

# The Survival of Rituals and Traditional Culture

## Practicing United Temples in Singapore's Community Planning

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the challenges and innovative approaches to preserving traditional cultural heritage with rapid urbanization, through a comparative analysis of temple management and urban planning in Singapore and coastal cities in China such as Putian and Macau. Singapore's model of united temples demonstrates the potential for effectively protecting heritage within urban planning frameworks, while coastal cities in China face evolving urban landscapes and challenges in heritage preservation. The concept of "roof-top temples" emerging in Putian reflects dynamic responses to urbanization pressures, integrating traditional culture with contemporary urban functions. Community engagement and government policies play crucial roles in safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting sustainable urban development. By drawing on best practices from Singapore and coastal cities in China, pathways toward inclusive and sustainable urban development can be formulated for cities like Putian, ensuring the flourishing of rich cultural heritage amidst changing urban landscapes.

### **Keywords**

cultural sustainability, urbanization, traditional culture, united temples, community planning

### **How to cite**

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Temple Name	Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple (玉皇殿联合宫)
Location	76 Jurong West Street 76 (廊西街 76 号)
Year Established	1996
Composition	Yu Huang Tian (玉皇殿), Fuan Temple (福安庙), Ci Shan Tan (慈善堂)
Temple Types	Yu Huang Tian and Ci Shan Tan are deity-related temples (神性寺庙), while Fuan Temple is a geographic temple (地性寺庙) from Anxi County, Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China (原中国福建省泉州市安溪)
Adjacent Temple	Tou Tian Gong (斗天宫)
Composition	Tou Tian Gong and Chwee Long Tow Pek Kong Temple (水廊大伯公)
Temple Types	Both are deity-related temples (神性寺庙)
Adjacent Facilities	Supermarket (Mart), cultural center, commercial and public buildings

Table 1. The Introduction of Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple and .Tou Tian Gong

## INTRODUCTION

In previous studies, it was found that there are about 25,000 temples in Fujian, with more than 3,000 in Putian alone, indicating a vast number<sup>1</sup>. As urbanization progresses and rural land is converted to urban use, these spatially laid-out temples face demolition due to low land utilization rates. Notably, in Putian, some villages have combined several temples onto rooftops to preserve them as much as possible<sup>2</sup> (Figure.1). This clearly shows an effort to retain these temples. Meanwhile, Putian's urban planning also faces the dilemma of whether to demolish the numerous large and small temples. If demolished, how should traditional culture be preserved? If not, in what form should they exist? This issue seems to find potential reference in Singapore's urban planning, which might offer valuable lessons for integrating cultural preservation with modern urban development.

Singapore is an immigrant nation. From the early 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, a large number of immigrants from southeastern China settled in Singapore. During the resettlement process, these immigrants formed the organizational structure of the Chinese community, in which ancestral gods and temples played a crucial role. These temples and deities transcended social classes, helped unify and integrate the community, strengthened connections between locals and overseas Chinese, and enhanced the continuity and dissemination of traditional culture. Therefore, the importance of studying temples in Singapore cannot be overstated. Since Singapore's independence in 1965, the government has initiated urban planning efforts. In 1966, the Land Acquisition Act was enacted, granting the government the legal power to acquire land at low costs, leading to the demolition of temples. With the emergence of urban planning, united temples were formed. This article primarily explores two issues regarding united temples in the context of planning history: firstly, the evolutionary history of temples from their original villages, crossing borders through "branching" to settle in Singapore and eventually uniting; secondly, the development of united temples themselves

and their application in important public housing planning within Singapore's planning history, offering insights for urban planning strategies in Fujian and Putian inspired by united temples.

The study of united temple complexes in the context of urban planning history cannot be separated from original village communities, religious rituals, and planning policies. In the study of temples in native communities, Zheng Zhenman uses the Jiangkou Plain in Putian as an example to provide a brief overview of hydraulic infrastructure and community development. His research examines various levels of temple systems and festival organizations, discussing relevant theoretical issues and revealing the significant role of temple systems and festival organizations in the process of community restructuring. From this, it is evident that temples play an extremely important role in the "re-socialization" process of local Chinese communities<sup>3</sup>. In the study of local religious rituals, Zeng Ling uses the Penglai Temple in Singapore as a case study. Zeng describes the process of cross-border "incense division" from ancestral gods originating from their native regions and their resettlement in Singapore. This process illustrates how Singaporean Chinese used the worship of ancestral gods and ancestral identity to achieve close communication with their native Chinese communities and promote the dissemination of traditional culture. The temples, serving as the new "homes" of these ancestral gods in Singapore, became inviolable sacred sites. The new Penglai Temple, in fact, emerged from the integration of ancestral gods and architectural spaces of several surname-specific temples during urbanization<sup>4</sup>. In the field of immigration history, scholars like Kong Feili have conducted extensive research on the history of modern Chinese immigration. In his work on the changes in the social structure of overseas Chinese communities, Kong confirms the cohesive role of local temples in Southeast Asia<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Wang Gengwu, in his research on Chinese immigration, explains the fundamental reasons early Chinese immigrants established temples in local communities: to sustain survival and develop businesses. By holding religious activities and worshipping common deities, they strengthened group cohesion and built confidence. Moreover, constructing temples with connections to the coastal regions of China enabled these immigrant communities to form large-scale organizations, which were eventually recognized by the government, leading to chain migration and providing the social motivation for the emergence of united temples<sup>6</sup>. In urban planning research focused on architectural heritage preservation against the backdrop of urbanization, Heng Chye Kiang analyzes Singapore's urban planning and development after the 19th century. Heng suggests that urban heritage preservation reflects Singapore's uniqueness in urban planning and management. Using Chinatown (Niu Che Shui) as an example, Heng details the participation and effective management of Singaporean society and government in urban heritage preservation within urban planning<sup>7</sup>. This broader environment has facilitated the emergence and development of united temples.

Based on the traditional research mentioned above, Singaporean scholars have started to focus on the changes of temples under urban planning policies. In the study of united temple rituals, HUE, Guan Thye analyzed the ceremonies that take place after temple mergers. He noted that the process of merging temples often involves phenomena of "absorption," where some temples, while retaining their names, combine their rituals to collectively worship deities<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, HUE, Guan Thye classified united temples from the perspective of the

subordinate temples, dividing them into three categories: deity-related temples, ancestral temples, and geographic temples<sup>9</sup>. This classification provides a framework to understand the different origins and bases upon which these united temples are formed and how they function within their communities.

The study of temples extends beyond national-level urban planning to include architectural studies focusing on ritual spaces and architectural forms, as well as anthropological research on rituals, ethnicity, and communities. Inspired by the aforementioned research, this article takes united temples as the subject of observation to explore the significant impact of urban planning processes on their formation in Singapore. It specifically analyzes the application of united temples in community planning in Singapore. Additionally, the study integrates the author's research on united temples in Putian, Fujian, China, exploring how the application models of united temples in community complexes can offer insights for urban planning and renewal in cities with existing temples, such as Putian and Macau.

## BACKGROUND

### URBAN PLANNING HISTORY OF SINGAPORE

Singapore, as an island nation with limited land area and a dense population, faces the challenge of efficiently utilizing its land, making urban planning a top priority. As early as the colonial period, in the early 19th century, Sir Stamford Raffles, the British founder of Singapore, proposed comprehensive planning when establishing Singapore Harbor. Through the organized layout of streets, different ethnic and social groups were segregated, serving the political agenda of the colonizers while laying the foundation for subsequent urban planning in Singapore.



Fig. 1. Temples on the rooftops. Putian, Fujian province, China. Three temples of villages were built on the rooftop of the bungalow together, the function in the bungalow is commerce.



