important, but is that enough? Just streets and streets of sterile looking buildings with no sign of life will not bring anybody to use these places. Not even the tourists. The most important and urgent need to bring in changes in policy which can inject the relevant content and spirit into these conservation districts. What people remember of these places are streets bustling with activity which is no where to be seen now. This is largely due to fact that there is no significant living population in the areas.

This brings us to the next concern of who, this rich heritage should be conserved for. It is thanks to the tourism industry that triggered any conservation in Singapore. Initially everything in conservation was geared towards bringing in tourists, when you think of it, it is such a waste of effort if the tourists were the only people that this effort catered to. It is such a waste of time and effort. The tourism industry is very important for the economic feasibility of these areas as it brings in employment, higher standards of living, foreign exchange and most important, it is also most often the factor which keeps certain arts and crafts from perishing. So it has many identifiable benefits. But, as important as conservation is to tourism, there should also be other goals of providing a sense of place to the local population. It is eventually the local acceptance of the place, which is vital to the tourism aspect as interchange among the local residents and visitors, is necessary for its ultimate success. So bringing back what is valuable to the local people is where the point of departure should be and the tourism aspect should only be a by-product of this effort in a later stage. So the physical fabric with out any social, cultural and historical meaning is not going to make the effort successful and the economic returns from these areas have to be re-thought.

Should these places of special character with so much rich heritage be as profitable as the rest of the country? Singapore in the 1960's has a land area of 581.5 sq. kilometers and today it is about 648 sq. kilometers after the extensive reclamation of land over the years. In comparison the total area of the three conservation districts combined is about 102 ha. Or 1.02 sq. Kilometers. I quote this fact to just show how little the conservation district comprises of in comparison to new land, which has been created for more viable economic uses. So I think it is not unfair to say that the conservation districts should be treated as special which they are and the incentives offered to bring back uses and people

which will keep the place which the locals will appreciate and use more is really crucial. Incentives are key in attracting owners to maintain the restored shop-houses and also to keep the place affordable for smaller trades to flourish. The attitude of the authority that conservation should not be subsidized, but survive only on market forces will only result in the areas being absorbed by the strong real estate markets of the central business district, driving out any residential population which survives now and will also remove commercial and retail uses that are useful to the local people. So incentives to owners and other private organizations in the form of tax benefits, transfer of developmental rights and other development concessions should be introduced.

Again with the uses, it doesn't mean that we have to bring back uses not relevant to the day and age. The fossilization of trades and lifestyles that existed before conservation would just create an artificial museum like place and to 'Disneyfied' environments. Making these areas based on theme zones will only make it unauthentic and unsuccessful even more. The success of conservation therefore lies in adaptive reuse of these conserved buildings, making them relevant to the changing needs and feelings of the place. The right mix of the tangible and the intangible is what is needed. The intangibles and values that people look for can be realized only through a dialogue with the people who can make it successful, that is the local population of Singapore. So the old attitudes of 'we know what is best for our people' have to go and there should be more involvement from peoples groups and the private sector. So the bottom line for conservation should be, to conserve without stifling development; to adapt conserved buildings to modern viable uses, instead of freezing them for posterity with irrelevant uses in our day-to-day lives and to get more involvement from the private sector in creating more innovative solutions for the areas.

Singapore has achieved enormous progress in a very short period of time. It has provided its people with the best housing & living standards, keeping all these factors in mind, one thing it needs to achieve is to provide the right kind of development for the conservation districts. Mistakes have been made, but there are several reasons which might have led them to do that, but it is never too late to reverse the process of making the wealth they have in these conservation districts valuable to its own people as a result of which there will be enormous benefits to the identity of the Nation & also for the tourism industry. So they have to realize the social & cultural values these areas stand for.

Once the intrinsic value of these areas are understood and appreciated, then conservation of built heritage becomes easier. In Singapore the tangibles are conserved to a great extent and the need now is to go forward with the right attitude to be guardians for the past and to pass it on to the future. The good attitudes will eventually lead to good intentions in providing a better link with history and memories of the past, which further reinforce the identity, cultural heritage and thus the historical continuity which are expressed in our life styles and built environment. Only then will the old built fabric with the right spirit embody intangible values and meanings and make it culturally significant which will also result in making the place economically feasible.

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