

The Assessment of Young Generation Understanding and Awareness toward Artistic Ornamental of Taoist Chinese temple from 1800-1900AD in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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I. INTRODUCTION

Abstract--The issue of building conservation is vital to the country as all Architecture design of the building and historical value prominently reflects the identity of the country. Each part of the design components for the building express a significant meaning to the folks and our generation. Alternatively, the aspect of tourism heritage also help to generate a profitable return to the country. The urban modernization and in the recent digital world, heritage seems like a trend of degenerating. The sign of young generation “lacking appreciation toward the historical heritage” is dramatically seen, specifically to the aspect of artistic elements in Chinese temple built during pre-war period. Although they see the artistic elements such as dancing dragon, phoenixes, mythological figures and many others motifs crafted delicately in their daily routine, but they hardly understand the symbolism of these artistic ornamental. Hence, this paper is objectively to assess the young generation’s awareness and understanding toward the artistic ornamental of the Chinese temple. An actual test to be conducted by using 5 point Likert scale questionnaire and it was administered to the group of youth, age below 40 years old. The questionnaire was categorised in 3 sections which inclusive the young generation understanding toward the artistic ornamental & the basic construction of the Chinese temple and the awareness toward the Taoist Chinese temple. The results significantly shown that the mean scores for these three sections are relatively low, which is majority scored less than 3, $< M=3$ (neutral) and surprisingly there is 0 scores for 4 and 5, which is aware and aware very much. On the contrary, result shown there are 81.25% of the young generation claims that Chinese temple signifying an important iconic, but yet they have less clue toward the artistic ornamental of the Chinese temple. Hence the imminent action has to be taken for further study on this topic.

Index Terms—building heritage, artistic ornamental, Chinese temple.

Malaysia is truly rich with the history values, legacy and architecture heritage specifically these assets reflects a powerful and unique Chinese, Malays as well western inheritance which influenced by the British, Dutch and Portuguese[1]. In the recent decade, due to these potential assets have significantly generate a motivating tourist revenue [2], as well conservation of heritage buildings has been increasingly recognized world-widely, hence many of the heritage related body and association has been developed rapidly by both government and private sector in Malaysia. In the year of 2006, National Heritage Department of Malaysia has proudly established [3] due to the awareness and Malaysia gradually more in concerning and appreciating the heritage building around the country. Additionally, National Heritage Act also fully developed to ensure all heritage buildings are fully protected by the authorities. Surprisingly, according to the inventory list done in 1992 and 1993 by University Technology Malaysia, the data shown that there are approaching 39,000 of the pre-war building, which were built in the year of 1800 to 1948 [2].

Unfortunately, urban modernization as well in the recent digital world are one of the factor caused the historical heritage degenerating. This lead to our young generation in the modern society gradually far apart and lacking of appreciation toward historical heritage. This resulted the young generation have less clue toward the historical heritage aspect specifically to the artistic ornamental of the Chinese temple.

This goal of this paper is objectively to assess and identify and assess young generation awareness and understanding toward the artistic ornamental constructed in the interior and exterior of a traditional Chinese temple built from era 1800-1900AD in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The survey will cover a specific design elements components which comprises the art elements, furniture, door, window, pillar and ceiling etc.

In Malaysia, there are some research done by expertise related to Architecture mosque but there is no research cover for elaborating the artistic ornamental of traditional Chinese temple particularly building built during pre-war period. Deeply believed the related research will positively benefit the folks and young generation.

The type of conservation buildings in Malaysia, commonly known as Mosque, shop houses, worship building, government civil office, bank, monument, railway station, institution, theatre, hospital etc. [2].

As for worship building in Malaysia, there are various Architecture design being applied for Chinese temple. It

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commonly can be seen the four typical Chinese temple design style which is Cantonese style, Teowchew Style, Hokkien style and Hakka style. All these design character mainly brought by the immigrant craftsman from Southern China, particularly from Guangdong and Fujian province [4]. Lot of Chinese temples were built prevalently around the city area similarly for the rural area but the design applied and built in respond to the few factors which inclusive local culture context, historical concern, political issue, local climate and society changes.