Fig. 2. Fivefold united Temple (Wu He Miao, 伍合庙). Fivefold united Temple is composed of Jutian-gong (聚天宮), Shanzuyuan Fudeci (山竹園福德祠), Tongxing gang (通興港), Zhaoyingci (昭應祠) and Wu-jinggong (無極宮).

Before the mid-20th century, Singapore experienced rapid population growth due to the booming port industry and massive immigration, leading to overcrowding and insufficient infrastructure and housing space. However, in modern times, Singapore's urban planning has benefited from the government's clear understanding of urban development. In fact, Singaporean urban planning is closely intertwined with its economic structure, industrial types, and other factors.

Since the establishment of the current government regime in 1965, Singapore's urban planning has undergone four main phases. In the 1960s to early 1970s, labor-intensive industries were the focus of development. With the establishment of the Economic Development Board, large-scale industrialization began, leading to the transformation of traditional urban areas into central business districts (CBDs). In terms of housing, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) was established to build public housing estates, known as HDB flats, within 8 kilometers of the city center, with accompanying facilities to reduce residents' reliance on the city center.

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Singapore experienced rapid economic growth, prompting the redevelopment of the city center. In the early 1970s, the government formulated a new urban concept plan to rejuvenate the city center. Land acquisition laws and land sales programs were used to reorganize and sell land, while the Urban Redevelopment Authority ensured the overall urban image. Besides the city center, efforts were made to develop urban infrastructure across the entire island.

By the late 1980s, urban and architectural conservation became prominent. Rapid urban development, surplus space, and economic downturn in the mid-1980s prompted the Urban Redevelopment Authority to propose new urban planning schemes, strengthening the protection of historic neighborhoods while promoting public or private participation through enhanced publicity.



Fig. 3. The surrounding facilities of Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple and Tou Tian Gong. With Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple and Tou Tian Gong as the center, combined with surrounding supporting facilities, it has become the core of public housing community planning.

Since the mid-1990s, the aging population has become a significant issue, posing challenges to the living environment with the influx of immigrants. Under the framework of developing extensive rail transport, new town planning introduced the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) concept to optimize existing facilities, improve greenery in a more ecological and sustainable manner, and introduce new green spaces and recreational areas<sup>10</sup>. As urbanization progresses, the development of Singapore's community complexes since 2000 has evolved alongside the iterative development of town centers and neighborhood center functionalities, becoming the spatial carriers of a new generation of comprehensive community services in high-density residential areas in Singapore<sup>11</sup>.

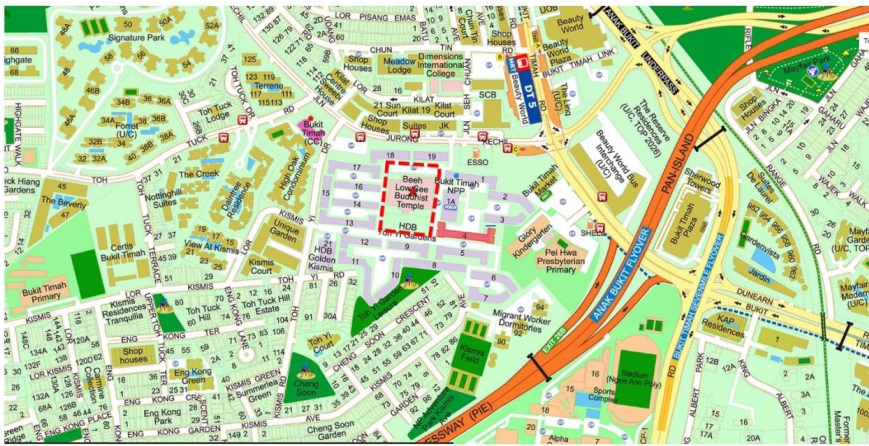


Fig. 4. The surrounding facilities of Beeh Low See Temple 1935 . As a Buddhist temple, it is integrated into community planning and serves as a symbol of the Bukit Timah community.

