

Taipei's UNESCO World Heritage Temple

By SUSAN JAMES

In 1742, immigrants from China's Fujian Province arrived on the island of Taiwan. There, in what is today's Dalongdong District of Taipei, they built a small wooden temple to their principal god, Baoshen Dadi, the God of Medicine. Rebuilt four times over the years, the final Baoan Temple was constructed of wood and stone and completed in 1830.

Facing south, the three main halls and two side wings of the complex form a Chinese character that stresses the original purpose of the temple—"to give protection to the people." Side chapels in the wings that flank the main hall are dedicated to a variety of other gods, particularly Taiwan's principal female deity, Matsu, Goddess of the Sea. One of the three largest temples in the Taipei area, the Baoan complex has been known for generations for its grandeur and elaborate decoration.

By the 1990s, the 10,000-square-meter temple complex was in sad shape. Termite devastation, peeling paint, and a leaking roof had severely damaged the fabric. Awkward additions to the architecture had compromised the overall integrity of the buildings. In 1994, the Baoan Temple Committee decided to reclaim the temple's history and heritage by spearheading a US\$7,439,000 project to restore, conserve, and repair the temple.

The first step in the reconstruction was to remove later incompatible architectural elements and modernize with needed utilities like plumbing, electricity, and a fire alarm system. Where possible, all such utilities were laid in underground conduits to minimize the visual impact on the complex and are now controlled by a centralized computer.

The fabric of the early 19th century temple was built using two competing construction teams who worked in tandem on parallel east and west blocks of the complex. This created a liveliness and



TAIPEI GEM: The famous Baoan Temple features an eclectic cultural mix of Taoist, Buddhist, and folk elements as well as a mix of architectural styles. SUSAN JAMES

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diversity in ornamentation that the second step in the modern restoration process sought to ensure.

Restoration work on wood carvings, frescos, and stone sculpture was done using materials and methods consistent with techniques of the early 19th century. Earlier attempts at restoring clay sculptures using cement as a bonding agent were replaced by traditional adhesives of glutinous rice, black sugar, white ash, lime, and oyster shell. Experts and consultants in painting and carving were brought in from China, Japan, and Austria. New

wood employed where the old was unsalvageable was treated with water-resistant tung oil, used as a protective membrane, while original pieces were injected with termite-controlling pesticides. Regular inspections of the temple fabric have been scheduled every five years.

The Baoan Temple is symbolic of Taiwan itself, a Taoist temple incorporating both Buddhist and animist folk elements. Its syncretistic nature combines in perfect harmony different but co-existent spiritual schedules as well as differing architectural

styles—northern Chinese, southern Fujianese, and Hakka. The temple stands as an embodiment of Taiwanese ethnic diversity, balancing both spiritual and communal needs. It is more than just a place of worship.

Baoan has always been a center of community, acting as a public hall and gathering place. Today, it hosts in addition to a regularly scheduled free medical clinic (worthy of Baoshen Dadi, himself), a library, an English language school, the Traditional Puppet Show Camp, the Baoan Temple Chinese Orchestra,

and the Cultural History Work Association. All of the money raised to restore it came from the local community.

Completed in 2002 after eight years of work by Heritage architects Song-Yong Wang, Ming-Che Tsai, Yao-Qin Chu, and Huey-Jiun Wang, the splendidly restored temple stands at the heart of Taipei like a multicolored jewel emerging from the gray accretion of the years.

In 2003, Baoan Temple was awarded a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award for Culture Heritage Conservation. The

temple's crowded precincts at Chinese New Year, when clouds of burning incense rise above offerings of orchids and oranges, and the busy market area crammed with shoppers which surrounds the complex signifies Baoan Temple's continuing importance to the people of Taipei.

Susan James is a California based writer who has lived in India and the UK. She specializes in art and history and has written about China's Silk Road, Henry VIII's England and the Singapore art scene.



CELEBRATED ART: Elaborate carvings, restored where possible from original materials, helped make the Baoan Temple a UNESCO Heritage Site. This detailed carving is just one of the many exquisite restored works. SUSAN JAMES

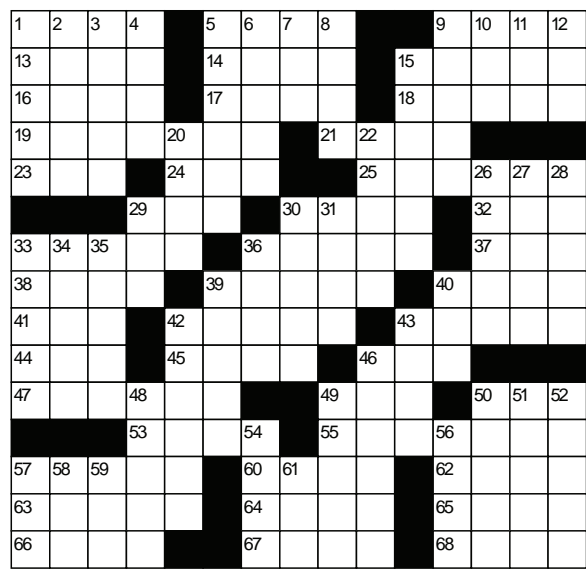


GODDESS OF THE SEA: Within the Baoan Temple complex are separate altars dedicated to specific gods. This area is dedicated to Matsu, Goddess of the Sea. SUSAN JAMES



THE GOD OF MEDICINE: This altar area is dedicated to the principal god of Taiwan, Baoshen Dadi, the God of Medicine. SUSAN JAMES

Crossword



Across

- 1 Type of fish
- 5 Afloat
- 9 Cat's cry
- 13 Singing voice
- 14 Eat lightly
- 15 Asian nation
- 16 Christ's mother
- 17 Back of the neck
- 18 Pope's country
- 19 Sunder
- 21 Opp. of little
- 23 Scamp
- 24 No
- 25 "Pathfinder" maker
- 29 Snake like fish
- 30 Machine bolt
- 32 Fasten
- 33 Lopsided
- 36 One over par
- 37 Compass point
- 38 Group
- 39 Scam
- 40 Show for a score
- 41 Hubbub

- 42 Girl in Wonderland
- 43 Islands
- 44 Peaked
- 45 Artist Van ___
- 46 Clock time
- 47 Hose
- 49 Calorie
- 50 Estimated time of arrival
- 53 Launder
- 55 Turned over
- 57 Intone
- 60 European monetary unit
- 62 Elderly
- 63 Mush up
- 64 Against
- 65 Display
- 66 Dreamer
- 67 Biblical "you"
- 68 Association (abbr.)

Down

- 1 Deer
- 2 Fright
- 3 Throat infection
- 4 Soybean
- 5 Yearly
- 6 Slippery
- 7 Sixth sense
- 8 Excuse me!
- 9 Tales
- 10 Epoch
- 11 Fat
- 12 Route
- 15 Mediterranean island
- 20 Had known
- 22 Single
- 26 Type of metal
- 27 Passageway
- 28 Desires
- 29 Electroencephalograph (abbr.)
- 30 Hunt illegally
- 31 Malaria
- 33 Do over
- 34 Not happily
- 35 Hillock
- 36 Guardhouse
- 39 Brush and ___ (dentist's orders)
- 40 Clock time
- 42 Male relation on father's side
- 43 Island
- 46 Al
- 48 Proprietor
- 49 Radioactivity unit
- 50 Verges
- 51 Swarms
- 52 Append (2 wds.)
- 54 Make hot
- 56 Nil
- 57 Cycles per second
- 58 Color
- 59 Is
- 61 Expression



TEMPLE ARTISTRY: Colorful, detailed murals depict important scenes from history. SUSAN JAMES