II. THE ARCHITECTURE OF TAOIST TEMPLE

The Taoist temples were commonly built in Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). Generally, Taoist temple consist of few specific areas to serve different function for the users which is a palace, (for oblation and sacrifice), the alter area (praying and offering), divine hall, reading area (main for reading a sculptures), practicing asceticism, reception area and cubby for pilgrims, living room, last but not least, a garden nicely built surrounded the temple, mainly for visitors to rest [5]. Traditionally, the space planning of the Taoist temple characterized by traditional and Bague style. From the traditional style, the layout design can be seen by a form of symmetric. The main halls, allocated on the central axis and other structures built alongside of the main hall. The flank and back of the temple usually serve as an accommodation and dining hall [6]. While for Bague style always reflects Taoist philosophy, which it importantly emphasized on human cosmos follow by natural cosmos in order to integrate spirit, energy and qi. A stove namely "Danlu" for making pills of immortality, will be allocated at the center and surrounded by others structures. This setting is built specifically according to the position of the Bagua. A long center axis from the south heading to the north accompany with some structures flank at the axis can be seen in the Bague style [7].

III. THE SYMBOLIC OF THE ARTISTIC ORNAMENTAL IN TAOIST TEMPLE

There are many form of the ornamental built in the Chinese temple such as animal, plants, shape etc. [8] The setting of the components was signifying and symbolizing different meaning. These artistic elements and ornamental mostly built correlated with the geomancy matter, some specifically for expressing the luck, like longevity of lifespan and good fortune etc. [6]. Hence, this is crucial that the usage of the artistic elements and ornamental must be applied appropriately.

Deities is also one of the most significant ornamental display in the temple. The deities generally can be seen in both male and female. Each of the Chinese temple dedicated to the primary deities, usually displayed on the main altar table located at the main lobby. Some others secondary deities can be found standing, sitting and displaying at others area or corner [9]. Each of the deities have their own respective legend and story. The most popular Daoist deities for Taoist temple included Yu Huang (玉皇), The Queen of Heaven (天后娘娘), The Eight Immortals (八仙), God Of Literature (文昌), The God Of Longevity (寿公), The God Of Wealth (财神),

Syncretic Deities (关帝), The Monkey God (齐天大圣), Ne Zha (哪吒), God Of Carpenter (鲁班), The Door God (门神), The Kitchen God (灶君) [8].

Figure 1 below demonstrated a summary and conceptual framework for artistic elements and ornamental for Chinese temple. Author concluded and categorized the artistic elements and ornamentals in six group which are, animal, plant, color, shape, calligraphy and others.

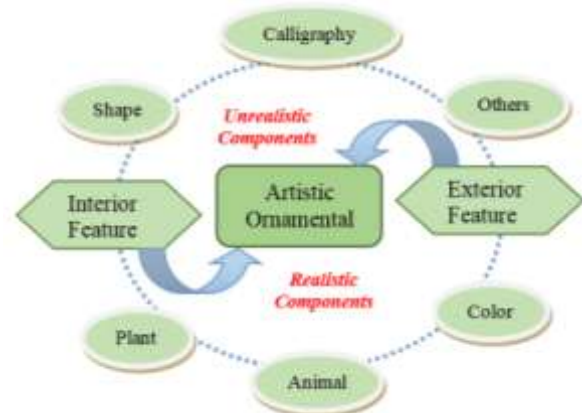


Fig 1: The Conceptual of artistic ornamental

a. Animal elements

The interior and exterior of the temple were ornately and fully decorated with the lifelike art carved elements such as flying or dancing dragons, lion, phoenix, carp, crane and many other mythical creatures [10]. These sacred elements generally carved in few different materials, like concrete or stone, alternatively it cast in metal and painted or colored with auspicious colors, like gold or red which dominantly symbolizing a spiritual protection. Traditionally, devotees believed that these mystical elements comprise an extremely powerful energy as well serve as a safeguard to their family typically give protective benefit to their homes, health, wealth, and business etc. Hence some of these art elements also were wisely used in many others building like artistic pottery, display statues, doorway and door-knockers etc. [11].

The roof of the Chinese temple declared as one of the most important iconic for each of the Chinese temple. There is various type of the animal built to decorate the roof and each of the animal serve respective usage. The more significant or important a temple it is; there will be more lifelike artistic animal built on the roof. Basically, a benchmark has set for a maximum animal to be built, not more than eleven. Even Tai He Dian (太和殿) in Forbidden City (故宫), as a most reputable palace located in Beijing, it only shows nine awesome and auspicious animals on each of the roof rib constructed at the corner [12]. The most popular artistic elements can be seen on the roof is a scared pearl located at the centre of the dancing dragons which perfectly symbolising a balance of yin and yang [13].

TABLE I: THE SYMBOLISM OF ORNAMENTAL UNDER THE GROUP OF ANIMAL [8], RE-ORGANISED BY AUTHOR.

| <i>The ornamental</i> | <i>Symbolism</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Bat | Good luck/joy |
| Carp | Success/ wishes come true |
| Crane | Longevity/ wisdom |
| Deer | Wealth |
| Dragon | Royalty/power |
| Elephant | Wisdom |
| Goose | Marital bliss |
| Lion | Power/ repelling of evil |
| Phoenix | Yin quality and beauty |
| Tortoise | Longevity |
| Unicorn | Wisdom |

b. Plant elements

Green, plants or landscape in the Chinese temple are one of the essential elements to serve aesthetic purposes as well symbolising a nature [14]. It spiritually to heal human body and mind. Traditionally, the landscape and garden in China were wisely designed and developed in the Three Kingdom Era till Qing and Ming dynasty but it reached at peak during song dynasty (AD960-1279) [15]. Evelyn emphasised that there are a few principles to achieve for designing a successful landscape. First, able to differentiate the closeness and openness of the green easily, secondary, design with several of straight and curve line and last, it visually able to create a panorama view. Additionally, these criteria also associated with planting a green in the right place and positions, building up a hill and creating water elements. Others artistic elements to be applied to enhance and beautify the landscape with the amenities which were bridged, pavilion and hardscape [16]. Many different type of the plant will be used for the garden. Bamboo, plum tree and pine tree considered the most popular and it commonly being applied by Chinese community due to these plants, describe as “Three Friends of Winter”, is able to withstand with the extremely cold weather [17].

TABLE II: THE GROUP OF PLANTS[8], RE-ORGANISED BY AUTHOR.

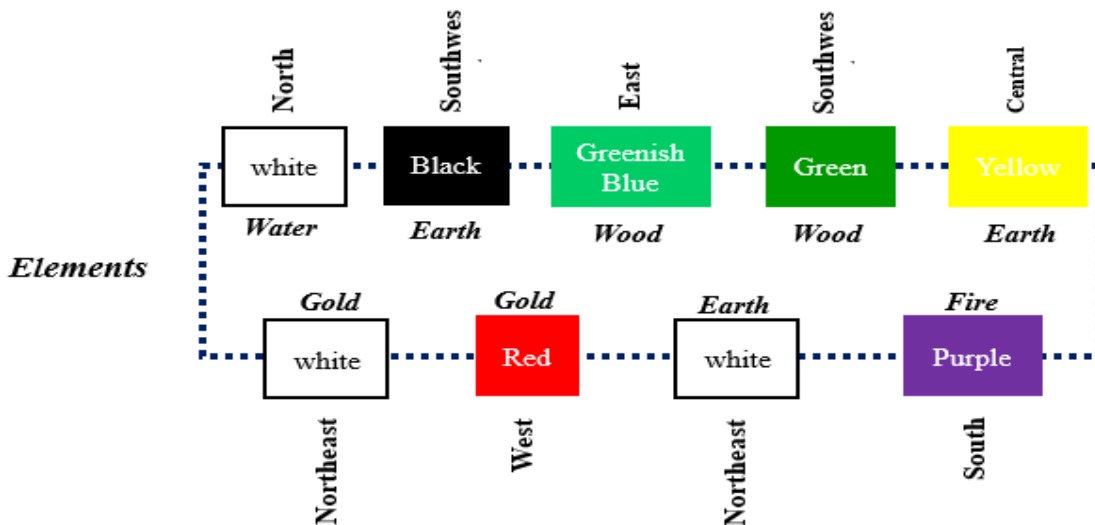


Fig 2: The Color Symbolism and the elements [8], re-organised by author

| Symbol | The meaning |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| Bamboo | Youthfulness/ longevity |
| Chnsanthemum | Endurance/ longevity |
| Cypress | Longevity/strength |
| Lotus | Uprightness/endurance |
| Peach | Beauty/joy |
| Peony | Success |
| Pine | Longevity |
| Plum | Endurance/purity |
| Pomegranate | Fertility |
| Willow | Spring/ gendeness |

c. Color

Scientifically, color give as human very first impression and it dominantly effect human perception, as well greatly influence space user emotion and mood[18]. Evelyn has emphasized that designing a Chinese temple always associated with the color symbolism [15]. Hence, it can be highly concluded that color aspect indeed play an important role for Chinese temple. She sophisticatedly described that color is always correlated with the five elements [12]. It has recorded by Dunzhen, the bright color , in many hue and tonal value has begun and richly develop during the early of Chunqie (春秋) [19] as well it commonly applied for the art elements, which ornately crafted in the exterior and interior components such as roof, decoration, main entrance, column, ceiling, furniture, window and door etc. The figure below representing respective color closely associated with five elements and the orientation. The most popular color applied in the temple were yellow, exclusively representing royal color, symbolizing the power of the emperor. Red color, declared as an auspicious color, mostly applied for the interior of the Chinese temple and art elements, believed to be happiness and good fortune. Green color generally applied to the roof decoration and ceiling components which manifested longevity [15]. Blue is heavenly representing blessing, white color closely associated with gold elements, denotes to mourning and lastly, black color indicates darkness [8].

d. Shape

There are endlessly form and shape of the building as well art elements developed well in order to achieve the proportion relationship. Form and shape is richly applied for the interior components, range from structural to non-structural such as wall, ceiling, roof, column, bracketing system, window, door and opening [15]. As depicted by Evelyn early, an important building always highly decorated. Similarly, this principles goes to ceiling. The ceiling will be in complex design, various form of shape as well the pattern intricately developed for magnificent building. Generally, square and circular shape are more common in the Chinese temple which square signify earth and circular shape is denoting haven.

As recorded previously by Evelyn, there are seven decoration motif has been dominantly developed, which is derived from the plants such as bamboo, peony and chrysanthemum. For mythical animals, it delicately modelled well as phoenix, unicorn and dragon. The shape of wind, rain or lighting expressing the natural forces. Pearl, coin and bronze tripods signify precious utensil. Rectangles, squares or circles is transform from geometric motif. Auspicious Chinese character such as Shou (寿), meaning of longevity and last group if supernatural human figures portrayed from deities[15]. Furniture as well another prominent artistic elements being displayed in the Chinese temple. It not solely for deities' procession, it as well serve for display and decoration purposes. Such as sedan chair, palanquins and altar table has beautifully engraved with some flamboyant and lifelike motifs[20].

TABLE III: THE SYMBOLISM OF SHAPE COMPONENTS [8], RE-ORGANISED BY AUTHOR.

| Symbol | The meaning |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Cloud pattern | Blessings/ happiness |
| Gourd-shaped bottle | Capture of evil influence |
| Square | Earth/stability |
| Taiji symbol | Perfect balance of yin and yang |
| Triangle | Uprightness/endurance |

e. Calligraphy

Chinese community regard calligraphy is one of the precious gift from heaven. Generally, Lee emphasized that there are four type of calligraphy which categorized in phonetic combinations, logical combinations, indicative and pictographic [17]. Various calligraphy inscription can be seen in many Chinese temples, crafted and painted ingenuity as horizontal or vertical form of plaque or pillar couplets by the skillful craftsman. Some are crafted horizontally, as a name of the temple for displaying purposes (refer to figure 4, horizontal plaque at the temple façade). Some etymology, carved in vertical form, as a phonetic combination at the entrance of the temple (refer to figure 4, vertical plaque in left and right at the temple entrance) as well some as commemorative plaque to retrospect or memorize the prominent leader for their endeavored [20]. Many others calligraphy can be found in the form of mural on the wall or form of painting vigorously. These painting usually can be seen on the main praying hall for display purposes.

f. Others

Many others form of elements being applied in the interior of the Chinese temple in two or three dimensional, sculpted in cements or porcelain. Such as fan, carved with the lively Eight of Immortal [20]. The elements of hill and jade mostly used as a painting or mural on the wall in expressing harmony and peaceful impression. These elements also prevalently applied for the façade or the entrance of the Chinese temple, Pailou, curtain wall and the column base typically for Chinese temple in Cantonese style [21].