### THE ORIGINS AND RESETTLEMENT OF TEMPLES

Mentioning united temples inevitably brings to light the crucial social functions temples undertake. In the early 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, a large number of Chinese immigrants from the southeastern coastal regions migrated to Singapore, bringing along their regional religious beliefs and fervently constructing temples. This period of immigration coincided with various stages in Singapore's entire planning history. Among these, the social functions fulfilled by ancestral temples from their places of origin played a significant role. Take Putian, for instance. Due to a scarcity of freshwater resources and intense competition for water resources in some coastal cities of southeastern China, regional alliances

were formed. Through the worship of deities and ceremonial rituals, people aspired to gain advantages in this competition. Gradually, the management of water facilities and the distribution of resources became intertwined with sacred spaces, and community power centers also consolidated<sup>12</sup>. With the disintegration of community organizations related to sacrificial activities during the Ming Dynasty and the formation of temples, the community power of temples reached its peak. They not only managed water systems but also played the role of “China’s second government,” responsible for the daily affairs and community economy of residents, dedicated to local economic development, including the improvement of village roads, electricity, irrigation facilities, and public health facilities. They also supported local cultural activities, such as establishing scholarships and founding senior activity centers<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, these temples shoulder important social functions, enhancing residents’ territorial identity and further strengthening community cohesion.

Temples play a crucial role in integrating and bonding immigrant communities. During the 19th century migration process, as the imperial court did not permit women to leave their families, most immigrants were men who left their wives and children behind to venture overseas. To survive in their new environment, they began to utilize religious activities to build communities, strengthening group solidarity and confidence through the worship of common deities. They also established temples with connections to famous coastal temples in China, including both Buddhist and Taoist deities. These immigrant communities further developed into large-scale social organizations recognized by local governments. The presence of temples and deities allowed for mutual support within the community, especially in business endeavors. This practice persisted until 1893 when the imperial court finally abolished the ban on overseas travel and allowed male immigrants to bring their families abroad in the early 20th century, gradually replacing the previous pattern<sup>14</sup>. The temples constructed by ancestors who migrated south played a significant role in the “settling down” process of Chinese immigrants in Singapore.

## TEMPLE DEMOLITION IN URBAN PLANNING

In the planning phase from the 1960s to the early 1970s, the Land Acquisition Act stipulated provisions regarding the scope of land acquisition:

*“5. —(1) Whenever any particular land is needed — (a) for any public purpose; (b) by any person, corporation or statutory board, for any work or an undertaking which, in the opinion of the Minister, is of public benefit or of public utility or in the public interest; or (c) for any residential, commercial or industrial purpose; the President may, by notification published in the Gazette, declare the land to be required for the purpose specified in the notification.” (AGC 2005)<sup>15</sup>*

This means that, to maximize public interest, the Singapore government may, for specific purposes, issue acquisition or requisition notices for any specific piece of land at any time and provide reasonable compensation under the Land Acquisition Act: first, for any public purpose; second, if deemed beneficial to the public welfare, utility, or interest by the Cabinet Minister due to the needs of any individual, company, or statutory body for any work or undertaking; third, for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes. Such broad definitions of public interest essen-



tially granted the government significant powers of land acquisition. Utilizing a “low-in high-out” approach, the government acquired privately owned land at low prices and then resold land use rights to private developers at higher prices, as long as such actions were deemed to serve a “public purpose” under the Singapore Planning Act and were supported by clear development plans. This empowered the government to acquire any private land for optimizing national land use<sup>16</sup>. In the two decades following the enactment of the Land Acquisition Act, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) cleared and reclaimed approximately 184 hectares of land under the “land sales” policy. This included many private residences, historical and cultural sites, and Chinese temples, all demolished under the “urban redevelopment” policy<sup>17</sup>. Until the late 1980s, the government became increasingly aware of the importance of architectural and urban conservation.



Swimming Pool/ Sea    Commerce    Religion    Public Housing (HDB)    Parking    Greening    School

Fig. 5. Yueh Hai Ching Temple. 1826. Yueh Hai Ching Temple is located in the city center. This temple was originally the Chaozhou Mazu Temple and Laoye Temple. In 1826, it was merged into Yueh Hai Ching Temple.

