Field Report

The “Night Zone” Storyline: Boat Quay, Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay

HENG CHYE KIANG AND VIVIENNE CHAN

This article focuses on the Singapore River as the nucleus around which modern Singapore developed. While the importance of the river grew initially as a direct result of its ideal location and its role in Singapore’s development as a port, its significance, in time, came to encompass far more than mere commercial functionality. The article seeks to examine the changing agendas behind the conservation and revitalization of the Singapore River and the subsequent transformation of their ideals: from providing socio-cultural cohesiveness and continuity, to becoming primarily a vehicle for tourism.

On July 25, 1996, an article in The Straits Times reported that the government of Singapore had “approved an initial budget of $600 million to start off a plan to turn Singapore into a regional tourism capital that should attract 10 million tourists and some $16 billion in tourist revenue by the year 2000.” The article went on to explain that a national tourism plan, Tourism 21, was being launched, and that among its key recommendations would be the creation of eleven distinct tourist districts, or themed zones, that would repackage existing attractions with a “unifying character or storyline.”

One of the themed zones is “The Night Zone,” centered along what used to be the economic lifeline of Singapore, the Singapore River. This area, encompassing Boat Quay, Clark Quay, and Robertson Quay, was once the heart of a thriving port until economic success and changing naval technology rendered it obsolete. The sun has indeed set on the transshipment and warehousing activities that used to dominate the riverside. The boats and barges that were once common there have been moved to new locations, and conservation efforts, begun in earnest in the late 1980s, have given new life and character to each of the quays.

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Today, while much of the physical fabric has been saved from the bulldozer, all else has changed. New forms of economic activity have moved in. Another storyline has taken over. Yet, prior to the announcement of the themed-zones program three years ago, the conservation and revitalization of the riverside areas had other goals. According to S. Rajaratnam, one of these had been to “give a sense of cohesion, continuity and identity,” because “a sense of common history is what provides the links to hold together people who came from the four corners of the earth.” In short, the conservation of urban heritage was to provide a “social glue.”

This report examines how this conservation/revitalization process has been transformed by the more recent strategy of theming the river.

THE SINGAPORE RIVER, PAST AND PRESENT

For 40 years after the initial establishment of Singapore as a trading hub of the British Empire, the Singapore River was the focal point of a flourishing commercial center that grew up around the port, with subsidiary trading areas emerging in the Rochore and Kallang Rivers.

Today the Singapore River winds through the heart of the city center much as it did in the early 1800s. But it has borne silent witness to the sequence of events that has created the modern city-state. Today, the river’s visual backdrop is dominated by the soaring skyscrapers of the city’s central business district and the conserved shophouses and godowns of Boat Quay, Clarke Quay, and Robertson Quay. Yet while the river may no longer be a working river, its historical significance has not waned. It serves as a physical reminder of the island nation’s humble origins as an entrepôt port, founded by Sir Stamford Raffles and built up through the toil of immigrants from all reaches of Asia.1

In Singapore’s early days, travelers customarily approached the island from the south (Peninsular Malaysia lies to the north), arriving through the mouth of the river. The focal points of activity and center of trade were thus the Singapore River estuary and the beach fronting the river plain. Merchants came from all around the region to trade, and as they approached, their impression was of a hive of activity. Scores of twakows and bumboats crowded the river, berthed four to five vessels deep; goods were loaded and unloaded along the riverbanks by lightermen; and godowns and warehouses hummed with activity (Fig. 1). In the early days of the colony witnesses reported, “the port of Singapore was crammed full of shipping, ketches, sloops, frigates, two-and-a-half masters, schooners, junkos from China, Annam and Siam, and Boats from Borneo.”2 The manmade banks of South Boat Quay housed the merchants’ godowns and businesses, while the larger warehouses were set up by the banks at North Boat Quay (now known as Clarke Quay). Meanwhile, the North Bank of the River (now Empress Place) was reserved for government buildings, and a site was leveled for the creation of Commercial Square (now Raffles Place).

Many things to many people, the river had different connotations for the diverse communities of colonial Singapore. To the British and European officials, its North Bank provided a pleasant locale for work and recreation as well as the strategic locale for an imperial outpost of great significance. Raffles wrote of Singapore: “A more commanding and promising Station for the protection and improvement of all our interests in this quarter cannot be conceived. It is impossible to conceive of a place combining more advantages; it is within a week’s sail to China, still closer to Siam, Cochin-China & C. in the very heart of the Archipelago.”3 Meanwhile, to the Chinese merchants living and working in the shophouses along Boat Quay, the river was a growing source of personal wealth, and the daily stream of transactions and survey of goods from the South Bank held the promise of economic prosperity. Finally, to the hundreds of immigrants and coolies working along the quays and on the berthed bumboats, the river was a source of economic livelihood as well as the stage around which their lives revolved. Such workers toiled during the day along its banks, and they ate, slept and gambled on its bridges and in the adjoining streets after work. Known as Bu Ye Tian, the river and its surrounds exhibited a frenetic pace of activity around the clock, with peddlers, storytellers, and noodle sellers gathering amidst the laborers and twakow people.

Buoyed by its prime geographic position, its status as a free port, and the government’s policy of complete freedom for mercantile interests, within the first five years of its establishment the port had secured a position as the prime entrepôt for the region. It served as both a center of exchange for produce from Indochina, Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, and the Indonesian Archipelago, as well as a distribution center for merchandise from India, China and Europe.

A measure of the port’s rapid growth can be seen in the numbers of ships that stopped to on- or off-load goods. Singapore hosted 139 square-rigged vessels in 1822; but by 1834 the total number of such vessels had increased to 517, with a recorded total tonnage of 156,513 NRT (Net Registered Tons).7 Congestion of the river began to set in, and the lightering of cargo became a problem. The introduction of the first steamship service in Singapore in 1845 and the subsequent opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 exacerbated the problem, as there was no existing wharage at the river port. Additionally, coal for steam-powered vessels had to be brought in by sailing lighters, stored along the river, and brought back out to arriving ships — a tedious operation that not only held up bunkering operations, but posed a threat to the lighters when weather conditions were unfavorable.

Keppel Harbour (then known as New Harbour) was thus opened in 1849 and developed rapidly for the next 50 years. From its opening, ocean shipping favored the deep waters of the Keppel wharves, while the Singapore River continued to play host to coastal shipping.8 By the 1970s, however, the river’s role in Singapore’s port activities had been mostly superseded by

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technological advances and the practical benefits offered by the newer port areas, which could handle large container ships.9

Ultimately, the degeneration of the river’s well-being came as a direct result of its importance and centrality to Singapore’s trade. Yet, ironically, this physical deterioration occurred in conjunction with its waning economic importance. The early industries of Singapore, such as gambier- and sago-processing, also contributed to the pollution problem, as did the indiscriminate dumping and sewage disposal that occurred all along its length where settlements had sprung up. Used both for sewage and waste disposal and as a source for irrigation water and water for washing farm animals, the river soon became a “dreadful barrage of smells,”10 with all manner of human, animal and vegetable waste to be found in its basins.

By the 1950s, with water reserves on the island becoming severely strained, the river had become totally untenable as a domestic water source. It was not until the 1970s, however, that the government began to attempt to alleviate the situation, spurred by the severity of the pollution, along with Singapore’s exploding population, growing concerns for public health, and rising demand for a reliable supply of good water for newly built housing estates.