TABLE IV: OTHERS ELEMENTS

| Symbol | The meaning |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Fan | Goodness |
| Flute | Disappear |
| Hill | Backing |
| Jade | Purity |
| Water | Wealth /source of breath |

IV. TAOIST TEMPLE IN MALAYSIA

The purpose of Chinese community worship in the temple due to it gives a personal sense of security. They deeply believed praying to the god is not purely able to attain a great virtue, righteousness, salvation for their sins personally, they as well strongly believed that the god provide protection benefit for their life, and also has the power to enhance the family, society with a peaceful, harmony environment and continuous for the prosperity. This believed has been deep rooted in their mind thousand years ago [22]. Additionally, some devotees wish to attain salvation for any sins committed in the past.

There were two reputable and recognizable Taoist Chinese temple in the ever-bustling city- Kuala Lumpur. It has been declared by Asia Web Direct as a top five must visit and most popular Chinese temple [23]. There are Sin Sze Si Ya Temple (1864) , dedicated to sin sze (仙师) , built by Yap Ah Loy, is the oldest Taoist Chinese Temple in Kuala Lumpur [24] and Kuan Ti Temple (1888) also located in Kuala Lumpur, dedicated to Guan Ti (关帝), as one of the Chinatown Attractions.

Sin Sze Si Ya, a quadrangle Temple, the distinctive double volume ceiling high host with an open-air pavilion, is expressing the uniqueness of each artistic element delicately. A welcoming grand main prayer hall located at the center and each left and right attached with a side praying hall dedicated to god of Mercy (观音娘娘) on the right and Tai Sui (太岁) on the left. Interestingly, two extremely significant artistic elements were used to memorize the contribution of Yap Ah Loy, Yap Ah Shak, Yap Kwan Seng and Chan Sow Lin, which were the meaningful commemorative plaque, and an ornately carved wooden sedan chairs. These two artistic elements were crafted more than 100 years. Various valuable artifacts, palanquins, figuring, motif, calligraphy, pewter ware and many others form of carving have fully decorated on the interior structure like wall ceiling, column, window and door etc. referring to figure 4 below, an pairs of Eight-Immortal Fan, in wooden materials delicately carved with small figuring, showing all kind of happy expression on their face.



Fig 3: Xian Sze Temple (仙师) located in Kuala Lumpur, illustrated by YK. Cheah and color rendered by author.



Fig 4: The dragon at the façade, a lively Eight of Immortal and pewter joss stick holder.

Another 121-year-old temple- Kuan Ti temple, a god of war. This also declared as a well-known place of weapon replication for Guan Ti, particularly for copper sword and spear. This temple is ornately decorated with various meaningful artistic elements, typically on the wall, ceiling, window, door and roof. The 59 kg copper sword and spear displayed at the main entrance of the temple, proudly demonstrating the power of Guan Ti. It believed to be blessed if touching or the devotees able to lift it 3 times continuously. Another prominent creature, pairs of stone lion place on left and right of the main entrance, to serve as a door god and safeguarding purposes. A golden dancing dragons beautifully coiled around the column, constructed each left and right, also at the main entrance. Similarly, another glory dancing dragon has flamboyantly coiled at the column located at the main praying hall. Unimaginable, these vigorous artistic elements and ornament being survived more than 100 years!



Fig 5: The exterior and interior of the Guan Ti temple decorated with colorful dancing Dragon.

Obviously, both the interior and exterior of these traditional Chinese temple are extensively applied the auspicious color, which is red and golden color for most of the artistic elements.

V. METHODOLOGY

In order to further investigate the research questions of the study, a set of questionnaire has been fully designed and developed. It was instrumented and adequately distribute from 13 to 17 of March 2016, in Klang Valley Malaysia. The targeted respondent was a group of youth ages from 18 to 39, specific to ethnicity of Chinese, in the religion of Taoist with the education background ranged from Diploma to Degree level. The questionnaire is designing in 3 sections by using both open ended and close ended question. Section A is objectively to test respondent's awareness toward the background of Taoist Chinese temple in Klang Valley. Ten question has been develop pertaining to the history, age, materials usage etc. of the Chinese temple. Section B, comprises twenty six variables, mostly describe the artistic elements and ornaments such as mythical figures, sculpture, furniture etc. from the Chinese temple. This is developed to test the respondent's understanding toward artistic ornamental. Lastly, seven questions related to basic construction of the Taoist Chinese temple being developed. The table V below showing the process of data collection being conducted.

TABLE V: THE METHODOLOGY

| Method | Description | Respondents |
|--------|--|--------------------|
| M1 | Handout the questionnaire to the respondents directly | youth age below 40 |
| M2 | Pass the questionnaire to the respondents and they distribute to their friend. | youth age below 40 |

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The fact findings for the actual test are well presented sequentially in descriptive analysis. Frequency and mean will be used to interpret the findings in the form of graph. Refer to figure 6 below, showing the consolidated mean value scored for three section and sadly to say, the results has negatively reflected the young generation in Malaysia have very minimum awareness and understanding toward these 3 aspects; 1.) Construction of the Chinese temple, scored relatively low for M=2.07 (1 = not aware at all, 2 = aware a little, 3 = neutral, 4 = aware, 5 aware very much), 2.) Artistic elements of The Chinese temple, significantly scored M=2.48 (1 = not

understand at all, 2 = understand a little, 3 = neutral, 4 = understand, 5 understand very much) and the highest mean scored is 3.) The background of the temple, predominantly scored M=2.58 (1 = not understand at all, 2 = understand a little, 3 = neutral, 4 = understand, 5 understand very much). Ridiculously, for the part of open ended question, the result obtained from the group of well-educated young generation shown a conversely scenarios for the stratum aspects. Results shown few vitals fact which total of 81.25% of the young

generation claimed, perceived and strongly emphasized that Chinese temple is an important iconic to them but yet they have less clue about the symbolism of the artistic elements built in the Chinese temple. Total of 25% of the respondent able to name at least one, and only 6.25% of the respondents able to name 3 old Chinese temple situated in Klang Valley, built in pre-war era.

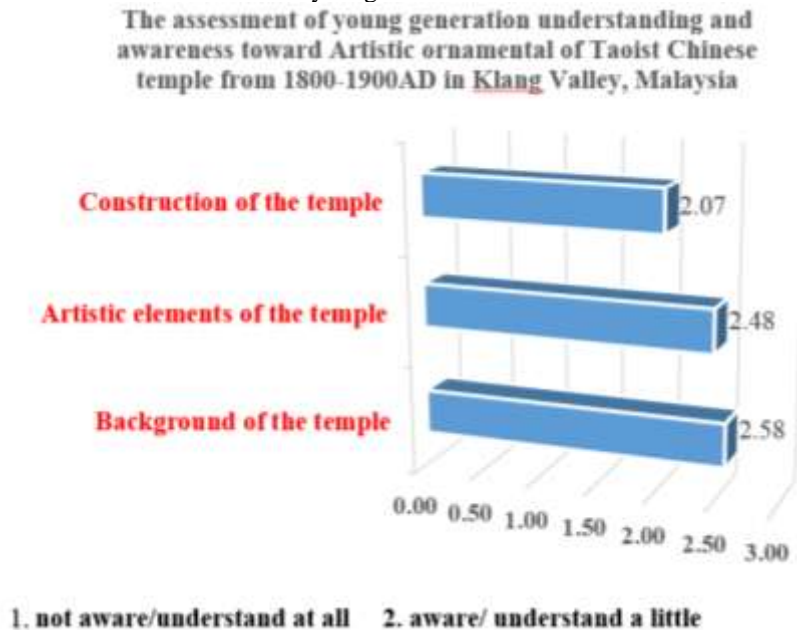


Fig 6: The consolidated mean scores for three section.

VII. CONCLUSION

The key findings is a hint as well strongly proven that a further research is crucial and imminently needed specifically the typology and artistic elements for the Chinese temple built during pre-war era. This expected findings completely support the author's initial assumptions, which is "young generation truly lacking of awareness and understanding of artistic ornamental toward Chinese temple built in 1800-1900AD". Hence, author concluded more concerted effort is required from both government and private sector to promote heritage aspect for Chinese temple in order to ensure Chinese culture can be well preserved and inherited to our young and next generation.

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