

## The Evolution of the Singapore United Temple: The Transformation of Chinese Temples in the Chinese Southern Diaspora

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Large scale Chinese emigration to Singapore began in the early nineteenth century and lasted through the first half of the twentieth century. Immigrants from Minnan regions of Anxi, Nan'an, and Yongchun, as well as those from Chaozhou, Guangzhou and Hainan left their home villages and migrated to different parts of Southeast Asia, including Singapore. Following the arrival and settlement of the Chinese immigrants, the need for spiritual support and a permanent place of worship prompted the establishment of Chinese temples dedicated to the principal gods of the different regional pantheons of Southern China.

To take up only the case of migrants to Singapore from An'xi county in Fujian province, many people from this region settled in rural villages around Singapore in the 1920s and 1930s, where they specialized in growing fruits and vegetables. These communities built temples dedicated to the following gods: Mazu (妈祖), Guangze Zunwang (广泽尊王), Baosheng Dadi (保生大帝), Qingshui Zushi (清水祖师), Anxi Chenghuangye (安溪城隍爷), Xuantian Shangdi (玄天上帝), Xuantianma (玄女妈), Fazhugong (法主公), Donggong Zhenren (董公真人), Guangong (关公), Nezha (哪吒), Wufu Wangye (五府王爷), Zhangsan Xiangong (章三相公), Fuxi Xiandi (伏羲先帝), Wugu Zhenxian (五谷真仙), etc. The temples they built included the Xuantianma Gong (玄女妈宫), Shizhu Miao (石竹庙), Mingshan Gong (名山宫), Fulong Gong (阜龙宫), Qizhai Miao (七寨庙), Tonghuai Miao (通淮庙), Guangshou Tang (广寿堂), Penglai Si (蓬莱寺), Longshan Si (龙山宫), Jiufeng Yan (九峰岩), Zhen'nán Miao (镇南庙), Zhongting Miao (中亭庙), Huatang Fu (华堂府), Longshan Gong (龙山宫), Liuming Tan (六明坛), Jiucaiba Chenghuangmiao (韭菜芭城隍庙), Yangtaoyuan Chenghuangmiao (杨桃园城隍庙), Longfeng Dong (龙凤洞), Anshan Miao (安山庙) and the Yuanfu Dian (圆福殿), etc. However, none of these temples were able to escape from the larger forces of urbanization that took place after 1965 when Singapore was separated from Malaysia and became independent. Some of them disappeared from Singapore completely, while others have merged into various "United Temples". Out of the 800 Chinese temples we have surveyed in contemporary Singapore, there are as many as 300 smaller, primarily rural temples, which have merged into some 64 "United Temples". The religious landscape in Singapore underwent enormous changes by the second half of the twentieth century.

### Urban Redevelopment Programmes

Singapore today is a thriving city and international business hub characterized by a high standard of living in a clean and green environment. This is a result of a process of proactive planning.

The Urban Renewal Programme, as part of the national development policy, came about after the People's Action Party ("PAP") took office. The Land Acquisition Act (Chapter 152, Act 41) was passed officially on seventeenth June 1966, giving the PAP government power to acquire any private land in order to allow better optimization of land use in the small country. The detailed wording of the Land Acquisition Act is as follows:

"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)

Between 1967 and 1989, a total of 184 hectares of land were cleared, assembled and sold under the URA Sale of Sites Programme (URA 2006). This means that hundreds of private houses, and many sites of historical and cultural heritage, including many Chinese temples, were demolished by this major urban redevelopment.<sup>1</sup> (Dale 1999, pp. 90-91)

### The United Temple concept

The legislation allowed the state to claim the freehold property of several hundred temples, and to force those temples that wished to continue to operate to sign thirty year leases on new pieces of property for the most part no larger than 2000 sq.m.. These leases would terminate upon expiry, and the government could repossess the land without compensation. The temples would then have to re-negotiate and pay for a new thirty year lease or move to a new location to be sold by the government, without the need for further official notification. The formation of the United Temple concept was an initiative of local temples which had no better alternative, which the stated later turned into a settled policy. The first United Temple in Singapore was the Five-Combined Temple (Wuhemiao 伍合庙) located on Toa Payoh Lorong 7, built in 1974. This temple was founded by representative of temples belonging to four different Chinese immigrant dialect groups, namely: Jutiangong (聚天宮, first established over a hundred years before by the Hokkien and Teochew); the Shanzuyuan Fudeci (山竹園福德祠, founded in 1940 by Cantonese); Tongxing gang (通興港, founded in 1862 by Teochew), the d Zhaoyingci (昭應祠, founded in 1940 by Hainanese, and the Wujigong (無極宮, which has since moved once again, and whose founders and founding date are unknown). These five temples were originally scattered around the rural Toa Payoh region and its rubber plantations. The Jutiangong and the Shanzuyuan Fudeci were originally on Boon Teck Road. The Tongxinggang was on Ah Hood Road, and the Zhaoyingci on Jalan Rajah. The gods worshipped in each of these temples were different. The Jutiangong worshipped Dabogong (大伯公, earth god) as well as a group of gods who had “divided their spirits” from their original statues in Fujian – these included Wugu xiandi (五穀仙帝, Imperial Emperor of the Five Grains), Puan Old Buddha (普庵古佛), the Three Loyal Generals of the Song Dynasty (大宋三忠王), and Xibei zunwng (溪北尊王, Revered King of the Stream North). The Tongxinggang’s main god was Emperor Gantian (感天大帝). The Shanzuyuan Fudeci’s main god was a Tudigong tutelary spirit and his wife, the Tudipo (土地公土地婆). The main deities of the Zhaoyingci were the “108 Brother Heroes” (一百零八位英烈兄弟), representing a group of early Hainan migrants. The main god of the Wujigong was the Lady Liying (李英娘娘). All these temples were confronted with expropriation by the state in the late 1960s. An informant who wished to remain anonymous told me that because the government planned to develop the Toa Payoh region into a new government housing settlement, all these temples would have to be torn down and forced to move. But the devotees of these temples were determined to resist moving, and repeatedly wrote to government officials expressing their views. This was only a few years after the Bukit Ho Swee fire of 1961, at which time rumors had spread that the fire was the work of “government henchmen”, to force the villagers to move. Many temple devotees decided to sleep in the temples to keep watch against acts of arson. However, after many meetings and discussions, the devotees had to accept the fact that their temples would be expropriated.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, just within one year, about 1,200 families from NI and 1,800 from SI had been acquired and resettled. See Ole Johan Dale, *Urban Planning in Singapore: The Transformation of a City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.127.