THE CLEAN-UP OF THE SINGAPORE RIVER

At the opening ceremony of the Upper Peirce Reservoir on February 27, 1977, then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew announced:

\[\text{It should be a way of life to keep the water clean. To keep every stream, every culvert, every rivulet free from unnecessary pollution. . . . I think that the Ministry of Environment should make it a target. In ten years time let us have fishing in the Singapore River and fishing in the Kallang River. It can be done.}^9\]

So began the rehabilitation of the Singapore River and the fundamental shift away from its role as a working river to that of a recreational waterfront. The ensuing river clean-up was therefore the result of both environmental concern and the changing economic tides of the port industry. Despite pressure from the public against moving the bumboats from the river, it was felt that their clearing away was a necessary sacrifice in the name of progress. The last *tukow* left the Singapore River in September 1983, and a Clean Rivers
Commemoration was held in September 1987. The key stated motivations of the Ministry of Environment in precipitating the river clean-up were its interests in developing the river as a public resource for general enjoyment, in “seeing rivers flowing with clean water, teeming with fish,” and in the introduction of “recreation activities on the nice river banks.”

In celebration of the river’s new lease of life, a number of events were coordinated. Boat races were held, with all manner of craft, including dragon boats, pedal-boats, rubber rafts, and speedboats plying the freshly cleaned river. A River Carnival was organized by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board, featuring fishing competitions, street vaung and variety shows by the river and on bumboats or pontoons. A mass swim across the river was even undertaken by the Telok Ayer Constituency. Nonetheless, after the noise of the initial festivities had died down, the river and its quays were again quiet. The river was clean, but empty — its former vitality departed with the trade, coolies and bumboats, and its neighboring shophouses uninhabited and destitute. New uses had to be found for the river and its surrounds.

CONSERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF THE SINGAPORE RIVER

The clean-up of the Singapore River coincided with the deployment of a Tourism Task Force in 1984 to investigate the causes behind the sudden drop in tourist arrivals for the year 1983. The report of the Task Force indicated that the drop was due, in part, to the devastating effects of urban renewal on large parts of the old city of Singapore, with many old buildings and districts falling victim to the driving force of wholesale redevelopment. Its report stated explicitly that in the effort to modernize, Singapore had “removed aspects of our Oriental mystique and charm which are best symbolized in old buildings, traditional activities and bustling roadside activities such as the ‘pasar malam.’” It recommended that urgent action be taken to address the problem. The report also highlighted the fact that the recent clean-up of the Singapore River had “opened up numerous prospects to develop it into a unique tourist attraction that [would] appeal to a diverse mix of tourists of all nationalities. If properly developed, it [could] bring back romance and life into the inner city.”

Along with the government’s disquiet over the ailing state of the tourist industry, another concern added impetus to the plans for the redevelopment of the Singapore River. In his speech on April 28, 1984, then-Second Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. S. Rajaratnam commented that,

> A sense of history is what provides the links to hold together a people who came from the four corners of the earth.

> Because our history is short and because what is worth preserving from the past are not all that plentiful, we should try to save what is worthwhile from the past from the vandal-

> ism of the speculator and the developer, from a government and a bureaucracy which believes that anything that cannot be translated into cold cash is not worth investing in."

The speech was a watershed for the conservation movement in Singapore and marked the beginning of an active involvement on the part of the government. As Brenda Yeoh has written, while “the ‘preservation of Singapore’s historical and architectural heritage’ was explicitly written into policy guidelines . . . , little of these intentions were translated into actions prior to the 1980s.” While private (and mainly elite) groups like the Singapore Heritage Society had advocated the need for conservation from the 1980s, they had had only limited success due largely to the lack of government support for their initiatives.

The move to conserve and revitalize the Singapore River (along with other historic districts) was, consequently, the result of a number of factors, both ideological and monetary. These included the emergence of nostalgia as a powerful reaction to the rapid socioeconomic changes of the 1970s and 80s; a growing awareness of the need to preserve and promote a “unique Singaporean heritage” and “traditional Asian values” (for pedagogical purposes as well as to counterbalance the influences of Westernization and globalization); and the government’s concern with falling tourist arrivals and its interest in promoting tourism as a new economic base for Singapore. The conserved Singapore riverscape was therefore to serve two goals — the preservation of heritage, and the generation of tourist income. The relative weight apportioned to the two goals, however, was indicative of the prevailing attitude of the Singapore government toward conservation.

