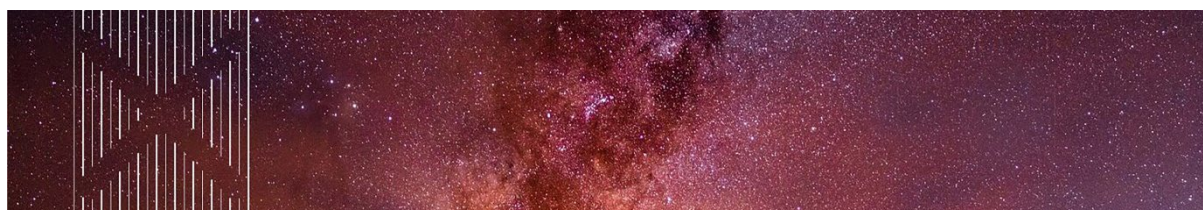


Ngā Pūtahitanga / Crossings

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Otherness and Cultural Change on Marginal Sites: The Siting and Establishment of Daoist Temples in Australia

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University of Tasmania

Abstract

Otherness relegates newly arrived migrants in Australia to the fringes and periphery of established territories. Whether the land allotted to them is on the outskirts of a town, or within industrial areas of a city, the prevailing attribute of these sites is their low significance and value to the existing population. Then, as migrant communities develop these localities, the identity of such areas is profoundly altered, particularly by the establishment of culturally and socially specific institutions. As examples, this paper draws comparisons between three Daoist temples in Australia: the Guan Di Temple (former Joss House) at Weldborough, Tasmania; the Yiu Ming Temple, in Alexandria, NSW; and the Guan Di Temple, Springvale, Victoria. They represent temples established in the colonial period, in the early years of Australia's Federation and in the late twentieth century under conditions of governmental multiculturalism respectively.

The paper will not focus so much on these temples as individual buildings, but rather investigate their influences on the urban morphologies of particular times and places, and how tracing these can provide a specific cultural history in relation to architecture and planning practices. Each of these buildings illustrates distinct tactics for occupying environments. These temples demonstrate how marginalised communities have been influential in developing or redeveloping the identities of surrounding areas. They are also illustrative of how the reassertion of marginalised cultural histories can challenge Australia's planning policies and practices.

Introduction

Expression of immigrant/diasporic identities is in some ways quite evident in the Australian built environment. Numerous examples of mosques, Buddhist temples, Orthodox churches and synagogues exist across the nation, as well as the houses,

business premises and community buildings of a multitude of cultural backgrounds. These buildings and their resultant streetscapes represent mixtures of symbolism, purpose and materiality derived from places of origin as well as their quotidian surroundings. However, despite an increase in recent scholarship on the subject,¹ these buildings are still largely seen as being outside Australia's central narrative. This marginal place in national self-identity tends to be echoed in the marginal locations of many such buildings, and in the cases of historical buildings and settlements, sometimes the erasure of their former presence. In historic instances, the complete disappearance of once substantial Chinese settlements in former gold-rush locations such as Ballarat is illustrative of this, while in contemporary instances, the locations of many of the religious and community buildings of cultural minorities on the peripheries of Australian cities, in industrial estates and fringe-rural land suggest the enduring othering of particular cultural representations in the built environment.

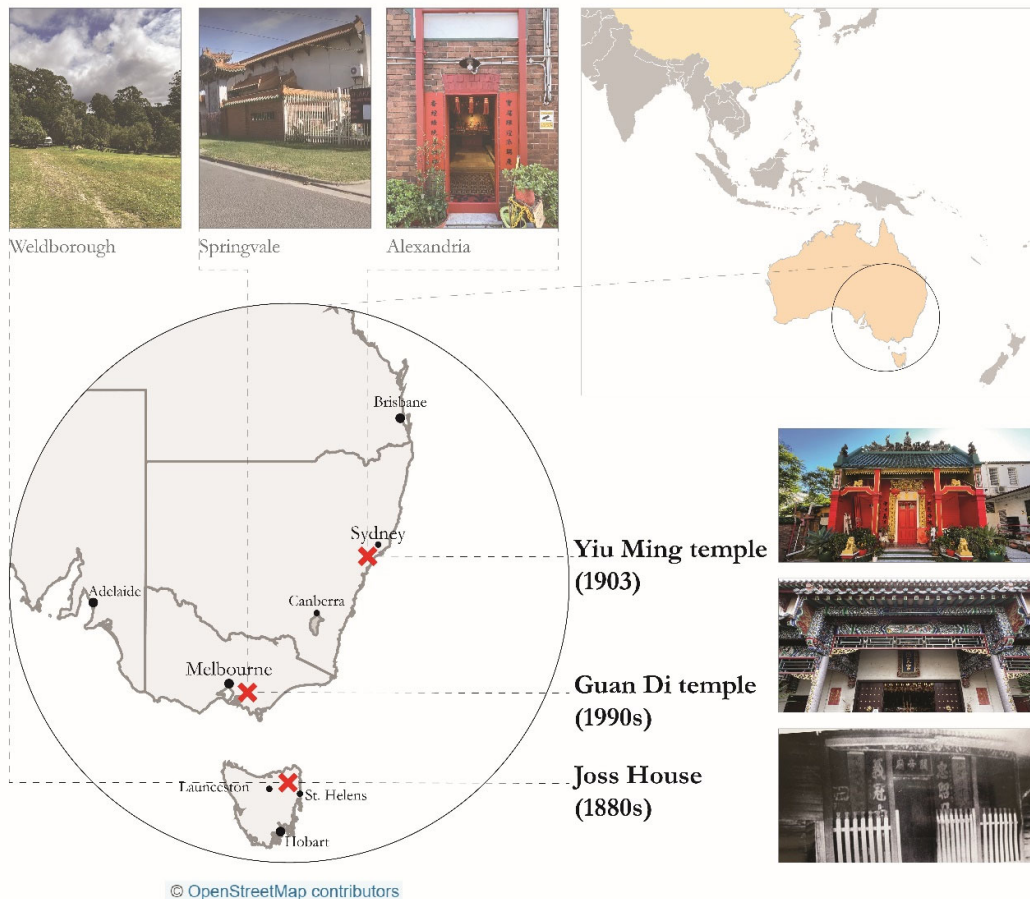


Figure 1. Figure 1. Australia context map showing the location of the three temples (Maps by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data; temple photographs by David Beynon, Freya Su and Van Krisadawat; and historical photograph of Weldborough Joss House from St Helens History Room, 1884).

There has been continuous Chinese settlement in Australia since the 1850s. Chinese-Australian buildings represent an interesting series of examples through which to understand this history. For this reason, this paper will concentrate on three Australian Daoist temples: the Guan Di Temple (former Joss House) at Weldborough, Tasmania; the Yiu Ming Temple, in Alexandria, New South Wales; and the Guan Di Temple, Springvale, Victoria. These temples were respectively established in the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century and the late twentieth century. As a result, they illustrate how such architecture was placed during conditions of late colonialism, assimilationist nationalism and governmental multiculturalism. Their architectures each represent the intersection of Chinese/Daoist identity (and more subtly the specific origins of their founders and users), as well as the social, economic and material contingencies of establishing minority institutions. In this context there is a confluence of cultural forces.

Guan Di Temple (Joss House), Weldborough, Tasmania

The Guan Di Temple (commonly referred to as the Joss House²) at Weldborough in northeast Tasmania, was built in 1880 as a simple timber structure to serve a small community of Chinese tin miners. Other tin-mining settlements in the region – Branxholm, Gladstone, Garibaldi, Moorina and Lefroy – had their own joss houses. However, Weldborough was the ceremonial centre and housed the region's largest Chinese settlement where Maa Mon Chin, the broader community's unofficial leader, resided. Following the decline of alluvial tin mining in 1888, both European and Chinese began to move away. As each temple closed, their ritual objects and plaques were moved to Weldborough until that Chinese settlement too was finally abandoned in 1934. Today all that physically remains at the Chinese settlement at Weldborough lies in a paddock off the main highway revealing only the shallow outline of the main street. However, the building has been partially reconstructed in Launceston's Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, combined with a collection of artefacts from the North East's other former Guan Di joss houses. Fearing the loss of these objects when the last temple caretaker left, the contents of the Weldborough joss house were donated to the Museum in Launceston.

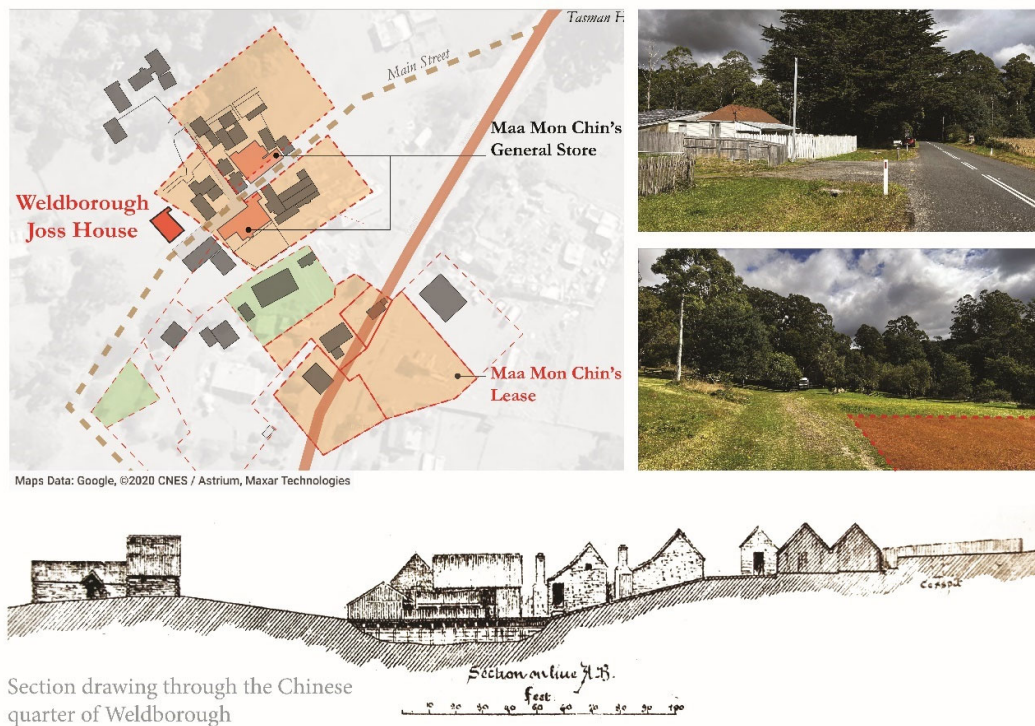


Figure 2. Map of the Chinese mining settlement in Weldborough and location of the Joss House (Map by David Beynon, Freya Su, Van Krisadawat, traced from 1904 and 1907 *Survey of the Chinese camp* (Tasmanian Archives: MIN226/1/17 and MIN226/1/20) with Google Maps aerial imagery; section drawing through the Chinese quarter of Weldborough by A. Mault, Tasmanian Parliamentary paper 156, *Sanitary Condition of Weldborough*, 1888-1889; and site photographs by David Beynon, Freya Su and Van Krisadawat.

Yiu Ming Temple, Alexandria, NSW

Yiu Ming Temple, also known colloquially as Gaoyao miao, was built between the years of 1908 and 1909. Yiu Ming Hung Fook Tong, the community organisation that supported Gaoyao Chinese migrants arriving in Sydney, is known to have existed in some form or another since the 1870s and still operates today. It emerged from Chinese migrant settlements that grew around the marshy land around Sheas Creek in Alexandria. The majority of these migrants came from Gaoyao and Gaoming districts in southern China. Yiu Ming is a contraction of the names Yao and Ming. The pronunciation of Yao is closer to Yiu in the Cantonese dialect that was spoken in these districts. Later, they lived on Retreat Street and around the corner on Botany Road between Retreat Street and McAvoy Road in housing built by the proprietor of the nearby Waterloo Retreat pub.³

At the time the temple was built, Alexandria was already an established industrial town. Chinese market gardeners worked side by side with brickworks, fat processing works and tanneries. Between the wars, larger, modern industry expanded into and eventually pushed the market gardens out, eventually building over the marshes and Sheas Creek, forming a concrete canal for stormwater management. By the 1940s there were over 550 factories and only one market garden remained.⁴

After their market gardens vanished, the Chinese continued to occupy the land; possibly this was because of their gradual establishment of a perimeter and safe haven. At the time of the construction of the temple, Victorian era terraces were also built for the housing of the old, and for new arrivals from China. When Wyndham Street was closed off, strangers no longer passed through; only residents inhabited the street, allowing the easy identification and exclusion of strangers. Later, in the 1980s, a fence and gateway were built at the opposite entrance, further increasing the street's privacy and transforming it into a type of Chinese courtyard, an important social vernacular in Gaoyao.

The temple precinct now sits in a gentrified industrial landscape, surrounded by apartments, both in re-adapted industrial buildings and new developments. While the Joss House in Weldborough no longer exists in its original form, the Yiu Ming has survived due to its continuing relevance in the Gaoyao community and its well-established ties to nearby Chinatown and fellow contemporary temple Sze Yup Temple (Figure 7).

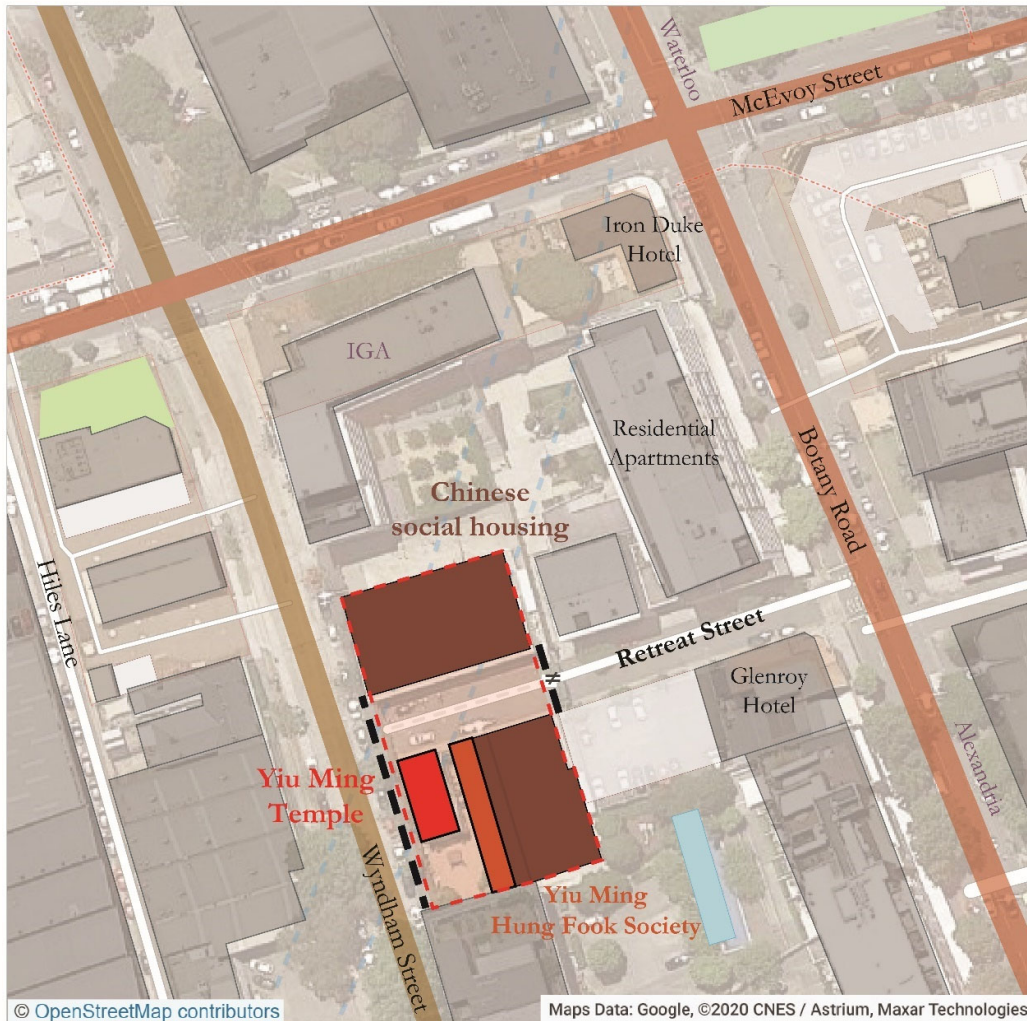


Figure 3. Map of Retreat Street and the location of Yiu Ming Temple (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data, with Google Maps aerial imagery).

Guan Di Temple, Springvale, Victoria

In the mid-1990s, the Vietnamese-Chinese Teo Chew community in Springvale was entering its second generation; twenty years after arriving as refugees from Vietnam small businesses and organisations that had been established in the 70s were then experiencing a measure of success and financial security allowing for the possibility of a temple and community centre. \$2 million AUD was raised in 1996 via donations and grants.⁵

Constructing a religious and community centre would not be unwelcome in the industrial neighbourhood, given the proximity of similar typologies such as religious buildings and community organisations (Figure 4). The location also possessed favourable feng shui

qualities. The significance of its street number, 9, would not have been lost on the Teo Chew (9 is an auspicious number in Chinese culture).

Instead of demolishing the original warehouse, it was reshaped for their use, firstly by infilling the “shed,” which became the temple, split into an altar room and a place for ancestral plaques. Later it was joined by an extension for a kitchen and community use and external Chinese ornamentation and two gateways. The majority of altar figures, columns and ornamentation were imported from Vietnam and China, however, some didactic panels were painted by a member of their society. Works on the site were protracted, starting from 1996 and not ending until 2004.



Figure 4. Map of Springvale's light industrial area highlighting religious and community buildings, and the location of Guan Di Temple (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data, with Google Maps aerial imagery; photomontages by Van Krisadawat, using photographs by David Beynon).

Temple Comparisons

Daoism has its roots in the teachings of Laozi's exposition on the Dao. It is commonly practised in southern China in rural temples, or at home with door god altars, whereas larger monastic teaching temples were established in the urban centres of Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Nanyang and Shanghai.⁶ Our three temples honour the folk hero Guan Yu, a warrior, often depicted with a red face who is revered as a fatherly figure with fierce protector instincts. He is known variously as Guan Di (Emperor Guan) or Guan Gong (Lord Guan) in temples within China and their diaspora countries. The temple vernacular comprises a temple and supporting community buildings. