

## 10. Chinatown

Some of the pre-war Chinese merchants returned in the late 1940s to begin a new trading area adjacent to Honiara's administrative and residential areas. This is still known as Chinatown, on the east bank of the Matanikau River. These pre-war merchants had connections with Hong Kong, Singapore, Rabaul and Sydney. Other Chinese merchants joined them in the 1950s, many from Hong Kong, or refugees from the mainland after the Communist takeover in 1949. The pattern was similar in other Pacific Island urban centres such as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, Chinatown was a separate shopping centre catering almost exclusively for Solomon Islanders. They operated what are still known as 'trade stores'; some of the original buildings still exist in the 2010s, having survived 2006 riots that destroyed much of old Chinatown. The small wooden shops were painted in bright colours, their front verandas framed with railings, leading into cool dark spaces full of tinned goods, rice, and cheap household items. The shops were similar to those that existed in Tulagi onwards from the 1910s, and in other places like Gizo and Auki. Solomon Islanders felt comfortable in Chinatown where 'eye shopping' (just strolling and looking around before you buy) was encouraged by the merchants, who were culturally adjusted to the slower pace of villagers visiting towns.

These Chinese families prospered, their children went to school in Australia and returned to enter more diverse business fields. In the 1970s, around one-third of the Chinese community left, worried about what conditions would be like after independence in 1978. Those who stayed built up substantial business interests and became important citizens. They are the 'old' Chinese, distinguished from the more recent 'new' Chinese and other Asian groups who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s. The 'old' Chinese families have marriage links to other Solomon Islanders and a greater cultural understanding of the circumstances of life in the islands. However, there is a degree of unease over Asian dominance of the economy, which extends to involvement in fishing and timber interests by many Asian companies and families.



10.1. Chinatown in the 1970s. (Solomon Islands Government)



10.2. Mananikau River and Chinatown, also showing the beginning of housing estates on the ridges, 1981.  
(Wendy Ho Collection, in Clive Moore Collection)



10.3. Chinatown, 1950s. (British Museum, Patrick Barrett Collection)





10.4. Chinatown in the early 1960s. (British Museum, Robertson Wright Collection)



10.5. Bridge over the Matanikau River going into Chinatown, early 1960s. (British Museum, John Tod Collection)





10.6. Chinatown, early 1960s. (British Museum, John Tod Collection)



10.7. Chinatown, 1974. (Wendy Ho Collection, in Clive Moore Collection)





10.8. Chinatown, 1975. (Wendy Ho Collection, in Clive Moore Collection)



10.9. One of the older 'trade stores' in Chinatown, 1992. (Terre Fisher Collection)





10.10. L. S. Tradings, a Chinatown store, 2006. (Clive Moore Collection)



10.11. QQQ, the Quan family store in modern Chinatown, 2006. The Quans were one of the first Chinese families to settle in Solomon Islands in the early 1910s. (Clive Moore Collection)



10.12. Y.T.L. No. 1 Discount Shop in Chinatown, 2006. (Clive Moore Collection)



10.13. An old-style Chinatown store, 2006. (Clive Moore Collection)





10.14–15. In April 2006, after discontent over the election of a new prime minister, a riot in Honiara destroyed shops in Point Cruz, around Central Market, the Chinese-owned Pacific Casino Hotel, and many shops in Chinatown. (Unknown source, and Clive Moore Collection)





10.16. Chinatown is also home to many non-Asian businesses and non-government organisations. This is the UNO Save the Children headquarters in Chinatown, 2014, with posters advocating, family values, abstinence and use of condoms. (Clive Moore Collection)



10.17. Playing majong, a traditional Chinese game, at night in a Chinatown backyard, 2016. (Vincent Verheyen Collection, in Clive Moore Collection)





10.18. The view of Chinatown from Skyline Ridge on a hazy day in 2005, with Honiara Hotel in the top left. The Matanikau River is visible in the middle. (Clive Moore Collection)