Pannell, Kerr and Forster, an American tourism consulting firm commissioned by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) in 1986 to develop a Tourism Product Development Plan stressed in their proposal that,

> … conservation for conservation’s sake is not in itself a viable endeavour. Conservation to enhance the image of a product can improve its economic viability and therefore be beneficial. Likewise, conservation to restore or maintain something that will result in national pride is also beneficial.

> Singapore needs to fill up the first class quality hotel rooms. Therefore, refined forms of entertainment that appeal to this market segment must be cultivated.”

It was with these priorities in mind that the government embarked on the conservation and revitalization of the Singapore River district, dividing the area into three distinctive subzones — Boat Quay, Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay — based on the historical and architectural background of the individual areas (fig.2). The government plan comprised the conservation of not just single buildings, but of the whole critical mass of the area, with the introduction of new “historically compatible” activities such as entertainment, retail, hotels, and other cultural activities.
While economic viability and sustainability took precedence in overall planning for the redevelopment of the three quays, each evolved in a different direction in terms of image, audience appeal, and operational aspects. More importantly, the degree of success of each area as measured by its “preservation of local heritage” and “generation of tourist income” varied considerably.

THREE QUAYS, THREE APPROACHES

To date, redevelopment of Boat Quay and Clarke Quay have been completed, while the redevelopment of Robertson Quay is still underway. Boat Quay was envisioned in the 1986 Tourist Product Development Plan as a commercial zone, combining riverside entertainment and new residential uses with a landscaped public promenade. The urgency to redevelop Boat Quay arose from the need to re-inject life into the Singapore River as well as repair the many old shophouses along the crescent there, which were already a major tourist attraction.

In early 1997 the Singapore River Businesses Committee commissioned two consulting firms to carry out a study on possible development directions for the river. Their report, presented in February 1997, noted there were “too few places to visit and no defined beginning and end to the River,” and that the river should be further developed into two zones—an entertainment zone comprising Boat Quay and Clarke Quay, and a “river garden zone” for Robertson Quay.

Boat Quay, as realized today, is the focus of riverine nightlife. It comprises a dining and entertainment street that lines the south bank of the river, boasting a cosmopolitan mix of pubs and restaurants serving a variety of international and ethnic cuisines (Fig. 3). Professionals and office workers from the central business district frequent the area by the day and by night, and the riverside promenade also draws a constant stream of expatriates and tourists.

While the attempt to revitalize Boat Quay has indubitably been successful (in terms of the new lease of life it has been granted and the bustling activities now concentrated there), a legitimate question remains concerning what has been overlooked, compromised or even sacrificed in order to regain the quay’s commercial and economic health. Despite the few half-heated, obligatory attempts at including “heritage” items such as bumboats (as river-taxis for ferrying tourists), nowhere in the current scheme is there a significant reminder of the history of the place and its laboring pioneers. Indeed, as Yeoh has pointed out, “Boat Quay has been described by one journalist as ‘an unremitting row of watering holes’ with a reputation for drunk-
erness and teenage catfights with little to remind one of ‘the toil and tears of the immigrant generation of Singaporeans’ who used to work on the River.”

Clarke Quay, like Boat Quay, was planned as a commercial entertainment district. The key difference between the two projects, however, was that the former was conceptualized as a themed festival village to be developed whole by a single developer, rather than a collection of independent, privately owned businesses (FIGS. 4, 5). Sold through the Sale of Sites Programme in 1989 to DBS Land, and completed in 1992-93, Clarke Quay shows little of the diversity that gives Boat Quay its distinctiveness and personality. Targeted primarily at mass- or package-tourist and family groups, the development has endeavored to present itself as a “waterfront marketplace.” To achieve this image, it had made prolific use of period street furniture (for example, gas lamps and wrought-iron benches), and a former roundabout has been converted into a “village green” with a gazebo used for live band performances. A Disney-style adventure ride has been constructed through refurbished, air-conditioned godowns “showcasing the 100-year old history of Clarke Quay and the traditions of the Singapore River.” Traditional tradespeople such as clog-makers and street barbers have been placed at strategic locations to enhance the nostalgic appeal of the development. And tourists can buy tidbits, handicrafts, and various souvenirs disguised as ethnic merchandise from pushcarts. The aim of all this has ostensibly been to bring back the street life and recreate the atmosphere of the past era. But the net result has been to establish a tourist zone that has little appeal to local people either in terms of services offered or identification with the past. This is evident in the fact that the area is all but deserted most of the day, and only comes to life in the evenings and on weekends. Nevertheless, the fact that the “carnival and festival village” themes have little to do with the working history of Clarke Quay has not deterred the developer from marketing the area as the re-creation of the “Singapore of the 1930s.”

