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*Divine Custody: A History of Singapore's Oldest Teochew Temple.*  
By Yeo Kang Shua. Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. xxiv+244 pp.

Published with the support of Singapore's National Heritage Board, this hardback monograph with colour plates on Yueh Hai Ching temple (or Wak Hai Cheng Bio in Teochew, the default nomenclature adopted in the book) is meticulously researched. Besides appealing to regional scholars, architectural historians, sinologists and conservators, the abundant inclusion of images, ranging from reproductions of archival maps to record drawings, and even a rare sepia photograph of the temple's distinctive twin shrine entrances believed to have been taken shortly after its reconstruction in 1895, will likewise be of interest to heritage enthusiasts among a general readership. The focused study of this national monument—widely acknowledged as Singapore's oldest and finest Teochew temple, sited on the corner of Phillip Street in the present central business district—inserts a crucial perspective to the established state narrative in the Singapore Story that underplays the complex interrelationships between global politics, regional economy and religion at the turn of the twentieth century (see Dean 2015). The eclectic architecture of Wak Hai Cheng Bio, as with its Hokkien counterpart the Thian Hock Keng temple, exemplifies the local adaptation of a classical building type enriched by transnational flows, giving rise to fresh design ideas, updated construction techniques and alternative material resources.

The author pursues a sociology of architecture to examine the influence of buildings and objects—in spatial, visual and functional terms—on the cultural history of Singapore. By treating “architecture as a field of cultural production” (Jones 2011, following Pierre Bourdieu), this object-centred and sociology-informed approach brings to the fore the importance of architectural form and meaning without disregarding the political and economic conditions governing a building's inception, continued relevance and legacy. Divided into two parts, the first half charts the likely origins of Wak Hai Cheng Bio as a shrine within the curtilage of

a gambier plantation. An overview of topological transformations, substantiated by contextual history, helps the reader understand why the temple continues to be sited in the same location in the old town a short stroll from the Singapore River, even when its surrounding environment was subjected to extensive town planning restructuring under the British administration, followed by intense urban development post-independence. Today, the well-preserved Teochew temple with its bounded forecourt appears diminutive compared with the postmodern monoliths crowding it. An incisive review of the array of reported activities that transpired in the temple grounds makes explicit the evolving role of religious institutions and the wider social function assigned to this site of worship against the backdrop of watershed moments in the first half of the twentieth century. Singapore is fortunate to have evaded major wartime destruction, and historical structures that are accorded state protection remain intact and in use. Although I have visited Wak Hai Cheng Bio on several occasions, I gained a newfound appreciation of the front courtyard's sociopolitical relevance outside its religious context from reading the book. In addition to hosting performances and markets during religious festivals, the compound was used to mete out public floggings in the 1870s and dispense humanitarian aid during the Japanese occupation (p. 41). The diachronic recounting enabled me to visualize vividly the central role of this civic space for celebrations as well as mutual support in times of hardship.

The second half of the book, which I felt is where its strength resides (reflecting the author's professional background and interest in architectural conservation), explains the significance of the temple building's architectural and decorative features and explores this through the periodical construction works performed on Wak Hai Cheng Bio over the last two centuries. This part includes an in-depth discussion of the recent round of restoration efforts completed in 2014. Considering the production costs invested in this publication, some of the close-up photographs of the decorations and cultural artefacts taken on site could have been better composed or colour

enhanced at the editing stage. In this section, architecture is shown to be a cultural product as much as it is an expression of collective identity. While the Teochew community may be the second-largest dialect group in Singapore (Tan 1990), Wak Hai Cheng Bio is also as important to other diasporic dialect groups originating from South China by virtue of the first character in the temple's name being synonymous with Guangdong province. To highlight this fact, Yeo (p. 73) notes, "At least 13 plaques were presented by members of the Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese communities between 1896 and 1898 for the reconstruction." For this reason, conservation efforts spearheaded by Ngee Ann Kongsi, a major Teochew philanthropic organization in Singapore, to preserve the temple's tangible legacy are indissociable from the rituals and oral histories that sustain intangible heritage practice. In other words:

Architecture is, rather, a symbolic medium and a cultural technique through which a particular society *constitutes* itself.... It is in part through approaches to architectural preservation that a society writes its own history. Through an affective use of materials, dimensions, surface qualities, and forms, distinct architectures evince their own distinct personalities and have their own particular attraction. (Delitz 2018, p. 38, emphasis in the original)

I personally appreciate the concise pointers on how to visually identify Teochew architecture, exteriorly distinguishable from their finishing, decorative details and choice of colour palette. They speak to the author's direct attempt to redress an ignorant assumption regarding Chinese architecture in Southeast Asia: "the very few works that mainly consider the architectural aspects treat Chinese or southern Chinese architecture as homogeneous, without recognizing the regional and dialect-specific architectural traditions underpinning the construction of these buildings" (p. 156). But for the most part, the book is highly descriptive and at times lacks elaboration where it is needed, such as why the master craftsman from China, whom Yeo interviewed and who "auditioned" for the previous round of restorations, was eventually not engaged despite

his superior skills (p. 96). While this exhaustive study on Wak Hai Cheng Bio persuasively demonstrates the temple's heritage value and illuminates its place in Singapore's urban history, what should also be lauded is the wealth of references on documented epigraphs and bibliographic material for either follow-up research or to support related scholarly investigations.

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*Out of the Shadows of Angkor: Cambodian Poetry, Prose, and Performance through the Ages*. Guest editors: Sharon May, Christophe Macquet, Trent Walker, Phina So and Rinith Taing. Series editor: Frank Stewart. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 352 pp.

This volume is a comprehensive collection that spans the entire literary history of Cambodia from the earliest inscriptions to the present. The text includes around a hundred different examples of Cambodian writing that are organized in two main sections: classical (611–1930 CE) and modern (1930–present). The first group of texts