

A PHOTOGRAPHIC NOTEBOOK

Gods in the Harbour

Effigies, Smoke, and an Old Harbour Afternoon in Tanjung Pinang

Photographs and words by Michel Lippitsch
Tanjung Pinang, Bintan — September 2026



Introduction

You can do it close to home, not always a thousand miles away. The turn of a street, a new corner, a new perspective. New faces, a new conversation, new ideas exchanged, a new way of seeing, hearing, smelling. You can travel through time, feeling the weight of histories, peeling layers one at a time — a new cloud, a new sky, a new mind. Curiosity, in all and everything.

The old town of Tanjung Pinang — not the new harbourfront, which feels synthetic, built and conceived by people behind desks and budgets and weird ideas. Take a few symbols and turn them into a parody, a Disneyfication of a city. But right next door, less than a mile away, is a place so thick with history that you can't displace it. You can build a little within it, but you cannot replace it. There, in the market, among the fishing docks and the prepare shops, history prevails.

The Chinese temples are old and maintained, and they put me in a state of awe. They command respect, and almost a devotion, to the ideas embedded in the sights. The smoke of incense whirls and embalms the deities and their offerings. Most houses show signs of the yin and the yang. I sat to drink a perfectly crafted coffee, talking to an eighty-five-year-old man, born there, in those same buildings.

— *M.L., Tanjung Pinang*

PART ONE

The Market

Dried squid, tide-worn jetties, and a harbour that has not yet been asked to perform for anyone. Bintan has sat on a sea lane between India and China since long before any of these buildings stood, and the market still runs on the same tide it always has.



THE DRIED SQUID SELLERS

A family works through a heap of squid, split and pressed flat to dry under the harbour's lean-to roofs — ordinary trade, running alongside the temples rather than beneath them.

Long before either the temples or the market sheds existed, this stretch of the Riau archipelago was already a waypoint on the sea route linking India and China. The Srivijayan and later Malay and Bugis powers who controlled these straits taxed the ships passing through them, not the land, because the water was always the real asset.



THE PILE OF BILIS

A mound of *ikan bilis* — dried anchovies — sun-cured to pale straw, tails curled, sold loose by the scoop rather than the fillet.

Bilis is the harbour's quiet staple: too small and too cheap to be anyone's prize catch, but netted, dried, and sold here in bulk far longer than any of the grander trade goods — pepper, gambier, tin — that once justified the town's existence to outsiders.



BAILING THE BOAT

A man kneels in his own sampan, scooping out bilgewater, an empty boat drifting behind him and two men on the jetty minding a wrapped bundle.

Five minutes of unglamorous upkeep, repeated every morning — the plain labour that keeps a wooden hull from ending up in the boat graveyard a few hundred metres up the channel.



HANDING UP THE CATCH

A fisherman passes a bag of the day's catch up to the men on the jetty above him; the whole exchange takes seconds and needs no translation.

It is also, in outline, the same transaction that first brought Chinese settlers here in the 1740s — migrants who arrived not overland but by junk and prau, recruited under the Riau-Lingga sultanate's *kongsi* system to work gambier and pepper plantations whose harvest then left, again, by boat.



BOTH HANDS RAISED

An old fisherman in a camouflage hat lifts both palms toward the camera — half greeting, half a good-natured refusal to be photographed for long.

His hands carry the visible record of decades of rope, net, and salt water: a biography written on skin rather than paper.



A FACE THAT HAS WATCHED THIS HARBOUR

The same weathered face, closer: deep-set eyes, sun-cured skin, an expression somewhere between wariness and quiet amusement.

Easy to imagine this could be the same generation, if not quite the same man, as the eighty-five-year-old met later over coffee — someone born in one of these buildings, who never had reason to leave the water.



A DIFFERENT GENERATION, THE SAME DOORWAY

A young man in a red workshop polo crouches, laughing, against the timber shutters of an old shophouse, a motorbike parked behind him.

The old wood does not care how old the person leaning on it is; it has been the backdrop to this street's small talk for longer than anyone currently using it has been alive.

PART TWO

The Working Harbour

Before the temples, there was the sea route; before the sea route, there was the trade wind. What still moves on this water — boats built by hand, nets thrown by hand, an old hull left to rot when it can no longer be caulked — is the oldest continuous business in Tanjung Pinang.

Two Towns, One Strait

Stand on the old jetty at dusk and the far shore is close enough to seem like an afterthought — a low green line, a scatter of roofs, twenty minutes by boat. That narrow water is not empty space. It is a border that has held for nearly three hundred years, and it runs, roughly, along a line of dialect rather than distance: Tanjung Pinang town to the Hokkien, and Senggarang, the settlement facing it across the strait, to the Teochew.

Both communities trace themselves to the same wave of arrivals: labourers brought over from Fujian and Guangdong through the 1740s onward, not as free settlers but as recruits of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate's *kongsi* — sworn brotherhoods that were, at once, labour contractor, burial society, credit union, and local government, built to run the gambier and pepper plantations the Sultanate had granted them the right to clear. A kongsi did not ask where in China a man was from before it put a parang in his hand; it asked what dialect he spoke, because that was what decided which brotherhood would take him in, which temple he would owe incense to, and, eventually, which side of this strait he would settle.

Hokkien speakers clustered where the deep anchorage was — this town, its shophouses, its harbour, the very temples photographed in these pages. Teochew speakers took the opposite bank, building a temple cluster of their own at Senggarang that is, in its own way, as old and as layered as this one. The two groups shared a Sultanate, a crop, and eventually a nation, but for generations they kept separate clan associations, separate dialects at the market, separate gods addressed in separate accents — two Chinese Bintans, facing each other over water neither needed a passport to cross and neither, for the most part, bothered to.

No kongsi headman's name survives on any plaque in this town, but it is worth inventing one, briefly, to make the arrangement less abstract: call him Tan Ah Kim, a Hokkien recruiter who arrived with nothing but a dialect and a letter of introduction, and within a decade was the man plantation owners argued with and labourers owed money to — equal parts foreman, moneylender, and priest, since it was very often the kongsi headman who paid for the first modest shrine his workers could burn incense at. Across the strait, his Teochew counterpart — call her nothing, since the record is even thinner on women's names than men's, though gambier-curing sheds ran on female labour as much as male — answered to a different brotherhood, prayed at a different altar, and very likely never had reason to learn his name at all.

Their descendants have long since stopped needing the distinction. Hokkien and Teochew families here intermarry, trade, and turn up at each other's temple anniversaries; the tang-ki mediumship photographed later in this book is, by most accounts, a shared inheritance of both traditions rather than either one's alone. But the strait is still there, the two temple clusters still stand on their separate banks, and every so often — a lunar new year, a god's birthday, a funeral that calls for a particular brotherhood's rites — someone still makes the short crossing their great-great-grandfather made for entirely different reasons.



THE VIEW FROM THE SCALES

A market shed's scales and sacks, and beyond the open wall, the jetty and stilt houses the whole trade depends on, caught in one frame.

Every shed like this exists because boats can reach it. Tanjung Pinang's old town sits where it does for exactly that reason: a sheltered anchorage on the Riau Strait, within a day's sail of Singapore, Johor, and Bintan's own pepper- and gambier-growing interior.



A SAMPAN AT THE PILINGS

An open boat tied at the foot of a stilt house, jerrycans and coiled line the only clue to that morning's work.

Boats this size — unnamed, unregistered, built and patched by their own owners — still outnumber every other vessel in the old harbour, much as they must have when the first Hokkien and Teochew arrivals were ferried ashore here nearly three centuries ago.



THE GREEN BOAT

A man in a faded green shirt leans into the oar, the hull beneath him gone the colour of old sea-glass where the paint has worn through to bare wood and rust-red primer.

Nothing under him is registered, insured, or built to a plan — it is simply the kind of boat this shoreline has always produced: patched by its own owner, repainted whenever there is spare paint, and retired only when it finally refuses to be patched again. The first Hokkien and Teochew labourers came ashore here in vessels not so different from this one, ship to shallows, the last few metres always covered by hand.



THE TRAWLER

A larger wooden fishing boat at anchor, red hull below a blue waterline, tyres slung as fenders, two smaller boats moored close in the foreground.

This hull shape — timber, high bow, open working deck — descends directly from the prau and junk traffic that once carried the region's pepper, gambier, and tin to Singapore and beyond. The engine changed; the silhouette barely has.



PROW AGAINST RUST

A red-hulled boat noses up against a jetty building gone entirely to rust, a spare tyre lashed on as a fender.

The rust is climate more than neglect: salt air and monsoon humidity work fast on tin and steel here, one reason the harbour's older buildings are still raised in timber and mended plank by plank rather than replaced outright.