The third former riverside area, Robertson Quay, starts upstream of Clemenceau Road and extends to Kim Seng Road. Here, approximately 3,400 apartments are slated to be built as part of the government’s bid to revitalize residential development along the river. In keeping with the river garden theme proposed by the Singapore River Businesses Committee, the mostly residential area will have a lot of greenery between buildings and will feature shaded waterside promenades along with shopping malls, hotels, condominiums and service apartments. Unlike Boat Quay (with its diverse small parcels) and Clarke Quay (with its single developer), Robertson Quay is being developed by a number of big developers, each looking to establish an individual identity and achieve product differentiation through the marketing of a specific lifestyle, image and flavor.

Overall, in relation to the conservation and the preservation of heritage as part of the redevelopment of the quay areas, the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s (URA) official position is evident from the following statement by one of its former directors: “We see our heritage buildings and areas as living areas, living museums. Not as a museum-museum. Clarke Quay does a bit of that. But it cannot be expected that every conservation area become a museum-museum.” But the degree to which even such a limited objective is being met in present redevelopment efforts is subject to dispute. While Boat Quay is inarguably thriving, and the eventual success of Robertson Quay cannot yet be ascertained, the quality of animation in Clarke Quay is far from being either a “living museum” or a “museum-museum.”

The following proclamation (from the Tourist Product Development Plan) reveals and reiterates the relative importance of the marketability of conserved areas to tourists in the overall scheme of things:

**Strong emphasis has been placed in the revitalisation of our historical areas into tourist attractions. This affords Singapore the opportunity to have something unique, not easily duplicated in other countries of the world in such a**
diverse and condensed form. It allows the participation of numerous small entrepreneurs who can retail unique ethnic merchandise instead of common sundry items.28

The irony, then, arises from the juxtaposition of conflicting notions such as “uniqueness” and “historicity” with the stage-set tourist attraction that is Clarke Quay. By encouraging the development of the area as a mass tourist attraction based on formulaic waterfront projects found elsewhere in the world, the problem of increasing homogeneity in conserved areas has inadvertently been augmented. Thus, the quay has been converted from a historically rich area to one that has the usual restaurants and souvenir shops that can be found in major waterfront developments everywhere.

THE NIGHT ZONE: THEMING OF THE SINGAPORE RIVER

Tourism 21, the national tourism plan devised by the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB, now renamed as the Singapore Tourism Board) to turn Singapore into the regional tourism capital of the twenty-first century, was officially approved in July 1996. Stating that “the attractiveness of Singapore must be packaged into a winning story that will excite its target markets,” the plan has advocated the comprehensive reformulation of the “Singapore tourism product,” to “offer all its visitors memorable experiences.” One of the key recommendations of the plan was the introduction of strategic themed zones in Singapore for the “repackaging of existing attractions with a ‘unifying character or storyline.’”29 According to the STPB:

... the creation of zones of thematic development in Singapore will benefit both Singaporeans and help increase visitiorship in terms of arrival figures, tourism receipts earned and extended length of stay. In reformulating the product, a thematic development approach will not only serve to ‘beautify’ and enhance strategic locations as attractions/products Singapore can boast of; but also add value to the myriad of experiences Singapore can offer.30

