

JAY MASON-BURNS

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## Chinatown at Night

The Chinese Quarter, or Chinatown, has fascinated me since I was a child. I love visiting the place, talking to the people there, dining on the cuisine or simply hanging out. It's at night though that I feel the place really comes alive, the shops and cafés throw open their doors, neon lights shimmering, the air redolent with spice. I love it.

Chinatown is not simply China though, it's a much broader church than that. This area should more accurately be called the Pan-Asian Quarter, a place where people and businesses from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Japan and China all live and work together. Perhaps there's something about that cultural integration that I find so appealing.

For the Grid Project's *Districts* section I decided the best way to really capture my sense of what truly makes Chinatown special, was to photograph the shops and cafés that are central to this area's identity, at night. It was whilst I was out making my photographs that I noticed the recurring dragon motifs that ornament the rooftops and décor around the area. Later on I read up on these Chi'Wen dragons that have long been used by the Chinese to ornament their buildings. Chi-Wen were believed to be powerful symbols for luck and prosperity, having the power to ward off bad weather and evil spirits. My research on these mythical beasts inspired me to write the accompanying clumsy long-form haiku style poem (and yes, the Chinese do haiku too, and much better than me!).

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# Dragon on the Tiles

Chi'Wen, on the roof,  
he who likes to swallow things,  
dragon scales glitter.

He dreams of azure skies,  
Tethered to a skin of stone,  
Every sinew straining.

Fiery serpent gaze,  
Magpie on plum pink blossom,  
Sings of lucky days.

Curled talons grip,  
Wisdom is his sole reward,  
Hot breath through teeth.

Cross the Moving Sands,  
Ten thousand mountains over,  
Heart bound up nine times.

Fire, flood or typhoon,  
Fiery Chi'Wen defends,  
Children sleep in peace.

Frozen in mid-leap,  
Rattling his tail defiant,  
Plum blossom falling.