Because the double costs of constructing new temples and purchasing new plots of land were overwhelming, the temple reconstruction committees of all five temples gathered to work out a common solution. They decided to merge the contributions of all of their respective devotees, and to collectively purchase a plot of land and build a “united temple”, in order to maintain the worship of their respective temple’s deities. This decision was acclaimed by the devotees of the various temples, and also received support from the Member of Parliament for Toa Payoh Constituency, Cheong Yuen Chee and the MP for Jalan Besar Constituency, Chan Chee Seng. Each temple began raising funds, and they jointly submitted a request to the Housing & Development Board (HDB) to purchase a site for a temple. Their plan was approved by the HDB in 1970. By then they had gathered sufficient funds to spend 200,000 SGD to purchase the land for the Five-fold Joint Temple. The temple was completed in 1974 on the site at Toa Payoh Lorong 7. This was the first such effort in the history of Singapore, and it took a very specific form. Each temple preserved its independence by keeping its own separate room, thereby preserving its own space of religious activities, with each temple having its own doorway, its own altar for its gods, and its own incense burner. This format is unlike what has come to be commonly known as the Singapore United Temple – and this is shown in its name – the Fivefold Joint Temple. (Figure 1, Hue fieldwork report, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011)



**Figure 1** Fivefold Joint Temple (Wu He Miao, 伍合廟)

The parties involved in this first “united temple” had long, discrete histories of existence, and the serving members of the management committees of these traditional temples, who were charged with the duty of carrying on their ancestral religious beliefs of serving their gods, could not help but feel that they had been done a disservice in the name of progress as enacted by the Land Acquisition Act. After the temple members expressed their deep grievances, the authorities eventually agreed to for the first time to sell a piece of land designated for religious use directly to two or more of the affected temples in order to reduce their financial burden of relocating. The concept of the “United Temple” thus emerged.

In the course of a survey of the Chinese temples of Singapore conducted with Prof. Kenneth Dean of McGill University, we found that prior to a temple being compelled to relocate and join into a “united temple”, virtually each of them would resist the move to a certain degree, based on their sense of the importance of the history of their temple and the significance of the record of the god’s efficacious actions in the original site. From the 1970s until the present, 68 United Temples have been built (see Table 1). On average, united temples comprise three temples which had been forced to relocate, but some have as many as 12 temples within one unit.

Many of the temples built by migrants from Anxi were gradually absorbed into united temples. This was the case for the following temples; the Guang Fu Gong 广福宫 (which is made up of the Guang Fu Gong 广福宫, Lian Feng Si 莲峰寺 and Xie He

Gong 协和宫), Chin Leng Keng Chinese Temple 真龙宫 (Zhen Ren Gong 真人宫, Long Shan Ting 龙山亭, Jie Gu Dian 介谷殿, Ban Sien Temple 万仙庙) 、Chai Chee United Temple 菜市联合宫 (Zhu Yun Gong 竹云宫, Fu Shan Ting 福山亭, Fu Ling Gong 福灵宫) 、Jurong west United Temple 裕廊西联合宫 (Tian Gong Tan Zhao Ling Gong 天公坛昭灵宫, Xi Hai An Fudeci 西海岸福德祠, Xian Long Gong 显龙宫) 、Ju Shen Miao 聚圣庙 (Ji Fu Gong 集福宫、Hua Tang Fu 华堂府、Long Quan Yan 龙泉岩) 、Ang Moku Potong Pasir United Temple 宏茂桥波东巴西联合庙 (Hoon Hong Tian Haw Bio 云峰天后庙, Tian Sing Sze Temple 天性祠, San Zun Gong 三尊宫, Yun Feng Gu Miao 云峰古庙, He Xing Guang Miao 合兴光庙, Geylang United Temple 芽笼联合宫 (Long Shan Ting 龙山亭、Fu De Gong 福德宫, Qian Kun Miao 乾坤庙) etc.

In addition, there are united temples which contain other united temples within them. The Yishun United Temple 义顺联合庙 includes the three temples Guan Loong Sheng Temple 元龙圣殿, Chern Nam Kong Siew Temple 镇南庙广寿堂 and Shun Xi Gong Shui Chi Lin 顺西宫水池林. Yet each of these three temples is made up of several smaller temples. Guan Loong Sheng Temple is formed by Yuan Shou Tang 元寿堂, Long Xia Guan 龙霞馆 & Xin Sheng Tan 新胜坛; Chern Nam Kong Siew Temple is formed by Chern Nam Bio 镇南庙 and Kong Siew Tun 广寿堂; Shun Xi Gong Shui Chi Lin is formed by Shun Xi Gong 顺西宫 & Shui Chi Lin 水池林. Thus the Yishun United Temple applied to the HDB to purchase land in the name of three temples, but in fact it was formed from the incense and resources of seven smaller temples. (Hue fieldwork report, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010)

The United Temples can be divided into two groups, as shown in Table 1 & Table 2. The first group uses the term “united” or “joint”, while the second used elements of the original names of the constituent temples or gods of these temples to form a title.