Under the Tourism 21 plan, Boat Quay, Clarke Quay and Robertson Quay comprise “The Night Zone” and are to be marketed as the “city that never sleeps.” The possible activities to be coordinated include family-oriented entertainment (e.g., cinemas, rides, amusement centers), food outlets, festivals, riverside concerts and performances, as well as river cruises. While the activities to be highlighted remain fairly similar to what already exists along the river today, the act of theming itself has deeper implications, both for the built environment as well as for the national psyche and identity of Singaporeans. Dinesh Naidu, writing to The Straits Times in response to the STB’s recently unveiled plans to theme Chinatown, noted that,

... the activities themselves are robbed of their natural and logical contexts, turning them into objects on display for visitors. People would engage with these activities as spectators and tourists, rather than as participants. ... The nature of the Village Theatre [a newly proposed part of Chinatown] turns these daily tasks into performances for others. This changes the meaning of the activities.31

In theming the Singapore River, the emphasis of its conservation has shifted ever more toward the purely tangible, physical aspects of the place, rather than toward any more intrinsic, historical value it might hold, as “developers strive for accurate replications of visible details, more for the purpose of creating a historic ambiance for tourist enjoyment than for representing a true picture of the past and for increasing understanding of what is historically significant and valued in the environment.”32 This in turn results in the reduction of history to just architecture, and allows developers free reign to reuse the site for their own purposes. While adaptive reuse is an acceptable compromise between the two extremes of wholesale redevelopment and sacrosanct preservation, the manner in which it has been pursued in the context of the Singapore River has been less than ideal. In using the conserved architectural backdrop of the river as a stage-set for an easily digestible “storyline” written for tourists, a tone has inadvertently been set for the negative homogenizing influences of tourism that could well lead to the eventual destruction of local and regional features and their replacement with pseudo-places totally unrelated to the history, life and culture of the indigenous population.33

The proposed theming of the river has also almost certainly ensured that the end result will be biased primarily toward certain social groups and against others. From surveys conducted on public opinion toward conservation efforts in the Civic District, it can be conjectured that the locals (in particular, the aged, the lower classes, and the Chinese-educated) feel alienated from the new environments created by conservation projects, and almost half the respondents interviewed felt that the government’s uppermost motive in conservation was to attract tourists.34 This is significant, since as noted in the report by Pannell, Kerr and Forster, “local acceptance is vital to the tourism aspect as interchange among the local residents and visitors is necessary for its ultimate success.”35

As Naidu wrote with regard to the conservation of the Chinatown district and the Tourism 21 plan:

The tendency to homogenise and unify the Chinatown product, to simplify it for packaging and consumption by visitors, is seen down to the very details of its logo, street furniture and signage. These are not trivial components distracting the public from the substance of the proposals. They point ominously to the future of Chinatown and the other 10 thematic zones under the Tourism 21 masterplan when our rich and fascinating urban districts are stripped
of their complexity for the sake of more efficient promotion. In our attempts to revitalise important urban districts, we must be careful not to distort them to the point at which they lose the very authenticity we cherish only to become sanitised and simplified theme parks. Singaporeans, with their tremendous capacity for common sense and familiarity with other similar projects, are already very sceptical of the proposals.16

CONCLUSION

In 1997 The Straits Times described the Singapore River in the following terms:

The Singapore River, on whose shores the early immigrants disembarked to begin their lives here, bears essential witness to the country’s history. For that reason, if no other, it deserves to be treated with respect. There is another reason, of course. The coming generations must inherit it, not as the canal it once became, but as the repository of a water-borne history whose rhythms and ripples are cherished by Singaporeans in common.17

REFERENCE NOTES

This preliminary study is the result of an ongoing research project on “Good Southeast Asian Streets (and Urban Spaces),” conducted at the School of Architecture, National University of Singapore.