A KNOT, BEFORE THE ODE

Stripped of colour, a bow rope resolves into pure calligraphy — loops thrown over a worn post, one strand crossing another and holding, no metal fitting anywhere in the frame.

This is the same rope-work a later page in this book tries to put into words: nothing here is store-bought hardware, only cord doing, patiently, everything a cleat or a winch would do on a grander boat.



TIED UP FOR THE NIGHT

Two small sampans rafted fore and aft to a larger dark-timbered boat, a tyre fender hung from the mooring post nearest the camera.

Mooring boat to boat like this is an old economy of rope and space: the harbour has never had enough jetty frontage for every vessel to tie up on its own.



THREE, WAITING

Three wooden hulls lie nested prow to prow, ropes crossing between them like handshakes, the whole raft rocking so gently the reflections barely break.

Boats moor to each other here as much as to the jetty — an old economy of borrowed space repeated so often it has become its own kind of architecture, a village of hulls that reshuffles every tide.



TWO KINDS OF CROSSING

Two men row a green sampan by hand in the foreground; behind them, a neat row of white ferries and a crane barge belong to the harbourfront's newer, ticketed world.

The old harbour's real fault line runs through the water, not the streets: oar against outboard, a livelihood that still fits in one small boat against an industry running on schedules and hulls built elsewhere.



POLING HOME

Seen from behind, a man in a straw hat poles a laden sampan away from the camera, a patrol launch and a row of stilt-house roofs on the far side of the channel.

However official the harbour's newer boats become, the unpowered sampan is still the fastest way to reach many of these houses. No road has ever gone there.



THE NET DRUM

Hat low, cigarette clenched, a bearded man leans his whole weight into a bamboo pole, a woven net-drum lashed to the gunwale behind him and a plastic sack of the day's takings at his feet.

The pole does the work an outboard would do on a larger boat — slower, silent, and free, which in a harbour this old still counts as an advantage rather than a hardship.



CASTING THE NET

Waist-deep beside a stilt house, a man draws in a hand-cast net, a second net already coiled over his shoulder for the next throw.

Cast-net fishing off one's own pilings needs no boat and no licence — the oldest and least changed way of taking a living from this water, practised here since long before Tanjung Pinang had that name.



A SECOND CAST

From a low boat crowded with jerrycans, a man in a cap gathers his net for another throw, the last cast still dripping off the gunwale in bright arcs.

One throw is a chore photographed by accident; two throws, caught a breath apart, is a rhythm — the same unhurried repetition that has fed this harbour since long before anyone here owned a camera to record it.



AN ODE TO KNOTS

A hank of blue leader lines, each finished with its own snap-swivel, gathered and bound at the top with nothing more than a simple lashing round a loop of cord; beside it, coils of net twine and pale monofilament hang ready.

No sailor here would call this rigging poetry, but it is: the bowline that will not slip yet unties in a second, the clove hitch that holds a mooring line to a piling through a whole monsoon, the plain overhand loop that turns a length of cord into a hundred identical leaders in an afternoon. None of it is written down. It passes from hand to hand the way the boats themselves do, taught by having your fingers corrected until the knot stops needing thought.



A FACE FROM DECADES OF SALT WATER

An older fisherman sits low in his green boat among buckets and coiled rope, a hand-rolled cigarette at his lips, looking straight into the camera.

Faces like this carry the harbour's real oral history, none of it written down: which channels silt up first, which months bring which fish, which family has always fished which stretch of water.



THE PORCH COUNCIL

A woman sits with a box of fish scraps between her knees, four men gathered loosely around her in the doorway of a shophouse — nobody posing, everybody mid-conversation, the kind of gathering that has no name because it happens too often to need one.

This is the kongsi's real afterlife: not the brotherhood's old ledgers or halls, long gone, but the habit it left behind of neighbours settling the day's small business on a shared porch rather than alone.



WHAT THE SEA RETIRES

Behind an old warehouse, the stripped masts of dismantled fishing boats stand in a scrapyard of hulls; in the foreground, a patrol launch marked *KPLP* — *Pengawas Laut dan Pelayaran* (Sea and Shipping Patrol) sits freshly moored.

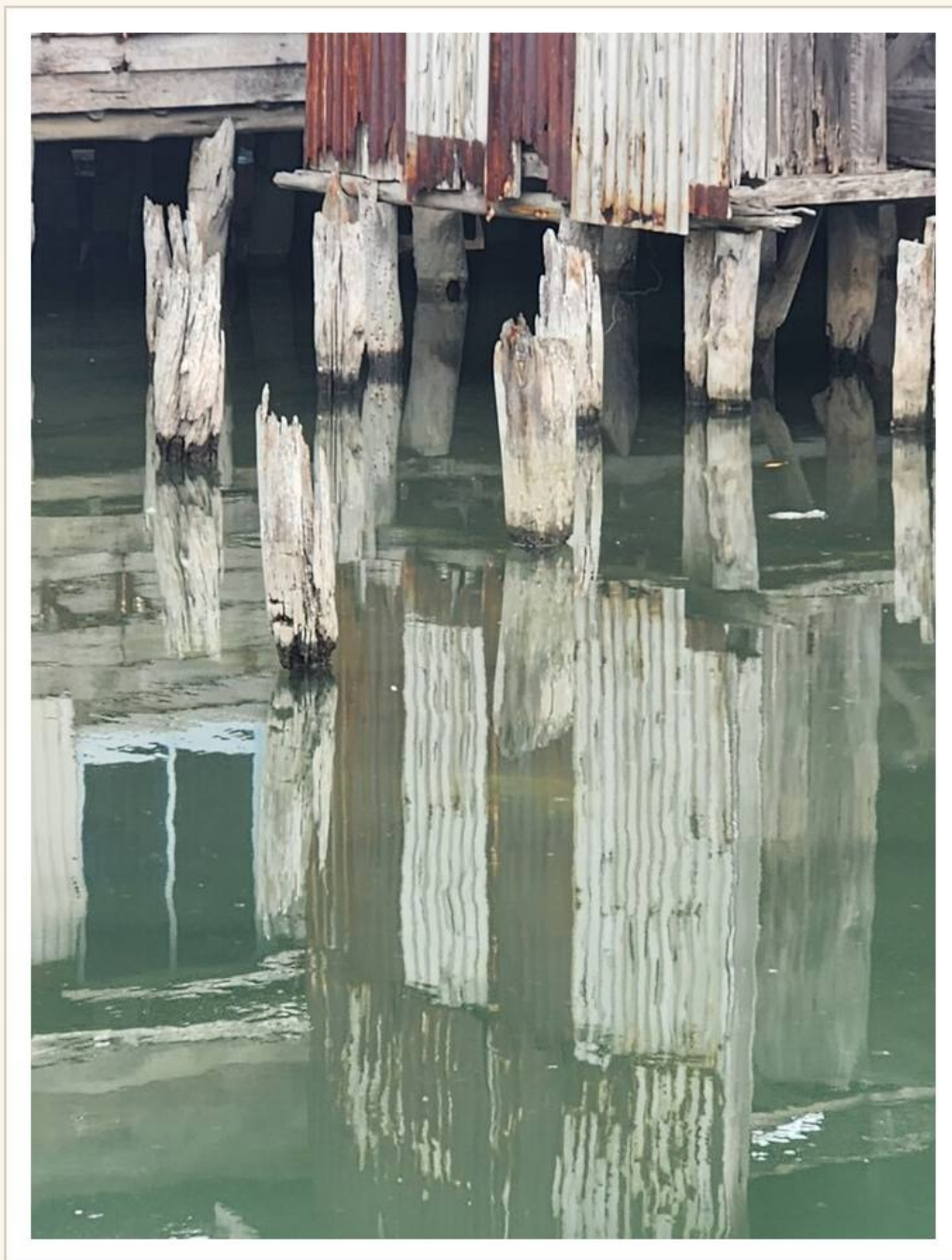
Not old against new so much as one continuous job, handed down: a kongsi headman once decided which boats kept working this water, then a harbourmaster under the Riau-Lingga sultanate, and now a patrol boat wearing a name that means, roughly, the same thing.



THE BOAT GRAVEYARD

An old wooden hull lies beached and broken open in a scrap-strewn yard further down the channel, its ribs exposed the way a boat's frame is only ever seen while being built, or after it has stopped being anything else.

There is no ceremony to it — no burning, no burial — just the plain fact that a wooden hull, however carefully bailed every morning, eventually loses the argument with the water.