However, during this planning phase, conflicts between the government and temples escalated. The temple's followers vehemently resisted relocation, yet most of the land had already been acquired by the government for public housing development, making relocation an inevitable reality. Initially, Singaporean law allowed these traditional temples to continue existing, but they were required to sign 30-year lease agreements with the government, paying rent. After the 30-year period expired, the government could reclaim the land without compensation. These temples then needed to relocate to new premises for another 30-year lease, significantly increasing the cost of relocation. In such circumstances, the merging of local temples became inevitable. Taking the first united temple in Singapore, the "Fivefold united Temple," as an example (Figure.2), it was built in 1974 in Toa Payoh Lorong, Singapore. It was formed by the merger of five temples belonging to four different Chinese immigrant dialect groups. However, the establishment of Fivefold united Temple was not easy. In the late 1960s, the government acquired the Toa Payoh area for urban housing development. The dispersed and independent temples initially refused to move, but the government's stance on acquisition and demolition was resolute, forcing the temple's followers to accept the fact that their long-standing temples would be demolished. Due to the high costs of relocation and reconstruction, independent temples were financially strained. Therefore, they negotiated with the government to purchase a plot of land collectively and merge the five temples into one to reduce costs. In 1970, the five temples pooled together sufficient funds and unitedly proposed to the Housing Development Board (HDB) of Singapore to buy land. Eventually, Fivefold united Temple was built, maintaining the independence of each temple in terms of ceremonial activities, worship space, and spatial sequence. Subsequently, due to the practices of Fivefold united Temple and the temples' long history, the government agreed to sell a portion of the land to the temples for their selection as temple sites, thus officially giving birth to united temples in Singapore<sup>18</sup>.

## THE MODEL OF UNITED TEMPLES IN CITIES

### DEVELOPMENT OF UNITED TEMPLES AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

As urbanization progresses rapidly, the government in Singapore has introduced management and sale regulations for religious land use, leading to the swift proliferation of the united temple model. In this way, various temples were peacefully brought together. However, due to the diverse backgrounds of the constituent temples within united temples, originating from different regions of China and worshipping different deities, they must consider the timing of their respective ritual activities to minimize disruption to other temples within the united complex. Additionally, each temple contributes funds from its devotees as operational funds for the united temple while maintaining the independence of each temple and its respective temple committee. However, the form of united temples determines that the process of "merging" is not always smooth. Some temples encountered conflicts during the merging process, leading to cases of "absorption," where smaller temples were taken over by larger ones, retaining only the name but no longer holding separate rituals, or even complete "takeovers," where both the name and rituals were lost. Consequently, some cases of disharmony arise in

united temples. For example, some temples may resist the outcome of the merger, leading to internal conflicts within the merged temple<sup>19</sup>. Over the 50 years since immigration ceased, the form and content of united temples have become more complex, with collaborations emerging between temples from different countries and different religious denominations, engaging in mutual worship and cooperation.

In the 1960s to 1970s planning phase, a large number of public housing — HDB flats — emerged, accompanied by the construction of supporting facilities. This initiative alleviated housing pressures and solved citizens' housing problems. In the late 1980s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority's urban master plan, focusing on architecture and urban preservation, incorporated united temples into the planning. Given the significance of temples in the daily lives of community residents, assuming certain social functions, integrating temples with public housing construction became an optimization measure.

With the continuous increase in public housing, the government of Singapore, mindful of the diversity and convenience of citizens' housing needs, began integrating more amenities and public services into public housing estates. Singapore's public housing development has gone through five stages, primarily including the new town centers in the 1960s and 1970s, neighborhood centers in the 1980s and 1990s, and the formation of community complexes after 2000. Essentially, Singapore's community complexes integrate various functions, including public services provided by community clubs managed by the People's Association, commercial services in new town centers and neighborhood centers planned and constructed by the Housing Development Board, and public facilities provided by relevant government agencies in the vicinity<sup>20</sup>. This design optimizes land use efficiency.

## PRACTICING UNITED TEMPLES IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

In this context, the forms and roles of united temples in urban planning in Singapore also vary. Here, this article takes the Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple, Tou Tian Gong, Ang Chee Sia Ong Temple, Beeh Low See Temple, and Yueh Hai Ching Temple as examples to illustrate this point.

The Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple is located at 76 Jurong West Street 76 and was completed in 1996. It is formed by the union of Yu Huang Tian Temple, Fuan Temple, and Ci Shan Tan. Among them, Yu Huang Tian Temple and Ci Shan Tan are deity-related temples, while Fuan Temple is a geographic temple originating from Anxi County, Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, China. Just one street away to the south, the Tou Tian Gong Combined Temple consists of Tou Tian Gong and Chwee Long Tow Pek Kong Temple, both of which are deity-related temples. From the image, it can be observed that the Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple and Tou Tian Gong Combined Temple are built together, with commercial buildings such as supermarkets and cultural centers in the same plot (Table.1). Zooming out to a broader perspective, these two combined temples are integrated with community parking lots, as well as amenities such as community hotels, food courts, gyms, and boxing arenas, serving as the central hub of the entire housing estate. Although the two combined temples

are independent entities, their co-location implies a form of “unitedness” in planning. Daily ritual activities of both temples are likely to be coordinated in time and space, forming a larger united temple at the community level, which holds significant practical significance for community planning (Figure 3).

The Beeh Low See Temple, a Buddhist temple located on Jalan Jurong Kechil in Singapore, was founded by Venerable Xue Shan in 1935. Originally named the San Bao Old Folks’ Home, it provided shelter for many homeless elderly individuals. Today, it is situated in the western part of Singapore, near the Bukit Timah Community Center. In addition to weekly prayers, they also organize prayer events for special occasions such as New Year blessings. They further celebrate festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival by hosting feasts and various performances open to everyone<sup>21</sup>. Similar to the planning approach mentioned earlier regarding combined temples, the Beeh Low See Temple serves as a community center integrating surrounding public facilities, albeit with one difference: the Yu Huang Tian Combined Temple and Tou Tian Gong Combined Temple are surrounded by more than one community, serving as the central hub for multiple housing estate neighborhoods, whereas the Beeh Low See Temple serves as the central hub for the Bukit Timah community. This indicates that the size of the central temple is correlated with the size of the community (Figure.4).

Similarly, using the Ang Chee Sia Ong Temple as the centerpiece and integrating facilities such as nursing homes, medical centers, food courts, and hawker centers as the core of the planning, HDB flats are arranged around it. The Ang Chee Sia Ong Temple is strategically located at the intersection of the main thoroughfare and river in the community, offering convenient transportation and a pleasant environment. It is a combined temple of Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism, situated on the west coast of Singapore. The main hall is dedicated to the Lord Green Dragon (Chinese: 青龍爺), also known as Ang Chee Sia Ong (Chinese: 安濟聖王).

Unlike the temples mentioned earlier in the community, the Yueh Hai Ching Temple, also known as the Wak Hai Cheng Bio Temple, holds a unique position. It is situated in the heart of Singapore’s Central Business District (CBD), the busiest and most vibrant area in Singapore. The Yueh Hai Ching Temple, colloquially known as the “Temple Street,” is the oldest Taoist temple in Singapore and served as the earliest gathering and meeting place for the local Teochew community, managed by the Yiyin Company. Located on Phillip Street, it originates from the Teochew region of Guangdong Province, China. Originally established as separate temples dedicated to Mazu and local deities, they were merged into the Yueh Hai Ching Temple in 1826<sup>22</sup>. Sandwiched between surrounding high-rise buildings, the temple has been preserved since the inception of urban planning in Singapore’s city center, highlighting its significant architectural heritage value. Its preservation holds crucial planning significance for the continuation of traditional culture in the modern urban landscape of Singapore (Figure.5).

## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN PLANNING IN COASTAL CITIES IN SOUTHERN CHINA

### BACKGROUND OF CITIES' PLANNING IN CHINA

Apart from Singapore, certain coastal cities in southern China, such as Putian in Fujian Province and Macau, also face the issue of traditional temple survival. Macau, similar to Singapore, has been deeply influenced by colonization and has a high degree of urbanization. On the other hand, the process of urbanization in Putian, Fujian Province, has just begun. The main differences between the two cities lie in their levels of urbanization, population density, and urban land capacity, with Macau being closer to Singapore. However, both cities face challenges in urban planning regarding the future of temples and the form they should take in a modernized urban environment.

China's current urban planning is based on the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, where urbanization and urban development are directly related to national governance. Urban planning and construction are closely linked to the capacity of urban governance. As early as 2019, the Chinese government issued guidance on central city development, urban-rural integration, and spatial planning, demonstrating high importance for the future of urban planning<sup>23</sup>. Additionally, in 2014, the National Development and Reform Commission proposed reform measures on how to protect and inherit historical and cultural heritage in the context of new urbanization:

*“Facing unprecedented rapid urbanization in human history, China’s architectural cultural heritage and traditional features accumulated over thousands of years are facing significant challenges. The ‘National New Urbanization Plan’ proposes actively protecting and promoting traditional excellent culture in urban construction and development renewal, continuing urban historical context, which clearly requires the protection of urban and rural historical and cultural heritage.”<sup>24</sup>*

Currently, some Chinese cities are in a planning phase similar to Singapore's in the 1980s to 1990s, such as Shanghai and Beijing. For cities like Putian, Fujian, where population density and land constraints are not as severe as in Singapore but richness in traditional culture is comparable, China has put forward more advanced planning concepts. Therefore, Putian's urban planning is relatively clear. In areas undergoing rural revitalization, traditional temples are preserved to maintain the local and continuous traditional culture. In areas facing unavoidable urbanization, the united temple model is employed to preserve traditional culture. In fact, Putian's planning adopts the concept of “green heart,” relocating villages from the central urban area to restore the ecology around the Mulan River. However, there are still some questions regarding whether temples will be preserved in the current planning. Therefore, the significance of this research lies in providing valuable references for urban planning in culturally rich cities like Putian.

## THE FORM OF UNITED TEMPLES WITHIN URBANIZATION

In fact, urbanization in Putian has led to the occurrence of temple consolidation, which the author referred to as “Rooftop Temples” in previous research. Due to urbanization and the conversion of rural land into urban use, three villages faced relocation, including their village temples. Residents moved from traditional villages to modern high-rise residential buildings, resulting in increased land utilization. However, the village temples could not be independently rebuilt. In response, the local government intervened to combine the temples of several villages, integrating them with commercial spaces.

Temples were placed on the rooftops, preserving the layout of the original village temples, including the main temple structure, stage, and square (Figure.6). After consolidation, certain rituals and deities were integrated, and community residents who came to worship would worship together with other deities. This achieved the significance of unity, continued traditional culture in a modern urban environment, demonstrated the resilience of traditional culture, and allowed community residents to enjoy the convenience of modern life<sup>25</sup>.

## THE ACTIONS OF VARIOUS PARTS IN SOCIETY

From Singapore’s overall urban planning, we can see the high level of societal participation in heritage conservation, combined with various policies and regulations formulated by the government for urban conservation. This synergy has maximized the effectiveness of heritage preservation efforts. In contrast, in Putian, most temples are still located in rural areas and have not been affected by urbanization. The “Roof-Top Temples” mentioned earlier, situated at the boundary between urban and rural areas, are the most representative. The change in temple form reflects changes in people’s lifestyles. Similar to community planning in Singapore, the ground floor of the Roof-Top Temples serves commercial purposes, with surrounding amenities forming part of the community. This planning approach wasn’t influenced by prior knowledge of Singaporean planning strategies but rather emerged from practical convenience in daily life.