1. “$600m to Turn Singapore into a Tourism Hub,” The Straits Times, July 25, 1996, p.34.
3. Sir Stamford Raffles was the founder of modern Singapore. After surveying other nearby islands in search of a location to establish a new trading station for the British Empire at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, he landed on the island on January 29, 1819. A trading post was set up in Singapore the next day, after the conclusion of a preliminary treaty with Temenggong. A formal treaty was concluded on February 6, 1819, with Sultan Hussein of Johor (the de jure ruler of Singapore) and the Temenggong. The river today is the product of the many pressures that went into both its shaping and the creation of modern Singapore. From its early days as the focus of Singapore’s infant port industry, to its current projected role as “an exciting activity corridor that capitalises on the river frontage and reflects the unique historical character of the area,” it has always been, and still remains, very much in the minds and hearts of the people. While it is well and good that the river should be developed with economic sustainability and viability in mind, G.J. Ashworth’s admonition on the dangers of heritage commodification in the face of tourism should be heeded. He wrote that “the deliberate use of history as an economic resource in the production of the commodity heritage for sale on tourism markets” will ultimately result in the “golden hordes” of tourists leaving behind a “trail of cultural prostitution.”11

An approach that endeavours to strike a balance between the involvement of the locals and the generation of tourist income might provide a solution that is amenable to all. Focusing on the development of the Singapore River as “a waterway which provides waterfront housing, enjoyment and fun to present and future generations of Singaporeans”10 could ultimately result in its evolution into a national attraction that appeals both to locals as well as to a more discerning breed of tourist interested not just in prepackaged tourist products, but in the real lives and history of the local people.

4. Tukandars and bumboats were lighters, or cargo boats, used to transport goods from ships anchored at the mouth of the river to the godowns, or warehouses, on the banks of the river.
7. NRT = Net Registered Tons. This tonnage is frequently shown on ship registration papers; it represents the volumetric area available for cargo at 100 cubic feet = 1 ton. It was often used by port and canal authorities as a basis for charges.
9. By 1880, the ocean shipping had risen to 1.2 million NRT, with the total cumulative tonnage of 1.5 million NRT for the port of Singapore.

With the introduction of electricity in 1897, the ascendancy of Keppel Harbour grew, as working hours along the wharves doubled, while those at the river remained, at best, at up to 7½-10 tons per daylight hour. In 1972 the opening of a container berth at Tanjong Pagar (then the only berth in Southeast Asia capable of accommodating a third-generation container vessel) marked Singapore’s position as an important link in the new chain of global container ports.

12. Chiang Kok Meng, Chairman of the Clean Rivers Committee, as quoted in Hon, Tidal Fortunes, p.98.
13. Wayangs are traditional Chinese opera performances.
15. Ibid., p.37.
18. The Singapore Heritage Society was set up in 1987 by a group of professionals with a view to channeling public opinion and providing a voice for the conservation movement.
21. The Singapore River Businesses Committee was formed in April 1996 to carry out the upcoming Tourism 21 Plan. Members include river-cruise operators, government authorities with interests in the river (such as the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Land Transport Authority), developers with riverside projects (Development Bank of Singapore Land, City Developments Limited and Far East Organisation), and the Boat Quay Association of Businesses.
24. The Sale of Sites Programme is a comprehensive urban redevelopment program carried out through the Urban Redevelopment Authority. Small fragmented land lots are acquired and assembled into larger parcels, which are then released by the URA for sale to private developers. The sales are carried out through a tender system offering a combination of conditions (usually urban design guidelines) and concessions which are tailored to achieve national planning objectives within the framework of a free-market economy. For more detailed information, refer to Chronicle of Sale Sites: A Pictorial Chronology of the Sale of Sites Programme for Private Development (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 1983).
26. Quoted from Clarke Quay promotional brochure.
27. Koh-Lim, Wen Gin (Former Director of Conservation and Urban Design at Urban Redevelopment Authority), as quoted in “Finding the Right Quay: Historic Conservation Waterfront or One Big Trendy Watering Hole?” The Straits Times, February 17, 1996.
33. Ibid., p.594.