WHAT THE WATER REPEATS

Broken pilings and a rust-streaked wall of corrugated iron stand doubled in still water, the reflection so exact it takes a moment to find the line where the real harbour ends and its copy begins.

A fitting note to close this half of the book on: everything photographed on this stretch of water — boats, ropes, faces, the whole working harbour — the water has been quietly repeating back for three hundred years, to anyone who stood still long enough to look down.

PART THREE

The Threshold

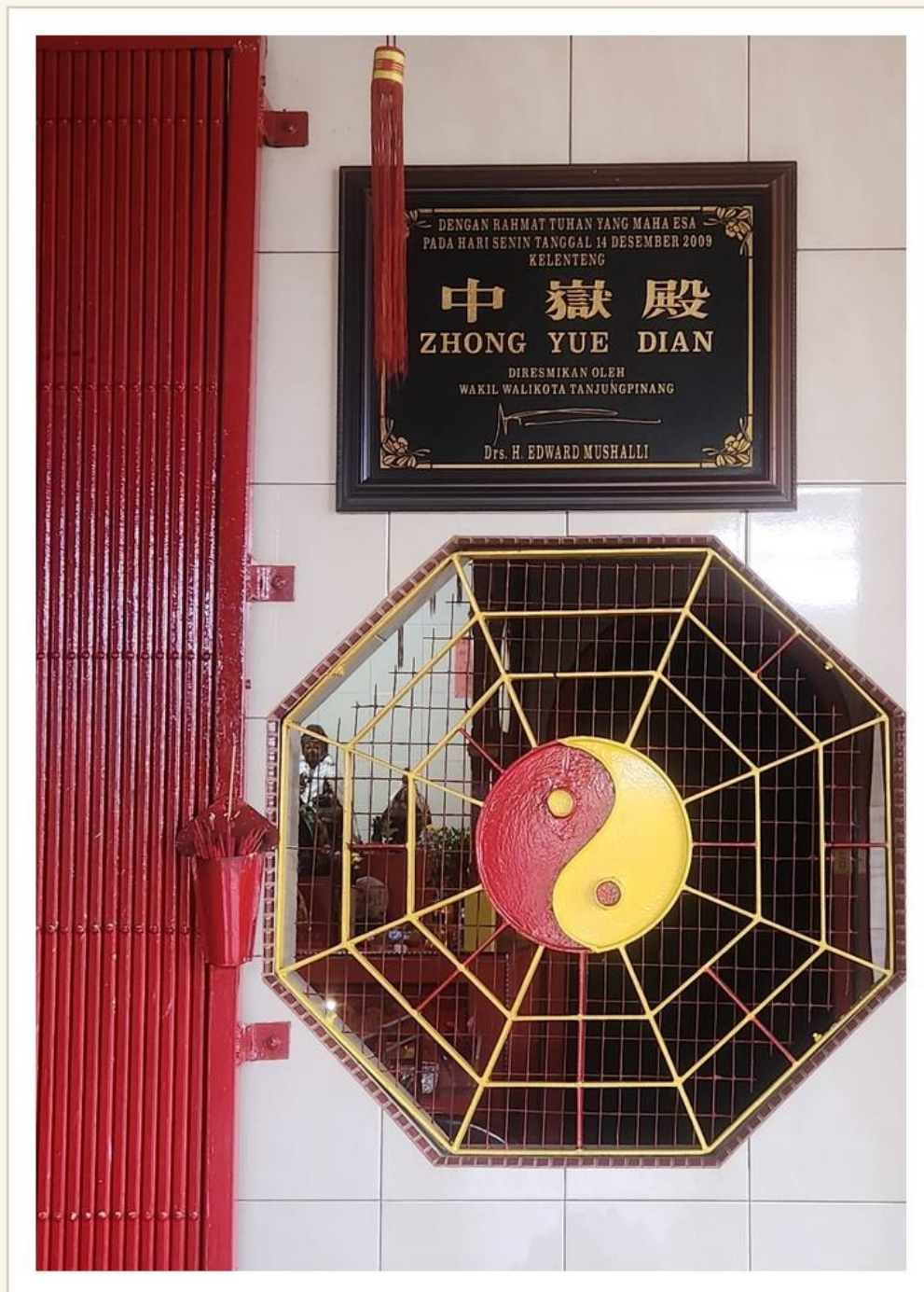
*A small neighbourhood shrine, formally named Zhong
Yue Dian, dedicated in 2009 but carrying on a much
older practice.*



THE GATE OF ZHONG YUE DIAN

Yellow walls, red-lacquered doors, a stone lion, and a black lacquer plaque naming the shrine *Zhong Yue Dian* — the Hall of the Central Peak, one of Taoism's Five Sacred Mountains, given a house on a side street.

On the other side of the threshold hangs an octagonal *bagua* mirror, its yin-yang disc wound in red and gold thread — the same symbol the introduction to this book noticed painted on so many nearby doors, here doing its quiet work of turning bad energy away.



THE BAGUA, CLOSER

Dedication plaque and mirror together, close enough to read the fine print: *Kelenteng Zhong Yue Dian* , consecrated Monday, 14 December 2009, under the city's deputy mayor.

A temple this size rarely gets written up anywhere else; the plaque on its own wall is often the only public record of when it began.



WHITE TIGER GENERAL

Low at floor level, never on the altar itself, crouches a painted tiger beside peacock feathers and a plaque reading *Bai Hu Jiang Jun* — the White Tiger General.

Kept deliberately beneath the higher gods: a fierce, subordinate guardian fed differently from them, believed to bite the head off approaching misfortune before it reaches the door.



FEEDING THE TIGER

Closer still: the tiger's carved jaw, red tongue, and glass eyes behind a thicket of joss sticks and incense ash.

Offerings left for him are kept separate from the gods above — raw or bloodied where theirs are cooked or sweet — a small ritual distinction that marks him as muscle, not management.



WHERE THE SMOKE RISES

An incense burner crowded with joss sticks and offerings, three gilded statues waiting out of focus in the red light behind it.

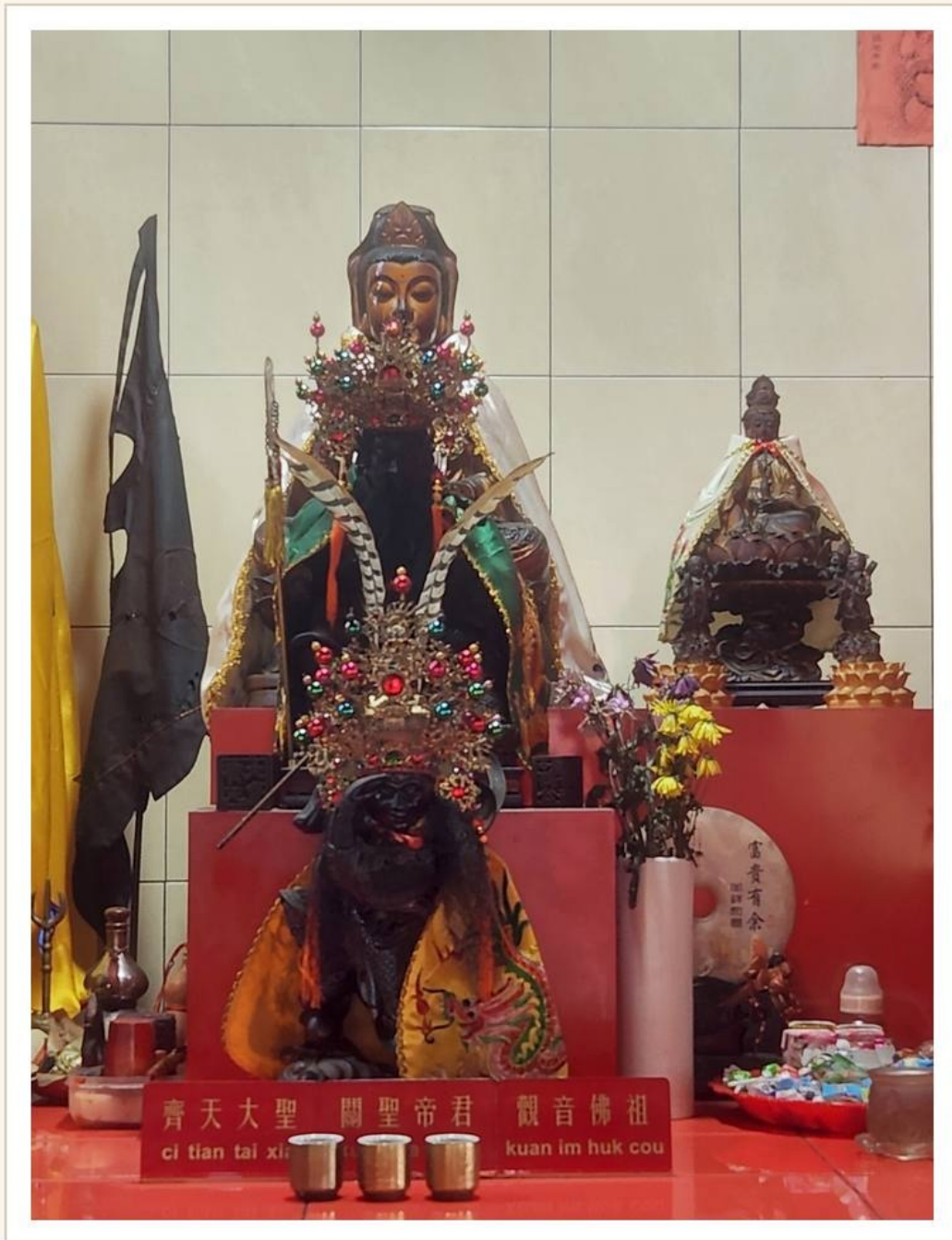
The burner is never allowed to go cold; the ash inside it is years, sometimes decades, deep — close to the introduction's own image of smoke embalming the deities and their offerings.