No.	Lianhe Miao	Lianhe Gong	Lianhe Dian etc	Others
1	义顺镇 联合庙	三巴旺 联合宫	蔡厝港 联合殿	天显庙
2	蔡厝港油池村 联合庙	裕廊西 联合宫	蔡厝港 联圣宫	天龙宫
3	榜鹅 联合庙	淡滨尼 联合宫	兀兰 联圣庙	汤申庙
4	长秀威灵东山 联合庙	石林晋山 联合宫	六巡三合庙	福发宫
5	慈灵 联合庙	菜市 联合宫	伍合庙	聚善堂华山宫
6	波东巴西 联合庙	芽龙 联合宫		蓬莱寺
7	宏茂桥 联合庙	忠邦 联合宫		忠义天明庙
8	玉皇殿 联合庙			七寨龙泉庙
9	桂林 联合庙			上帝庙济公坛
10	福通 联合庙			玄夫仙庙
11	巴谷礼峇 联合庙			镇山天福宫
12	盛港 联合庙			龙合山七寨庙
13	青云庙安仁宫锦福庙 联合庙			水沟馆葛岸馆
14	城凤 联合庙			聚圣庙
15	青云 联合庙			忠义庙
16	三巴旺成邦 联合庙			龙凤洞云南大伯公
17				裕廊总宫
18				真龙宫
19				天圣坛赐福宫
20				天德圣庙
21				紫云开吉宫
22				金凤庙
23				广福宫

24				五雷宫东天宫
25				慈义堂将军庙
26				众弘善堂九皇宫
27				德海宫
28				拿督坛保安宫天德宫
29				树头伯公暨广进殿
30				裕廊总宫
31				西天佛庙
32				七福宫
33				正华慈善宫
34				凤图庙
35				凤山坛飞龙宫

Table 1: Singapore United Temples

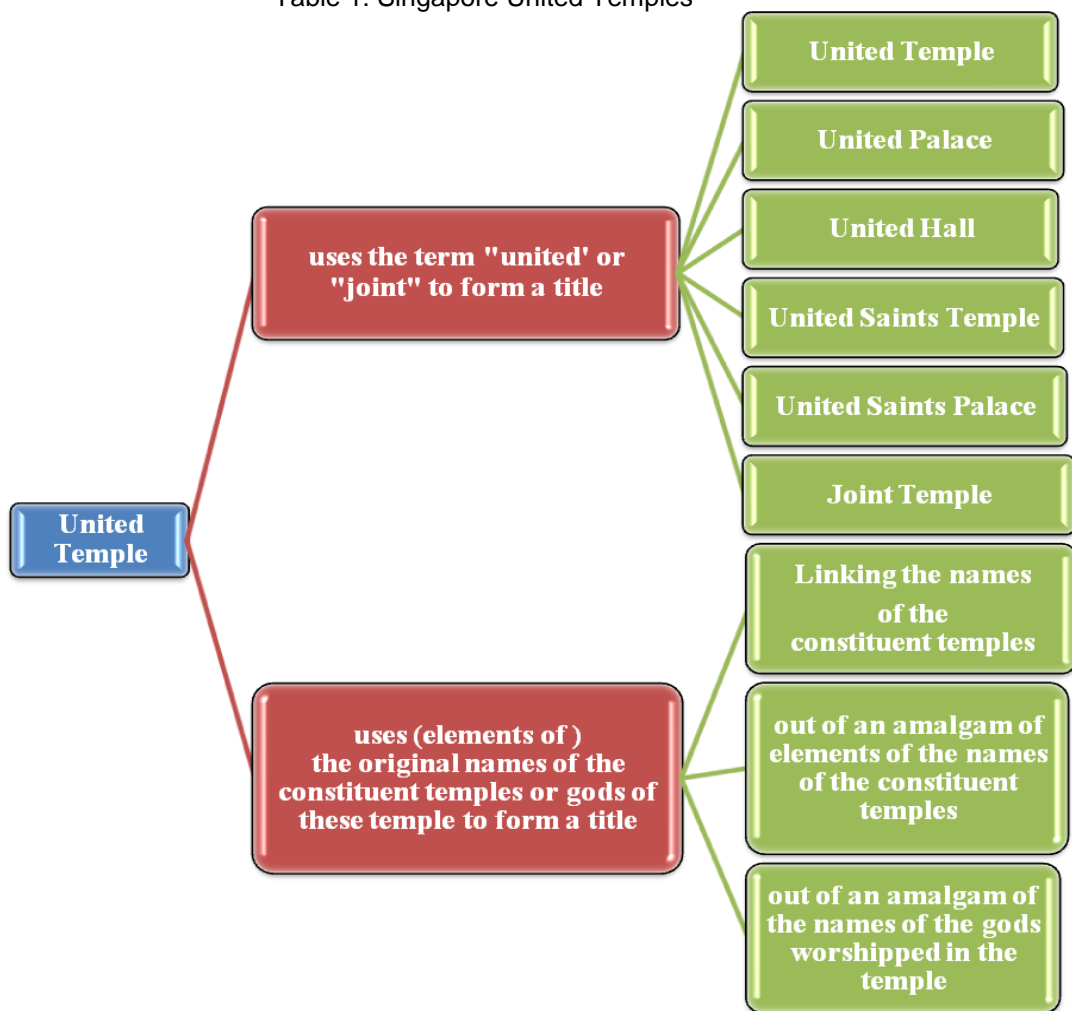


Table 2: Nomenclature of the Singapore United Temples

Most of the united temples in the first group used the name of their new joint location as a title for the new temple, as in the case of the Yishun United Temple, the Chua Chu Kang United temple, the Potong Pasir United Temple, Paya Lebar United Temple, Sembawang United Temple, Jurong West United Temple, Tampinese United Temple, etc.. These temples relied on the state imposed administrative regional

nomenclature to create their new names. The second group of united temples, and a small number of the first set, can be further subdivided into three categories, based on nomenclature:

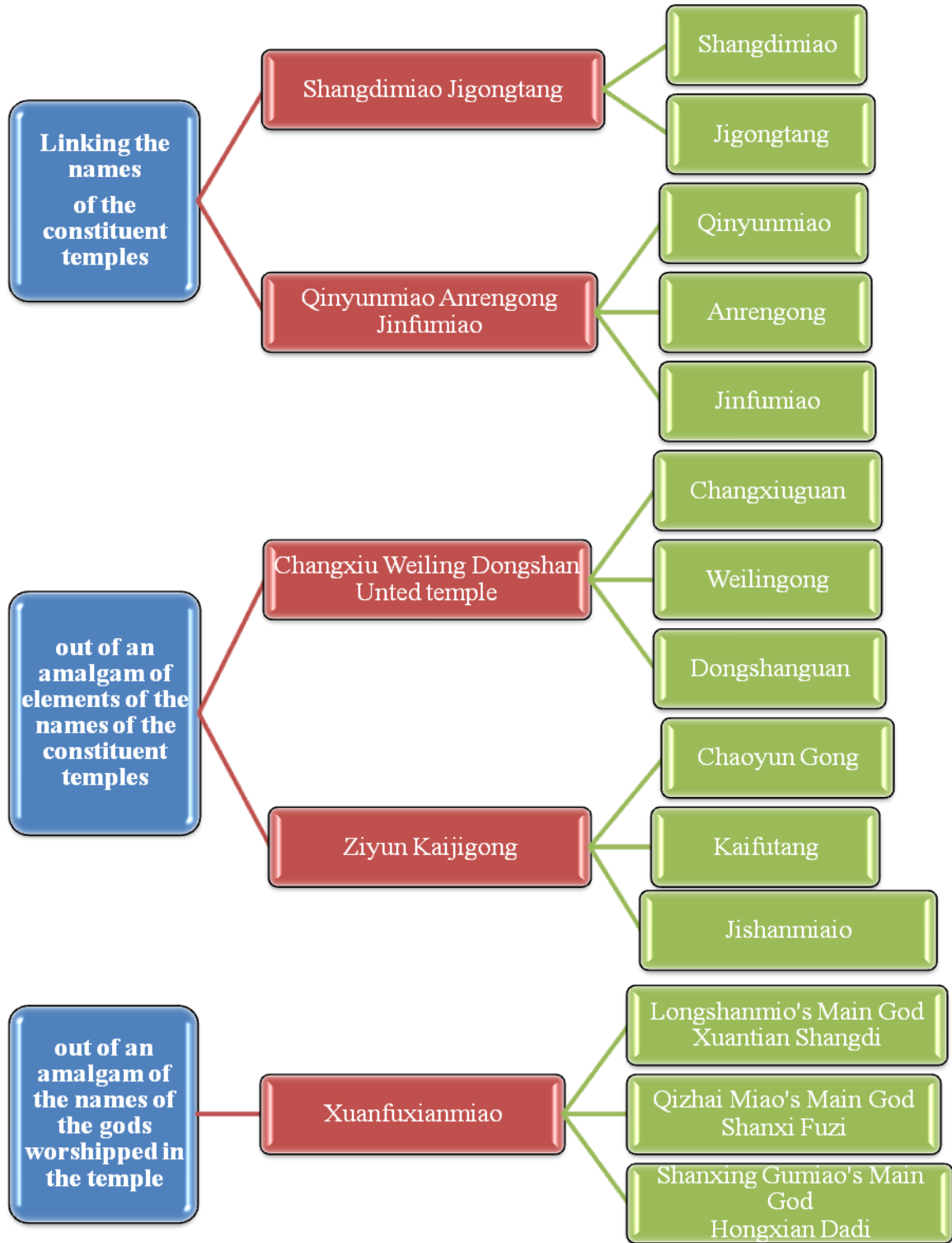


Table 3 : Categories of nomenclature of the second group of united temples

There is a traditional Chinese saying that “if the name is not rectified, all statements will go awry.” All these new united temples have attempted in one form or another to preserve elements of the names and histories of the original temples in the new united temples to maintain a sense of their original identity. While most of the “Palaces of Gods” have had to make way for the “Homes of Humans” or “Factories in Industrial Parks”, religious leaders and political authorities have managed to strike a compromise by adopting the new form of a United Temple – bringing all the deities from different temples together under one roof, a situation found in land-starved Singapore and nowhere else in South East Asia.

To draw on the example quoted by Dr. Ning Ngui Ngi, the Tampines United temple has as its main deities the Fu An Temple’s Lord Zhu, Lord Xing and Lord Li (朱邢李大人) the deities of the other temples flank them on their right and left in an orderly and well-spaced fashion, making it appear to be one of the show-pieces of a successful working united temple.

### **The development of United Temples**

Temples which agreed to merge into united temples, in addition to having to buy land, build a temple, and worry about subsequent extensions of the lease or moving of the temple, also had to learn to develop relationships with the other temples within the united temple. These temples often had different backgrounds, belonged to different dialect groups, and worshipped different gods. They had different forms of temple management, and different religious groups connected to them. They had to find ways to celebrate the great feast days of the gods of one’s own temple without disturbing the ritual activities of the other temple communities within the united temple; avoid disturbing the tranquility of the neighbouring altars when reciting invocations and inviting the god’s of one’s own temple to descend into a spirit medium who would proceed to “save the world” by responding to the queries of the temple devotees. And to pool the incense money of each temple and share the collective costs of the united temple. Issues such as these had to be continuously managed by the new united temples.

