

COLORS OF A RAINY PORT: AN URBAN SKETCH ARTIST'S PAINTINGS OF KEELUNG

雨港顏色：城市觀察畫家走 繪基隆

Urban sketch artist Cheng Kai-Hsiang's vibrant watercolors offer readers a taste of life in the port city of Keelung and a glimpse of its many charming tourist attractions.

Keelung, nestled against both mountains and the sea, is the largest port city in northern Taiwan. Early development and proximity to coal and gold mines aided development of the city's rich history and culture. In the seventeenth century, the Spanish and Dutch used the natural port as a base for their activities; in the early twentieth century, the Japanese colonial government's push to build new infrastructure established the importance of the Port of Keelung for the next century. Now, thanks to the media and popular culture, the image of Keelung as "the Rainy Port" is here to stay.

In 2021, Cheng Kai-Hsiang, well-known for his watercolor sketches of street scenes, was invited to be an artist-in-residence for a project intended to revitalize an old Keelung neighborhood. This book is a record of his life and creative output during the year-plus he lived there. The book contains a total of 110 illustrations, which include images of daily life, city landmarks, traditional markets, famous delicacies, and unidentified townhouses. Each illustration is accompanied by Cheng's detailed observations on Keelung, as well as local stories he gathered while roaming its streets, putting the many vibrant colors of the Rainy Port on display.



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bft.fiction.nonfiction@moc.gov.tw

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Streets where people holding umbrellas come and go, wet ground reflecting street lights, crowded night markets and religious festivals – Cheng’s brush turns the inconvenience, noise, and chaos of daily life in Keelung into vivid scenes conveying the local color. As we look at Keelung through the artist’s eyes, we not only discover beauty in the ordinary, but also for a brief moment feel we are there, taking in the view from its winding streets and breathing in its humid, salty sea air.

Cheng Kai-Hsiang 鄭開翔

Cheng Kai-Hsiang, known as a painter of the urban moment, is the first professional artist to depict Taiwanese townhome and shophouse culture. He has painted the urban architecture of Taiwan and several other East Asian cities, using his brush and vibrant color to create snapshots of local culture and communities. His first illustrated book has been translated into French, Japanese, and Spanish.