THE LANTERN

A black lacquer temple lantern, tasselled in red and green, its glass panels lit from within around a painted goddess and a gold character for fortune.

Even the fittings are iconography here. This particular panel's robed, wind-caught figure belongs to the same family of images as the sea goddess a few pages on — painted rather than carved, but keeping the same watchful, seaward posture.



THREE NAMES, ONE ALTAR

One nameplate lists three deities together: the Great Sage Equal to Heaven (the Monkey King, *Qí Tiān Dà Shèng*), the deified general Guan Yu, and Guanyin.

This kind of committee is ordinary here: a temple built by people, not doctrine, keeps whichever gods its worshippers have found useful, however different their stories. Guanyin herself has a maritime side rarely mentioned alongside her mercy: as *Nanhai Guanyin*, Guanyin of the South Sea, she is petitioned by sailors in trouble much as Mazu is, the two goddesses' followings overlapping at almost every port temple in this part of the world.



THREE HEADS, SIX ARMS

Close enough now to read the armour: fish-scale mail across the chest, a war-club cradled in one fist, a bright ring looped over another, and, half-hidden behind the central face, the second and third heads that give this form of Nezha its name.

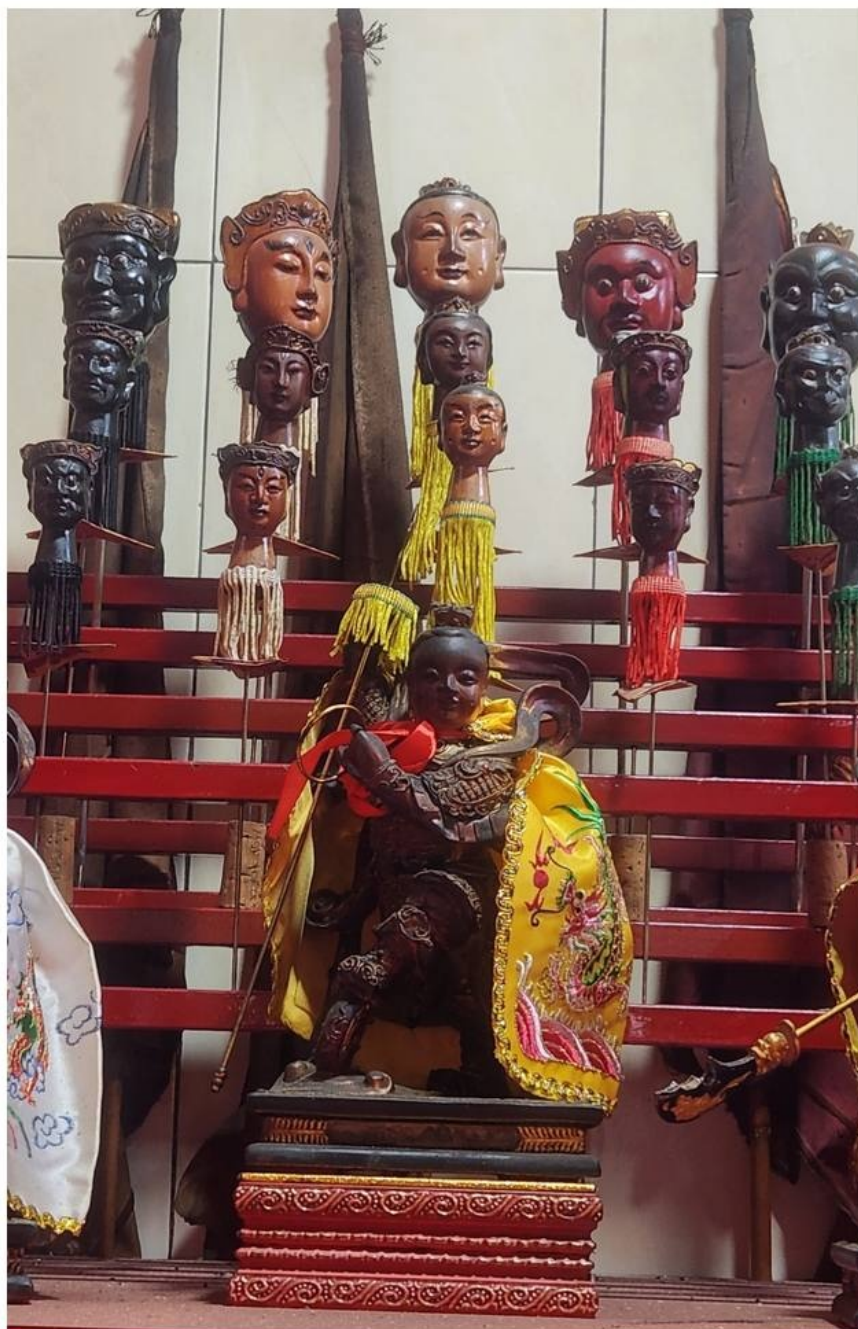
In this form he is also the Marshal of the Central Altar, commander of the Five Camps: the spirit army stationed at the temple's cardinal points, whose flags and painted heads appear a few pages on.



THE MARSHAL AND THE EARTH GOD, TOGETHER

A red sign names this shrine three ways — Three Heads Six Arms, Marshal of the Central Altar, and Fu De Zheng Shen — while a bearded, golden, fan-holding elder sits enthroned just behind Nezha's fiercer image.

That elder is *Tudigong* , sometimes *Dabogong* : the lowest-ranking, most approachable deity in the system, a village headman for the spirit world, responsible for this one patch of ground.



THE FIVE LORD GENERALS

Dozens of small carved heads on poles stand ranked before tall banners, a diminutive Nezha posted in front of them.

A sign identifies part of the array as the *Wu Ye Jiang Jun* , the Five Lord Generals: stand-ins for the Five Camps, paraded whenever the temple's spirit garrison escorts its commander through the streets.



FIVE FACES, FIVE COLOURS

Closer than the wide shot a page back: five carved heads on their poles, each a different complexion and a different calm — black, terracotta, gold, red, and a deep aged brown — tassels of coloured thread falling from each collar like unravelled rank.

Colour is rank here, not decoration: the Five Camps' generals are traditionally read east, south, centre, west, and north, each assigned his own hue, his own element, his own quarter of the sky to hold.



A FAN OF IRON LEAVES

A ceremonial fan-duster, its black metal fronds cut leaf-thin and gilded at the edges, bound to a handle of split bamboo.

Objects like this one travel with a procession rather than staying fixed to an altar — carried ahead of a possessed medium to clear the air, more tool than ornament despite the goldwork.



A FACE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Stripped of colour, one of the crowned general heads reads almost as a photograph of a real face: beaded crown catching the light, armoured shoulders, an expression fixed somewhere between calm and warning.

Colour is how these figures announce rank — black skin, red skin, gold trim, jade sashes. Without it, what is left is simply craftsmanship: how deliberately the carver built a face meant to be looked up at, not just at.



THE TEMPLE'S OWN CALENDAR

A paper almanac page for 19 September 2026, pinned inside a wire fan-guard, gives the lunar date and the day's lucky and unlucky hours.

A small, practical reminder that this is a working building with a rhythm of its own, not only a museum of statues.



JI GONG, THE LIVING BUDDHA

Closer in, the grin is unmistakable: a golden monk with his cap set crooked, a torn fan in one hand and a wine gourd in the other, two smaller attendant figures in red bibs seated at his feet like children who have climbed onto a favourite uncle's lap.