For the most part, each temple preserved its relative independence within the united temples. The temples which comprised the Fivefold Joint Temple retain their separate temple committees. When the Wujigong temple committee of Hainanese decided to leave the united temple after thirteen years, a group of Teochew took over their share and set up the Huade Shantang (华德善堂) in its place. To this day, each temple in the Joint Temple keeps its own temple committee activities separate. (Hue fieldwork report, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011) However, with the passage of time there have been cases where the workings of a particular temple, or changes in their financial status, has led to a situation where a temple may retain its name, but it has swallowed up one or more of the others. The Chin Leng Keng Chinese Temple was made up of four temples, but the Zhen Ren Gong and the Long Shan Ting are in fact managed as a single organization, and the daily performances of the “saving the world” ritual by a means of a sedan chair possessed by the god Baosheng Dadi are jointly organized by these two temples without any distinction in their membership. (Hue fieldwork report, 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011) As for the Ciyitang Jiangjun Miao (慈义堂将军庙), not only are the names of two temples combined into one, the management of these temples is also unified – in this case we find a truly united temple where the name fits the facts. (Hue fieldwork report, 21<sup>th</sup> May 2010)

In another instance, the Fengtumiao (凤图庙) temple management committee has completely taken over the management of three temples within it, namely the Huantugong (环图庙), the Baoanmiao (保安庙) and the Huaguoshan Pingan mingdegong (花果山平安明德宫) (Hue field work report, 23<sup>th</sup> April 2010). In the Doutian gong (斗天宫), the reknowned Shifugong (师父公) spirit altar has completely taken over

the activities of the Sulangtou Dabogong (水廊头大伯公), which has very few devotees. (Hue fieldwork report, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010)

One can also find cases of unification without harmony, contradictions, and conflicts In the united temples The Futong United Temple's (福通联合宫) Jurong Fengshansi (裕廊凤山寺) was not willing to be listed on an invitation card as one of the Honorary Committee Members of the temple next door to it, the Zhengkongjiao Benyuan Xulingshan zongdaotan (真空教本元虚灵山总道堂). They sent a strongly worded message, stating that they were deeply disturbed and moreover absolutely refused the "totally unreasonable request" of the Zhenkong temple, and demanded that the Zhenkong temple remove their name from the list of honorary members. This letter was copied to government ministries, the district mayor, various ministers of state and MPs, and to various lawyers' offices. (Hue fieldwork report, 21<sup>th</sup> May 2010. Letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> May 2004) [why were they refuse to be listed, and were so upset?]

The Teck Whye Fengshantan (德惠凤山坛), which worships Guangze zunwang (广泽尊王), and the Feilongtang (飞龙坛) which worships Lianhua Santaizi (莲花三太子) each have spirit medium sessions in which their respective deities possess mediums. However, there is such intense competition between these two temples that they have never found harmony despite being physically united in one temple. From 1996 until this day, the two temples have not agreed on a name for their united temple, and keep separate signs at the front of the united temple building. (Hue fieldwork report, 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2010)

The Jurong Fengshansi had its own share of internal contradictions, as shown in a letter it issued demanding that the Nanyang Dabogong (南洋大伯公) cult organization and its statue "immediately vacate" the temple, and "cease all activities within the temple". (Hue fieldwork report, 21<sup>th</sup> May 2010. Letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> Nov 2004)

However, there is little choice but for them to share premises, given the extreme shortage of space in Singapore Even temples located on the smaller islands of from Singapore island itself, such as Pulau Tekong (德光岛), and Pulau Ubin (乌敏岛) have been expropriated by the government machinery over the past twenty years. Many of these temples had no choice but relocate and become a member of united temples located on Singapore island. When Pulau Tekong was taken over as a military base, the Pulau Tekong temples were had to join into a consortium, register as a unit with the Registrar of Societies, and move into a united temple located in one of the Singapore's industrial zones, becoming the Pulau Tekong United Temple (天降佛堂). (Hue fieldwork report, 21<sup>th</sup> May 2010) As for the Tianhougong (天后宫) and the Ubin Thai Buddhist temple (乌敏泰佛寺) of Pulau Ubin, they joined different united temples on Singapore island. The Tianhougong of Pulau Ubin joined forces with the Wanxinshan Zhongyimiao (万兴山忠义庙) to become the Sengkang United Temple (盛港联合庙), where Mazu (妈祖) is worshipped next to Guandi (关帝). (Hue fieldwork report, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr 2011) The Thai Buddhist temple on Pulau Ubin merged with the Baogong miao (包公庙) and the Jiuhan Dadimiao (九皇大帝庙) into the Jalan Kayu United Temple (惹兰加由联合庙). (Hue fieldwork report, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2011)

After fifty years of ceaseless transformations, the form and content of the Singaporean United Temple has become ever more rich and complex, and has become a unique feature of the diverse and multifarious religious scene. Not only has the Pulau Ubin Thai Buddhist temple merged with Chinese popular temples dedicated to regional gods, even Hindu temples dedicated to Hindu deities have merged with Chinese temples. The temple dedicated to the Great Emperors of the Seven Stars merged with other temples and a Hindu shrine into the Fufa United Temple (福发宫). (Figure 2, Hue fieldwork report, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010) Similarly, the Luoyang Dabogong (洛阳大伯公) simultaneously worships Chinese, Malay, and Indian deities. These include the Chinese god Dabogong, the Hindu god Ganesh, the holy elephant, and the Islamic protector deity Nadugong. The Dabogong is worshipped in the main hall of the temple,



while Ganesh and Nadugong are worshipped in separate shrines. Not only do Chinese worshippers pray before Ganesh and Nadugong, Malays and Indian worshippers also offer incense to Dabogong, generating a richly hybrid religious space of diversity. (Figure 3, Hue fieldwork report, 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 2010)



**Figure 2** Fufagong United Temple, with its Chinese temple and its Hindu shrine



**Figure 3** Luoyang Dabogong United temple, with Chinese, Hindu and Malay deities

Village temples have become a thing of the past, replaced by spirit medium altars set up within the government-built HDB apartment buildings, though this is not legal. In recent decades they have also had to merge into various united temples in order to survive. The open format of the united temples presents them with unexpected opportunities. The Sanxingtan (善兴坛) spirit altar was originally housed in a 3 story residential unit in Zhenghua village. However, due to the growth of the following of the shrine, it was difficult to maintain its activities in a residential unit. The united temple format provided an alternative. When the Chuo Chu Kang United Temple (蔡厝港联合庙) was under construction, the Shanxingtan joined in as a member temple, and became one of the most vibrant of the constituent temples in the new united temple. (Hue fieldwork report, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2010)

With the spread of more orthodox Buddhist teachings in Singapore over the past 20 or 30 years, a number of temples dedicated to popular deities or to folk Buddhist cults have begun to invite orthodox Buddhist temples to join them in united temples, generating within the united temple form a new content involving the merger of the Three Religions (of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism). The Kaishanmiao (开山庙), which was founded in 1906 and dedicated to the cult of Jie Zitui (介子推), the

Sacred Lord who Opened up the Mountains, has in recent years set up a Buddhist hall in which many Buddhas are revered, and where Buddhist adherents recite sutras each Saturday, conducting their rituals in accordance with Buddhist regulations. In fact, the founder of this Buddhist hall is also the temple director of the Kaishan Temple, a Miss Chen. Thus the Kaishan temple has gone through a process of “division of the Dao into the one, and the one into the two”, forming a united temple that combines Daoism and Buddhism. (Hue fieldwork report, 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010)

Similar kinds of mergers of Daoism and Buddhism are numerous, but some of the most notable include the Yangtaoyuan Chenghuangmiao temple (杨桃园城隍庙) and the Tiangong Wulao Sages Hall (天公五老圣殿). In 1984, the Yangtao Chenghuangmiao invited the leading Buddhist monks in Singapore, including Venerable Hong Chuan, Changkui, Boyuan, and Fakun, along with Buddhist lay leader Li Muyuan to consult with them, and went on to build the Buddhist Wanshousi temple (万寿寺), which ended up being even more imposing a structure than the original City God Temple. (Hue fieldwork report, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2010) The founder of the Tiangong Wulao temple in her later years invited several renowned Thai Buddhist monks to stay in the temple. Downstairs Lu Dongbin (吕洞宾) and the Five Ancient Lords continue to be worshipped, while upstairs Thai Buddhist monks conduct services. The temple was transformed into the Jinbao Buddhist monastery (金宝寺), which was Buddhist on the outside and Daoist on the inside. (Hue fieldwork report, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011)

#### **The economics of the United Temple form**

In 1979, the URA had served a notice of land acquisition to the Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple (“FTSKT”, 望海福德祠) at Palmer Road off Shenton Way (Figure 4). This temple was established in 1819, which makes it one of the oldest Dabogong (Great Uncle – a God of the Earth) temples in Singapore. The temple has been managed by the clansman of two Hakka Associations for 190 years. In 1980 and in 1981, the temple management committee sent representatives to meet C.V. Devan Nair, the MP for Anson district (later appointed President of Singapore) and to the Prime Minister’s office to discuss the case. After a review and appeal, the URA increased the compensation offer and agreed to lease the land back to the Management Committee on a Temporary Occupation License (“T.O.L”). In 1982, the temple was officially acquired by URA with a compensation of \$245,000, but again a T.O.L. was granted to the trustees of the FTSKT on a monthly renewal basis. On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2005, the Singapore Land Authority (“SLA”) took over and re-issued a T.O.L. to the temple (Chen 2006, p. 7). Thirty years later, this temple still survives, subsisting on a monthly renewal lease.

Compared with many other Chinese temples, which were expropriated over the past few decades, the FTSKT is no doubt one of the most fortunate. Almost all the affected Chinese temples’ appeals were rejected by the authorities with the standard bureaucratic comment: “Given Singapore’s limited land area, there is a need for a continuous effort to optimize the use of our land.” (Tan 2009) In addition, most of the affected temples were unable to afford a relocation site due to the low compensation paid by the SLA and the costly price of land sold by the HDB.

In 1984, the HDB sold a 30-year leasehold property of 2,887 square metres to the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong (City-God) Temple (“LKCSHT”, 韭菜芭城隍庙) and the Feng Xuan Gong (“FXG”, 凤玄宫) at Arumugan Road (in the suburbs off Paya Lebar Road) for \$597,000, which works out to be \$206 per square metre (Xu 2007, p. 12)! This did not include the cost of the new building. (Figure 5 & 6)



Figure 4 Fook Tet Soo Khek Temple (望海福德祠)



Figure 5 Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong (City-God) Temple (菲菜芭城隍廟)



Figure 6 Feng Xuan Gong (凤玄宮)

Over the past ten years, the selling price of the 30-year leasehold land for the temples has risen dramatically. They have had to pay as much as S\$3 million to S\$10 million for a 2,000 to 3,000 square metres replacement site (HDB 2005). This is equivalent to \$ 1,500 to \$ 3,333 per sq. m. On top of this, the construction of new temple buildings would cost another few million dollars. Most of the affected Chinese temples have disappeared altogether as they were unable to afford the cost of relocation and reconstruction. A study of the replacement price of temples is instructive (HDB 2005). (Table 4 abstract)

Successful parties bidding for land designated for building of temples have to be contented with land on a 30 years lease, and the majority of these are of a size of 2,000 sq. metres. There appears to be a program to restrict the expansion of temples whose land has been acquired by the State. One exception shown in the table below refers to the Bedok North property – this land had a double classification of permitted use, as a temple and as a columbarium, hence the differential in pricing fetched for that land. (\$3,563 per sq. m)

Date	Street	Area/m <sup>2</sup>	Successful Tenders	Price	No. of Tenders
30/03/1992	Pasir Ris Drive 4	1,800	S'pore Buddha Sasana Society	\$621,320	3
25/07/1992	Jurong West St 92	2,000	Jin Fu Gong Temple	\$990,000	3
12/05/1994	Bukit Batok West Ave 5	2,000	Zu-Lin Temple Association	\$2,866,000	10
01/03/1995	Tampinese St 92	1,994.2	S'pore Soka Association	\$3,510,000	10
07/02/1996	Jurong West St 76	2,512.4	S'pore Soka Association	\$6,321,000	11
07/02/1996	Tampinese St 92	1,994.2	S'pore Soka Association	\$4,321,000	8
29/10/1997	Elias Road	2,715	Ven. Shi Cheng-Yen	\$5,696,613	6
17/07/1998	Woodlands Ind Park E	1,372.9	Jin Fu Gong Temple	\$1,372,900	7
26/10/1999	International Road	2,000	Bo Tien Temple	\$3,330,000	4
14/08/2000	Senja Road	2,000	S'pore Soka Association	\$3,571,700	8
29/06/2001	Admiralty St	2,000	Sal Ho Koo Kay, Tian Hoon Tien Society & Mr. Ong Bee Huat	\$1,680,000	3
26/11/2002	Punggol Field / Punggol East	2,000	Society of Love and Compassion, Sheng Jia Temple Association and Jun Temple	\$3,020,000	4
29/04/2003	Loyang Lane / Loyang Way	2,000	Loyang Tua Pek Kong	\$3,800,000	4
13/07/2004	Punggol Place / Punggol Drive	2,000	Fo Guang Shan (Singapore)	\$3,800,188	4
23/09/2005	Admiralty St	2,000	San Lian Deng Temple	\$2,300,000	1
03/01/2001	Bedok North Ave 4	3,000	Tan Holding Pte Ltd / Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple Association JV	\$10,688,340	5

Table 4: Successful bidders for lands designated for building temples (HDB 2005 abstract)

The economic implications of Table 4 warrant further discussion. The table shows that from 1992 to 2001, the State only put up 16 parcels of land designated for

temple development and there were 91 tenders submitted. Of these, 4 (or 25%) successful bids were from the external-sourced Japanese Nichirin Shoshu group (Singapore Soka Association) and 2 (or 12.5%) by Taiwan-led groups (the Fo Kwang Shan 佛光山/ Ci Ji group 慈濟功德會 of temples). The remaining 10 successful bids were from local groups. The sheer economic power of foreign temple groups account for a big portion of the successful bidders of such land parcels. Not only have such parties contributed to the competition for available land demarcated for temple building, they have upped the ante for the cost of replacement of temples. The traditional Chinese temples founded by Chinese immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century are thus being squeezed financially out of existence when faced with the Land Acquisition Act.

### **Political Mediation and United Temples**

When the temple lands were expropriated by the state in the old Tampines area under the urban redevelopment programme, the idea of setting up an organizing committee to build a United Temple was mooted in 1982 by the Member of Parliament of the Tampines area, Phua Bah Lee. Through his efforts, ten affected temples eventually obtained a piece of land for a United Temple. He was also instrumental in persuading the various heads of the temples to bring all their deities together under the same roof. After much negotiation, the price of approximately S\$370,000 was paid for the 11,100 square feet temple site. the Tampines Chinese Temple (淡賓尼聯合宮), costing approximately \$2 million, and with a total floor area of 37,000 sq. ft, conducted its welcoming ceremony for the deities on 5 November 1991 (Figure 7). The temple invited Phua Bah Lee to serve as the temple's Honorary Advisor (TCT 1992, pp. 62-65). The use of the regional nomenclature for this temple reflects the role of a wide range of government officials helping to create conditions for the construction of this temple.

Members of Parliament, various Ministers, and local grass roots leaders are often invited to serve as advisors to the United Temples – this has become an almost routine as Ning Ngui has explained:

After the formation of a United Temple, the new temples' consciousness of its identification with the nation-state is enhanced, and the temple desires to create closer connections with the state, so from time to time they will seek the aid of local Members of Parliament (some of whom serve as Ministers of State). From another perspective, the ritual community of the temple (and even its broader circle of believers) are devoted to the temple due to their belief [in its gods]. Political figures also rely on the important support of such believers, especially when the latter feel that their temple has been treated with respect and been honored [by a politician]. Those grassroots leaders who work to maintain harmony within the temple as a whole also serve as advisors, or as temple leaders, and on the basis of their newly formed territorial identity, they work extremely hard on behalf of the united temples, on behalf of society, and on behalf of the state. (Ning 2006:180).

Ning Ngui's analysis presents a picture of harmonious relationship between the temples and the state, but it is one based on mutual self-interest, which could conceivably lead to complications if the political leaders are not able to respond to the needs of the religious communities for the separation of religion and state has been a long-held policy of the government. Nevertheless, the Chinese temples of Singapore have developed new forms of cooperation, revealing a remarkable life force.



**Figure 7** Tampines Chinese Temple (淡宾尼联合宫)

Appendix 1. List of the United Temple of Singapore and their constituent temples

No.	Date of Removal	United Temple	Constituent temples
1	1974	伍合庙	聚天宮、山竹園福德祠、豆蔻園通興港、 昭應祠、無極宮（卅年後退出）、 華德善堂（卅年後加入）
2	1975	众弘善堂九皇宮	葱茅園九皇宮、众弘善堂
3	1978	水沟馆葛岸馆	水沟馆、葛岸馆
4	1978	真龙宮	真人宮、龍山亭、介谷殿、萬仙廟
5	1980	蔡厝港联合殿	关帝廟、善興壇、 关云殿、齊神宮、八巖元帥殿
6	1980	裕廊总宮	琼瑶教邸、西山宮、灵晋宮 (灵晋宮 + 西山宮 + 水沟馆 + 觀山殿 + 龍須岩)
7	1980	杨桃园城隍庙	楊桃園城隍廟 + 楊桃園萬壽寺
8	1980±	汤申廟	金榜山亭天后宮、蓮花壇、華光大帝
9	1980±	蓬萊寺	慈濟堂、名山宮、 蓬萊清水岩、普庵宮、水口宮、 祥福亭、中亭廟、舟山廟
10	1980±	紫云开吉宮	朝雲宮、開福堂、吉山廟

11	1980±	天德圣庙	报德善堂、长天宫、 钟头宫、后港水尾圣娘庙
12	1980±	太阳宫	太阳宫、福圆寺、 楞严精舍、南安寺、正龙宫
13	1980±	金宝佛寺	天公五老圣殿 + 金宝佛寺
14	1980±	显传灵光总道堂	显灵道堂、显总道堂
15	1980±	龙须岩田洋馆祥云馆	龙须岩 + 田洋馆 + 祥云馆
16	1980±	佛教会	佛教会、飞龙宫
17	1981	聚圣庙	华堂府、集福宫、龙泉岩
18	1982	广福宫	广福宫、莲峰寺、协和宫
19	1982	慈义堂将军庙	慈义堂、将军庙
20	1982	五雷宫东天宫	五雷宫、东天宫
21	1982	宏茂桥联合庙	檬林宫、金英堂、龙山岩
22	1983	三巴旺成邦联合庙	何碧山宫、成邦大伯公宫、南凤善堂
23	1984	玄夫仙庙	七寨庙、顺兴古庙、龙山庙
24	1984	镇山天福宫	石竹庙、龙镇宫、 万福宫、吉龙山庙、安山庙
25	1985	芽龙联合宫	福德宫、龙山亭、乾坤庙
26	1986	七寨龙泉庙	七寨庙、龙泉庙
27	1987	青云联合庙	青云庙、安仁宫、锦福庙
28	1987	波东巴西联合庙	云峰古庙合兴光庙 ( 云峰古庙 + 合兴光庙 ) 云峰天后庙、三尊宫、天性祠
29	1987	聚善华山宫	聚善堂、华山宫
30	1987	龙合山七寨庙	龙合山宫、七寨庙
31	1987	树头伯公暨广进殿	树头伯公、广进殿
32	1988	城凤联合庙	韭菜芭城隍庙、琅琊苑、凤玄宫
33	1988	义顺镇联合庙	镇南庙广寿堂 ( 镇南庙 + 广寿堂 ) 元龙圣庙 ( 元寿堂 + 龙霞馆 + 新胜坛 ) 顺西宫水池林 ( 顺西宫 + 水池林 )
34	1989	长秀威灵东山联合庙	长秀馆、威灵宫、东山庙
35	1989	天龙宫	金福宫 ( 仑仔尾大伯公 )、 谦福律天公坛、阜龙宫
36	1990	上帝庙济公坛	上帝庙、济公坛
37	1992	裕廊西联合宫	显龙宫、圣龙庙、西海岸福德祠、 天公坛昭灵宫 ( 天公坛 + 昭灵宫 )

38	1992	淡滨尼联合宫	福安殿、吉星亭 洛阳天公坛、淡滨尼九哩天公坛、 济阳堂、后池厅、慈灵宫、顺兴古庙 淡滨尼九哩大伯公庙、新芭大伯公庙、 洛阳大伯公庙、地万大伯公庙
39	1992	天降佛堂 (德光岛联合庙)	天降佛堂太阳宫、天照佛堂、 西华寺、缀伯公庙、降福宫
40	1992	福通联合庙	裕廊凤山寺、天灵道堂、本元虚灵山总道堂 (本元山道堂 + 虚灵山道堂)
41	1992	金凤庙	金凤庙、三宝佛光寺
42	1992	凤图庙	凤图庙、观音庙、环图庙、 花果山平安明德宫、义星堂
43	1993	巴爷礼峇联合庙	大圣院、风火院
44	1993	天圣坛赐福宫	天圣坛、赐福宫
45	1993	蔡厝港联圣宫	蔡厝港斗母宫、三中宫、 水沟馆圣德坛、天云殿、九龙宫
46	1993	蔡厝港油池村联合庙	虞都庵、顺龙庙、顺龙宫、 龙莲花山宫、五福庙
47	1993	六巡三合庙	凤山堂 (凤山堂 + 法进殿 + 泉盛宫)、 龙须岩金水馆 (龙须岩 + 金水馆)、三安府
48	1995	西天佛庙	西天佛庙 + 西天道庙
49	1995	慈灵联合庙	慈云山宫、昭灵庙
50	1995	七福宫	七福宫、天文坛
51	1995	菜市联合宫	竹云宫、福山亭、福灵宫
52	1995	忠邦联合宫	华报善堂、关帝庙、真空教复本堂、 泮水港斗母宫凤山寺 (泮水港斗母宫 + 泮水港凤山寺)
53	1996	桂林联合庙	爱民宫、集声宫、金全法坛 龙显山宫、石竹庙、对山庙
54	1996	玉皇殿联合庙	玉皇殿、福安庙、慈善坛
55	1996	忠义天明庙	忠义馆、广明堂、



			午峰岩、莲田堂、龙田庙
56	1996	凤山坛飞龙宫	(德惠) 凤山坛、飞龙宫
57	1997	石林晋山联合宫	檬林宫、石雾洞 晋平寺善莲山宫 (晋平寺 + 善莲山宫)
58	1998	天显庙	万礼莲和殿、 玄夫庙救世坛 (玄夫庙 + 救世坛)
59	1999	正华慈善宫	木山圣母宫、慈莲堂
60	2000	兀兰联圣庙	天祖庙、武当山庙、 清水庙东圣殿 (清水庙 + 东圣殿)
61	2000	德海宫	崇德善堂、莲圣坛、 玉海棠观音救苦会
62	2000	斗天宫	斗天宫、水廊头大伯公宫
63	2001	盛港联合庙	万兴山崇义庙、半港天后宫
64	2002	福泉寺水美宫	福泉寺、水美宫
65	2003	大乘精舍药师行愿会	大乘精舍、药师行愿会
66	2004	三巴旺联合宫	蓬莱殿、三巴旺天后宫、 三巴旺天云殿财神庙
67	2004	拿督坛保安宫天德宫	九条桥新芭拿督坛、保安宫、天德宫
68	2007	榜鹅联合庙	圣家庙、天君府、天慈宫

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