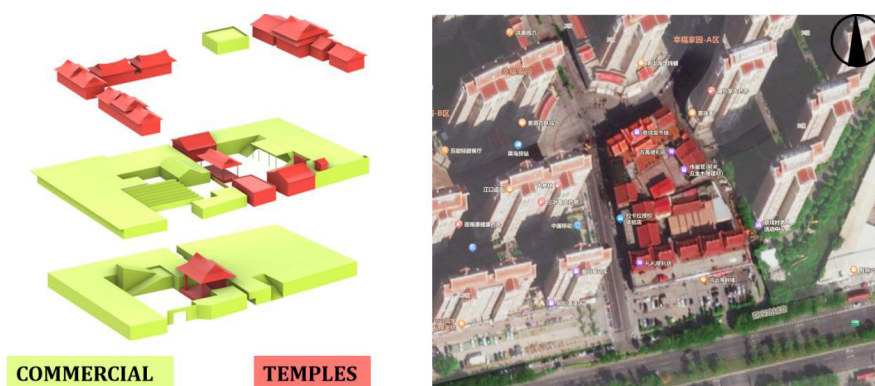


Fig. 6. Rooftop Temples. 2023. The rooftop temple is located in the community entrance square. From the functional distribution map, the temple is on top and the business is on the bottom. The two are spatially integrated.

By combining strategies for temple conservation from Singaporean urban planning, Putian can enhance public awareness and participation through publicity efforts. Leveraging Putian's unique circumstances, temples can continue to play their traditional role in community management within modernized neighborhoods.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of temple management and urban planning in both Singapore and select coastal cities in China, namely Fujian's Putian and Macau, underscores the multifaceted challenges and innovative approaches in preserving traditional cultural heritage amidst rapid urbanization. The comparative analysis reveals nuanced differences in urban development stages, population densities, and land use capacities between these regions.

While Singapore's experience showcases the efficacy of united temple models within urban planning frameworks, offering insights into community cohesion and heritage preservation, the evolving urban landscapes in China's coastal cities present unique opportunities and dilemmas. China's urban planning strategies, rooted in socialist principles and geared towards heritage conservation, provide a forward-looking framework for reconciling tradition with modernization.

The emergence of united temples, symbolized by the concept of 'roof temples' in Putian, reflects a dynamic response to urbanization pressures, integrating traditional cultural symbols with contemporary urban functions. Furthermore, community engagement and government policies play pivotal roles in safeguarding cultural legacies and promoting sustainable urban development.

In light of these observations, there is potential for cross-cultural exchange and mutual learning between Singapore and China's coastal cities, fostering innovative solutions to preserve heritage while embracing urbanization. By leveraging best practices from both contexts, cities like Putian can chart a course towards inclusive and sustainable urban development, ensuring that the rich tapestry of cultural heritage continues to thrive amidst the evolving urban landscape.

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor(s) Li Jie

Li Jie is a Wuhan University and National University of Singapore unitedly training master's student. His research focuses on the changes in temples and rituals under the background of urbanization. By exploring the form of the United Temple, he discovers the resilience and future sustainability of traditional culture.

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## IMAGE SOURCES

Table 1 Made by author according to the content of the literature

Figure 1 Photo by author, in Putian, Fujian province, China

Figure 2 From an illustration in the article: HUE, Guan Thye. "The Evolution of the Singapore United Temple: The Transformation of Chinese Temples in the Chinese Southern Diaspora." 159

Figure 3 Base image from website [https://www.streetdirectory.com/sg/ang-chee-sia-ong/131-west-coast-drive-128014/289\\_9112.html](https://www.streetdirectory.com/sg/ang-chee-sia-ong/131-west-coast-drive-128014/289_9112.html) and <https://earth.google.com/web/search>, modified and illustrated by the author.

Figure 4/5 Ibid.

Figure 6 The left one is drawn by the author and the right one is from the website: <https://earth.google.com/web/search>