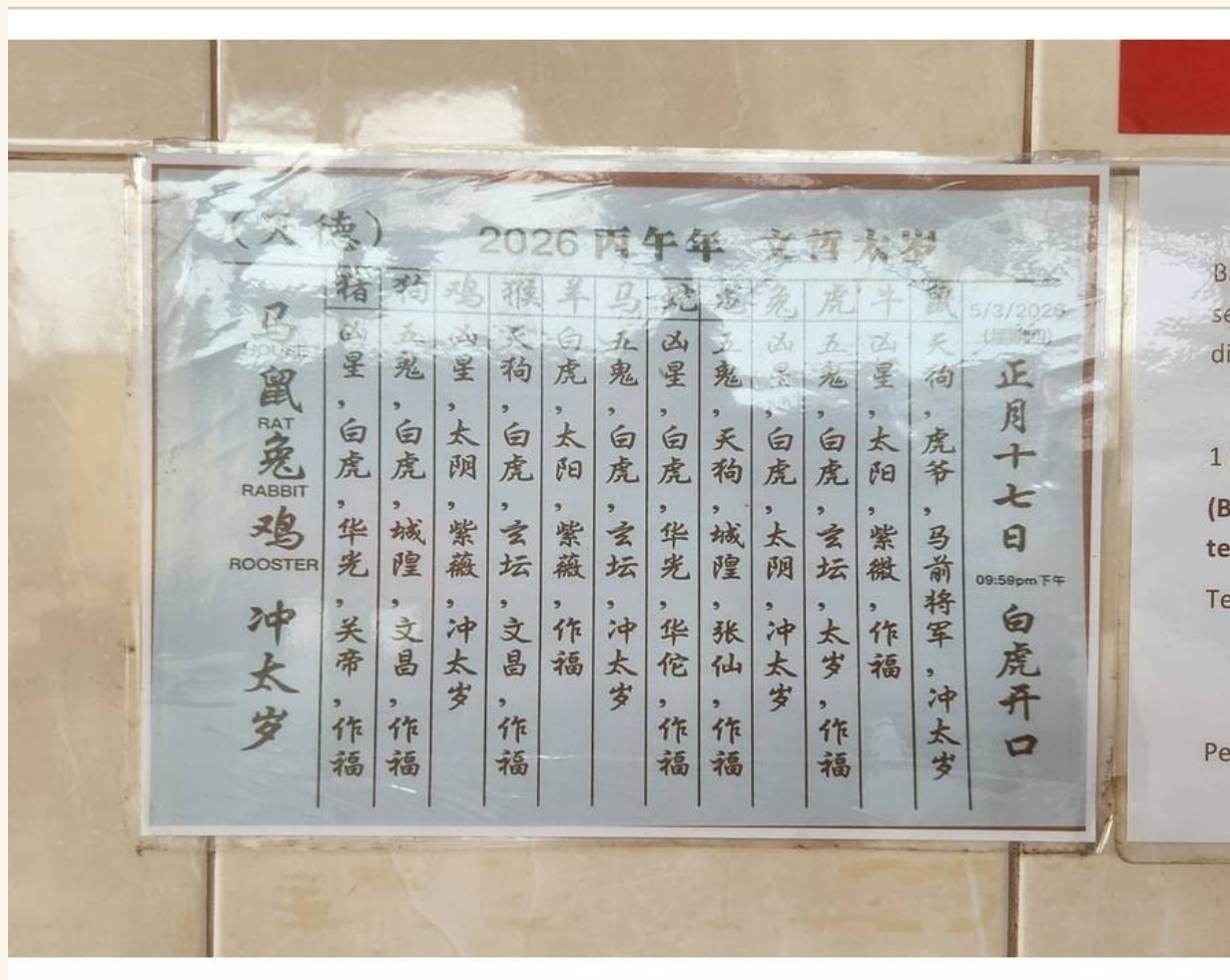
A plaque names him *Ji Gong Huo Fo* : a real Song-dynasty monk who broke every rule of monastic discipline while secretly holding full enlightenment, petitioned today for exactly the scrappy help a more solemn god might not bother with.



THE JADE EMPEROR'S COURT

Yu Huang Shang Di, the Jade Emperor, sits robed in gold at the centre of his own throne room, flanked two to a side by armoured marshals: the Four Great Generals of his celestial guard.

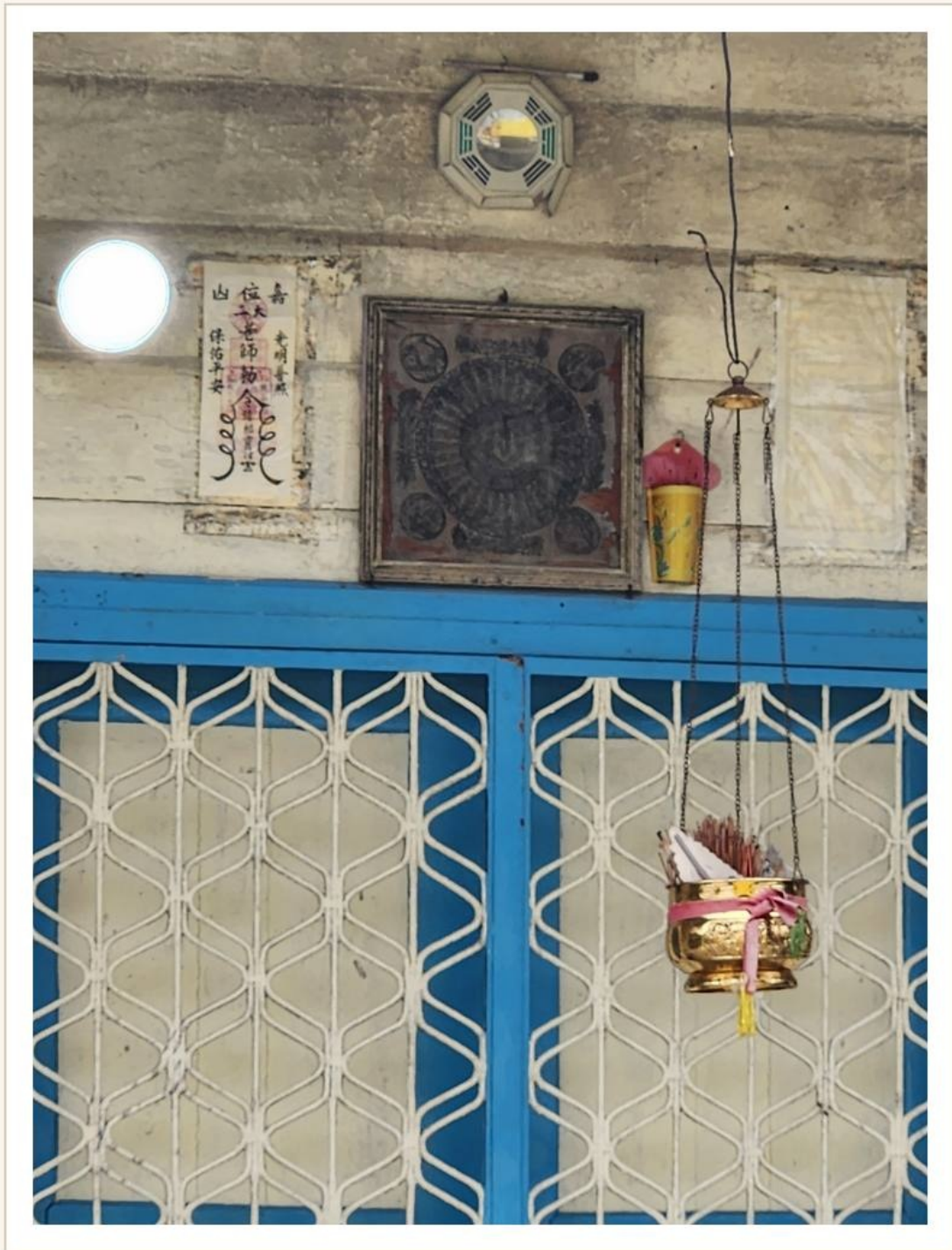
The clearest picture in the book of how this pantheon is organised: an emperor who rules by delegation, and a command standing ready to act on either side of him.



THE GRAND DUKE OF THE YEAR

A laminated chart lists which of the twelve zodiac animals clash with 2026 and which stand in harmony with it.

This is *Tai Sui* reverence: an entire year has its own presiding general, and offending him through ignorance of the calendar is treated as a real, avoidable risk.



A SECOND THRESHOLD

A second, older bagua mirror hangs on an outside wall beside a framed talisman, above a blue security grille.

Every entrance here is protected twice — once by lock, once by the older kind of security a mirror like this is trusted to provide.

PART FOUR

The Great Hall

*Deeper into the same complex, a taller, older-feeling
room: weapons, an immortal's portrait, and a ledger of
who gave.*



UNDER THE CLERESTORY

A taller hall opens beyond the small shrine room, its roof vented at a high clerestory, a miniature temple-within-a-temple glowing at the far end.

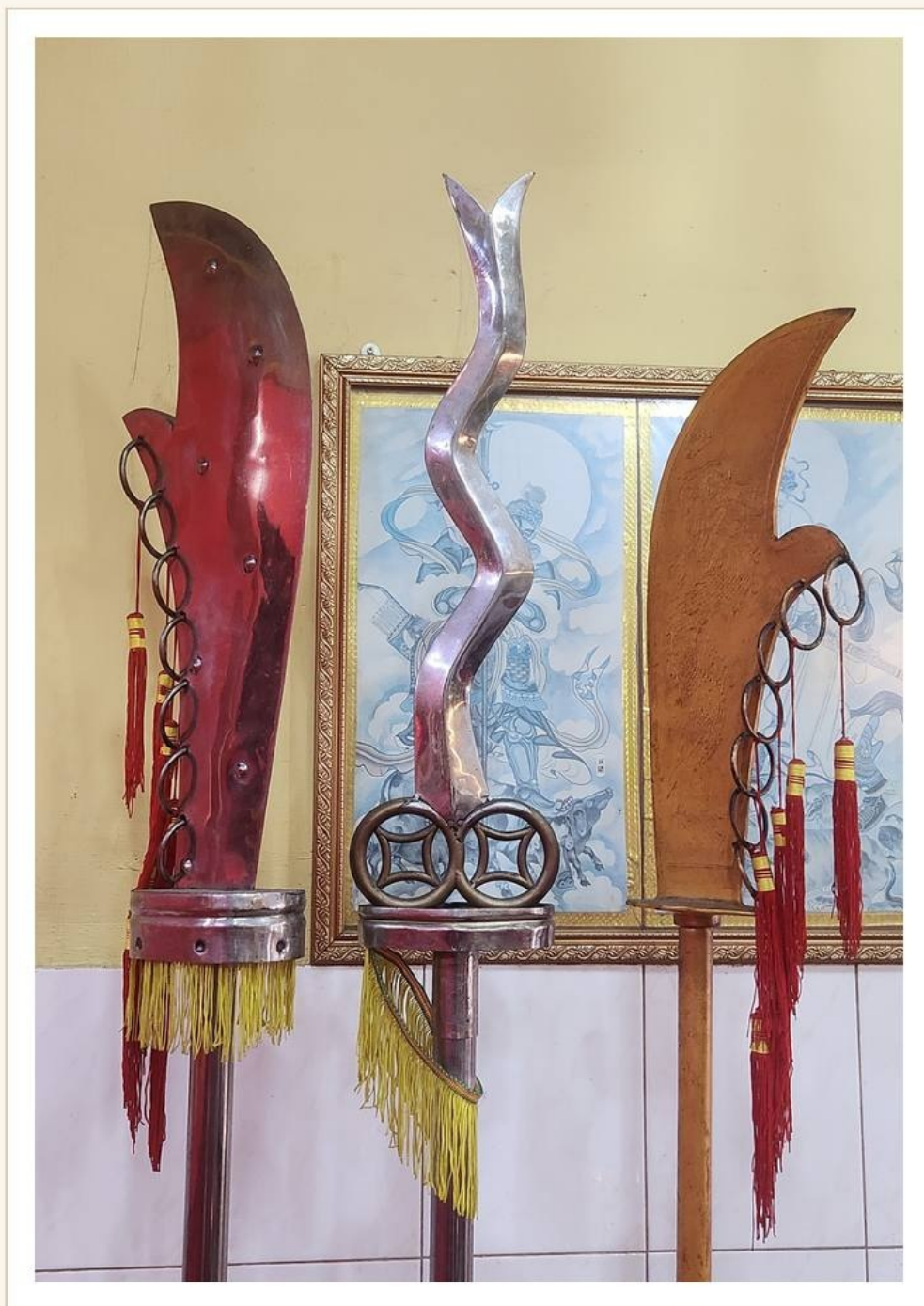
The scale change is deliberate: this is where the temple's more formal business — larger ceremonies, larger crowds — is meant to happen.



A TEMPLE IN MINIATURE

An entire wooden pagoda shrine in miniature, fairy-lit, gold dragons carved chasing a pearl across its back panel, cellophane-wrapped flowers standing guard on either side.

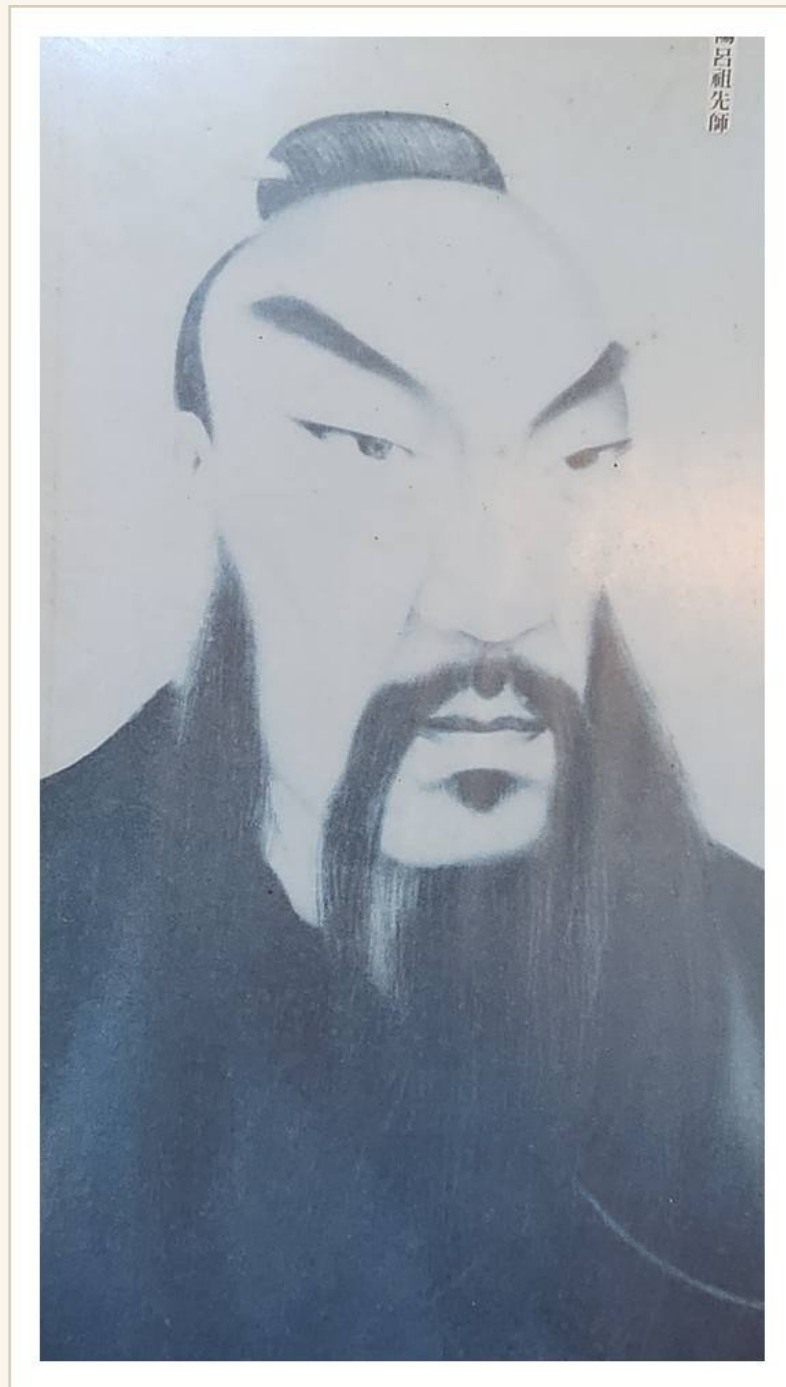
Building a small, exquisitely detailed temple to house the temple's own central image is common practice — a shrine within a shrine, reserved for whichever deity the community considers too important to leave in the open.



WEAPONS WAITING

Three tasselled ceremonial blades — broadsword, serpentine sword, halberd — mounted against the wall behind a framed blue-and-white print of a warrior god riding through cloud.

Not decoration. On festival days, weapons like these are handed to a possessed medium — to brandish, to cut curses with, or to carry at the head of a procession.



PATRIARCH LU

A framed ink portrait of a long-bearded scholar-immortal, labelled *Chunyang Lu Zu Xian Shi* — Patriarch Lu of Pure Yang, better known as Lu Dongbin, most famous of the Eight Immortals.

Patron of scholars, physicians, and swordsmanship, and, fittingly for a temple that still practises spirit mediumship, one of the immortals most often invoked historically in spirit-writing.



HANDS FOLDED

Cropped tight enough to lose the rest of the statue: a crowned face behind a curtain of beads, two carved hands folded at the chest in the universal gesture of prayer, a thread of incense smoke drifting past.

Whichever emperor-god this belongs to, the gesture is the point of this close-up rather than the identity — the same folded hands a visitor is expected to make back at him.

[illegible]

THE LEDGER OF WHO GAVE

Column after column of names in black ink on pink paper, a figure beside each one — a hundred here, sixty there, the modest arithmetic of an entire congregation's generosity written out by hand.

Unglamorous next to the gold and dragons around it, and essential: no incense burner stays lit, no roof stays painted, without a list exactly like this one. It is also the plainest surviving descendant of the kongsi's old ledgers — the same impulse to write down who gave what, kept alive on notebook paper long after the brotherhoods themselves dissolved into ordinary temple committees.

PART FIVE

Cetiya Sasana Kerti

A separate temple nearby, its name built from Pali and Sanskrit roots — the foundation of the shrine that upholds the teaching. Its inner sanctum holds the closest thing this book has to a spine: a sea goddess, a short walk from the water she is meant to be watching.



TWO DRAGONS AT THE DOOR

Outside, before any of the gold and lacquer within: a pagoda-roofed incense stand under a red sign reading *Cetiya Sasana Kerti* , flanked by two full-relief dragons coiling floor to eave up a pair of painted pillars.

Every threshold in this book has asked something of the visitor — a bagua mirror, a stone lion, a folded pair of hands. Here it is scale: nothing inside is small, starting with the dragons guarding the door.



THE INNER SANCTUM

The full altar at once: twin carved dragons framing a black-skinned emperor-god, gold attendants at his sides, red lanterns either end, offerings of fruit and tea laid out below.

Everything photographed in close-up over the next few pages lives inside this one wall.



THE DRAGON GATE

Two full-relief golden dragons coil the pillars flanking the sanctum, phoenix heads at the base, scales picked out in gold against dark lacquered wood.

“Cetiya” is a Pali and Sanskrit word for a shrine or reliquary, used across Indonesia's Tridharma temples alongside “Vihara” and “Klenteng” — Buddhist vocabulary wrapped around a very Taoist interior.



THREE TEACHINGS, ONE WALL

A warrior, a masked general, a bearded emperor, a white-bearded elder, a small Guanyin, and a large golden Buddha all share one red-tiled wall.

Tridharma in a single frame: Taoist generals, a Confucian-coded elder statesman, a Buddhist bodhisattva, and the Buddha himself, worshipped together without any sense that they compete.



THE DARK EMPEROR

The temple's senior resident deity: black-skinned, crowned, a curtain of beads veiling his face in the old imperial style, framed by two enormous gold dragons chasing a flaming pearl.

The dark skin, the face-veiling crown, and the paired dragons are the classic signature of a major martial Taoist emperor-god — most likely Xuan Tian Shang Di, the Emperor of the Dark Heaven — though without a legible nameplate here, that stays an informed guess rather than a certainty.



GUANYIN, AMONG THE DRAGONS

Set into her own gilded dragon medallion, Guanyin holds a small willow sprig, traditionally used to sprinkle purifying water over suffering.

Even inside a hall this martial, in the company of dark emperors and armoured generals, compassion still gets a carved dragon backdrop of its own — and, as noted a few pages back, her own quieter reputation as a protector of sailors, distinct from but overlapping the goddess on the facing page.

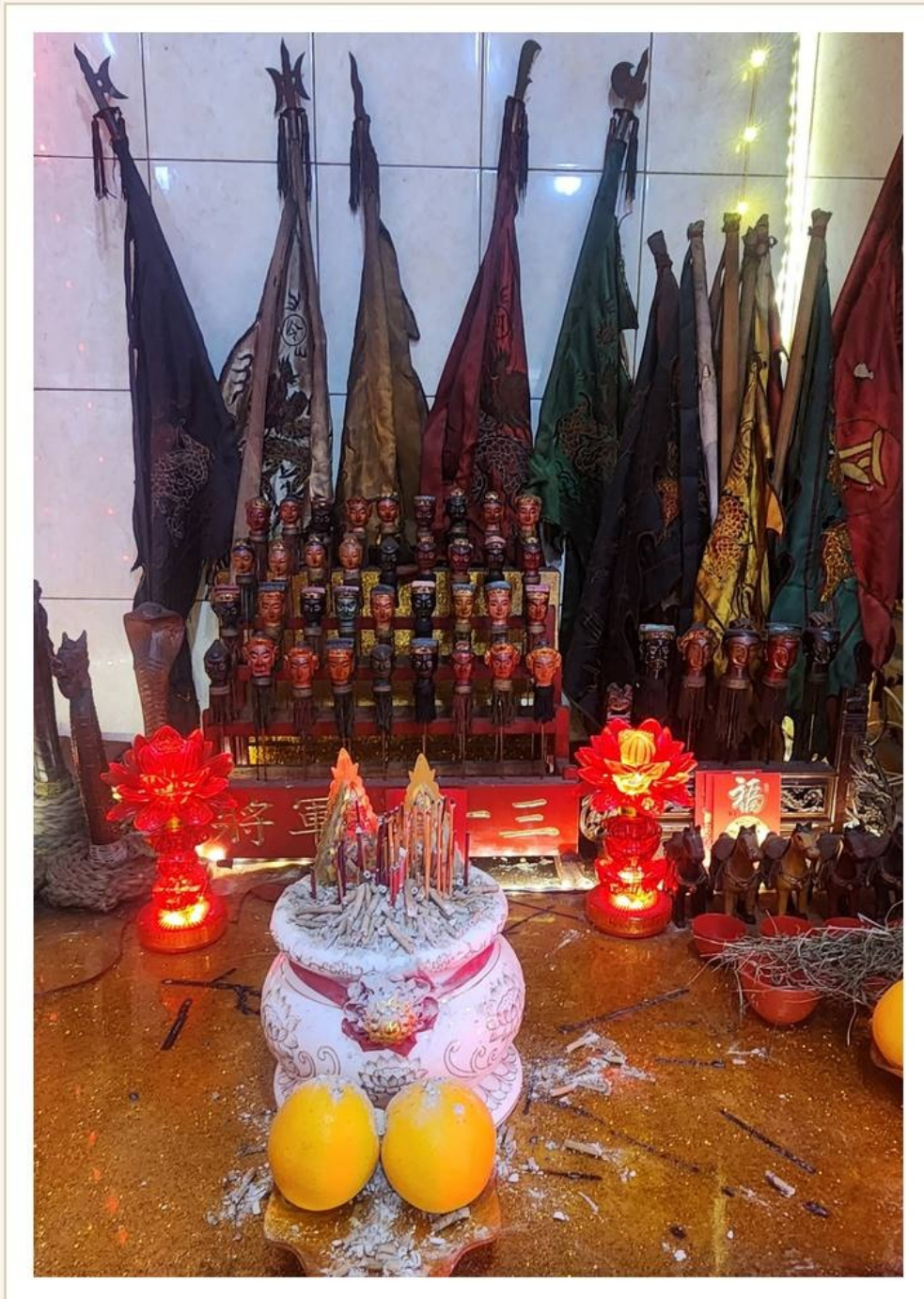


THE EMPRESS OF HEAVEN

A second goddess in a tall, fully beaded pearl headdress reserved for the highest-ranking female deities, hands folded at her chest, framed by the same paired dragons as the emperor beside her.

This is Mazu — though by the time she reached this altar she had already been many things. Born, in the founding legend, a fisherman's daughter on Meizhou Island off the Fujian coast in the tenth century, said to have saved her father and brothers from a storm in a trance and drowned trying to save one more; deified soon after as a local protector; then promoted, decade by decade, edict by edict, through the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing courts, from “Lady” to “Concubine” to “Consort” to, finally, *Tian Hou* — Empress of Heaven, the title carved beneath this very statue. Every fishing and trading community that left Fujian and Guangdong carried her with them and, often, renamed her: Tin Hau in Hong Kong and Cantonese ports, Mazu Po in Taiwan, A-Ma in Macau (which takes its name from her shrine), Thean Hou across Malaysia and Indonesia. She is rarely alone at a proper altar: her two attendant generals, Qianliyan (“Eyes That See a Thousand Miles”) and Shunfeng'er (“Ears That Hear the Wind”), traditionally stand at her flanks scanning the horizon for exactly the kind of trouble her worshippers are out on the water hoping to avoid, though neither appears in this particular shrine.

The Chinese families who reached Bintan in the 1740s crossed open water to get here under sail; the boats moored a few streets away, still bailed and poled and netted by hand, are her congregation as much as anyone kneeling before this statue. Wherever the sea is the livelihood rather than the view, some version of her tends to be watching it.



AN ARMY IN MINIATURE

Dozens of individually painted wooden heads stand racked in tiers before tall battle banners, small bronze cavalry horses lined up in front.

The same Five Camps institution seen at Zhong Yue Dian, scaled up: a miniature spirit army kept ready to be carried out and “activated” whenever the temple's presiding god needs an escort through the streets.

PART SIX

The Festival

*Photographs the temple keeps of itself: the one day a
year when a god is understood to be standing, visibly,
in someone's body.*



BEHIND THE CROWD

A framed procession photograph — a costumed dancer, arms raised, flanked by attendants in green and red — hung directly beneath a printed moral: *a good act still keeps disaster at a distance, even before fortune arrives; a bad one still drives fortune away, even before disaster does.*

The temple displays its festival photographs the same way a family displays snapshots: proudly, at eye level, with no curatorial distance from the ethics printed alongside them.



THE WOMAN IN THE BORROWED GLASSES

Another photograph the temple keeps of itself, framed and hung on a tiled wall beside a power socket: a woman in red ceremonial robes, oversized pink sunglasses pushed up her nose, laughing while she carries a plate of festival offerings above a small crowd.

Not every image a temple treasures is solemn. Somewhere between the fire-walking and the sword-raising is this — a moment of pure, unguarded joy, kept on the wall with exactly the same care as the rest, because devotion here has never required a straight face.



STANDING IN THE FIRE

Framed on the temple wall: a young woman in a tall crown stands on a lotus platform inside a burning-rimmed pit, smoke pouring past a crowd pressed against the fence.

A possessed medium performing a fire ordeal — at that moment understood by everyone present to *be* the god rather than merely represent one, standing unharmed as living proof of it.



PREPARING THE CHARM

The same medium, mid-ceremony, holds a fan of incense sticks, an audience and camera crew visible behind her in the rain-streaked dark.

Between the dramatic moments — the fire, the sword — are quieter ones like this: the actual work of blessing charms and answering petitioners that a festival day is really for.



SWORD RAISED INTO THE RAIN

Rain falling, the medium raises a sword overhead between two dragon-flagged banners while a small crowd claps and prays around her.

The sword is standard equipment for a deity in a human body: it can “cut” curses and bad luck from petitioners, or simply be brandished to display the possessing god's authority.



PROOF

A diptych: a bare-chested man from behind, metal rods driven through the flesh of his back, each flying a small flag; then the same man from the front, calm, in ceremonial dragon cloth.

Body-piercing mediumship, one of the most visceral and most internationally documented practices in the Hokkien and Teochew tang-ki tradition. The absence of blood or visible pain is, within the belief, the entire point: proof that the body currently belongs to the god, not the man.

Orang yang berbuat baik, walaupun rejeki belum tiba, tetapi bencana telah menjauhinya.
Orang yang berbuat jahat, walaupun bencana belum tiba, tetapi rejeki telah menjauhinya.

alkan "Nasehat Baik" ini guna memberi bekal akhlak-moral bagi anak-cucu dan semua umat manusia. Poster ini tidak diperjualbelikan / GRATIS

13 | galeri foto | POSMETRO
SELASA, 24 DESEMBER 2013

Pemenang Lomba Foto Budaya & Pariwisata Tanjungpinang

DIGELAR sejak awal hingga 18 Desember 2013 lalu, Dinas Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Kota Tanjungpinang selaku penyelenggara Lomba Foto Budaya dan Pariwisata Tanjungpinang menerima sebanyak 1.33 foto dari kategori umum serta pelajar dan mahasiswa. Terdiri dari 34 fotografer kategori umum dan 12 dari kategori pelajar dan mahasiswa. Dari foto-foto yang diterima ini kemudian dilakukan pemilihan oleh 5 fotografer profesional. Yakni Dwi Hasmun, Yuli Yaito dan Indra

Martino dari Jakarta, ditambah 2 fotografer Kepulauan Riau Super dan Ade Rindali.

Hasilnya kemudian ditetapkan 5 pemenang di masing-masing kategori. Untuk kategori umum, juara 1 diraih Rudi Laili, juara 2 foto berjudul Finger Touch karya Yusuf Haidhoti, juara 3 karya Andri Medaniyeh berjudul Pacu Perahu Naga, juara Harapan 1 karya Dwi Hasmun berjudul Waiting for Sunrise dan juara Harapan II karya Rudi Laili berjudul Cakes Gunung-Finish.

Sedangkan untuk kategori pelajar dan mahasiswa, pilihan para juri jatuh kepada karya milik Kurniawan. Lalu, disusul karya Niswari Hana Hana berjudul Jembatan Gagah sebagai Juara 2, Juara 3 diberikan kepada karya Ryan Hidayat berjudul Masjid Raya Sultan Ratu, Andri Kurniawan sebagai juara Harapan 1 dan karya milik Peri sebagai juara harapan 2.

Hasil para pemenang akan diserahkan pada perayaan Senamak Tanjungpinang pada 31 Desember 2013 mendatang ***

Naras: Andri Medaniyeh

Harapan 1 - Dwi Hasmun - Waiting For Sunrise.
Harapan 2 - Cakes Gunung-Finish.
Harapan 3 - Peri.
Juara 1 - Rudi Laili.
Juara 1 - Kurniawan.
Juara 2 - Yusuf Haidhoti - Finger Touch.
Harapan 1 - Andri Kurniawan - Jembatan Gagah.
Juara 2 - Andri Kurniawan - Masjid Raya Sultan Ratu.
Juara 3 - Andri Medaniyeh - Pacu Perahu Naga.
Juara 1 - Dwi Hasmun - Waiting For Sunrise.
Juara 2 - Rudi Laili - Cakes Gunung-Finish.
Juara 3 - Andri Kurniawan - Jembatan Gagah.

A SACRED FIRE, A PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE

A page from the newspaper *Posmetro*, dated 24 December 2013, announcing the winners of Tanjung Pinang's municipal photo competition — several of the winning shots are unmistakably this same procession and trance ritual, and another, *Pacu Perahu Naga*, is a dragon-boat race in full stroke.

The temple hung a decade-old newspaper page beside its own devotional photographs without drawing any line between them: the same fire sacred to the people standing in it was, to a photographer in the crowd, simply the best picture taken in town that year. A fire-walking ritual and a dragon-boat race sharing one prize page without comment says something too — here, sacred and seafaring have never been filed under separate headings.

A Note, Not an Ending

These pages follow one afternoon's walk: from the old harbour market, where dried squid dries on cardboard and an old fisherman still waves both hands in greeting, out along the jetties where boats are bailed, poled, netted, tied to one another, and eventually left to rot when the water finally wins — and then into two temples a few streets on, where a whole civil service of gods keeps office behind curtains of incense smoke.

The two halves are not really separate stories. Every deity in these temples arrived here the same way the fishermen's own ancestors did — by water, across the same strait that still carries the trawlers and sampans photographed a few pages back, and the same strait, a little further along, that still separates the Hokkien of this town from the Teochew of Senggarang. If this book has a single through line, it is the sea itself — not as backdrop, but as the thing the market sells, the boats cross, the kongsi once organised, the temples were built facing, and the Empress of Heaven, under whatever name a given coast has given her, has never stopped watching.

Some of the names here are certain — painted on a red plaque, or spelled out under a statue's feet. A few are best guesses from posture, colour, and crown, offered honestly as guesses. Either way, none of it is background. The tiger under the table, the child-god with three heads and six arms, the drunken monk with the wine gourd, the woman on the lotus platform with a sword raised into the rain — they are still fed, still consulted, still worth an eighty-five-year-old man's Tuesday afternoon.

Whatever story grows out of this walk, it already has its bones: a tiger fed differently from the gods above him, a border a possessed body is asked to cross, two towns facing each other across one narrow strait for three hundred years running, a boat graveyard down the channel from boats still bailed out every morning, and a newspaper clipping that put a sacred fire and a dragon-boat race on the same prize-winners' page without comment. The rest is a matter of which corner to turn next.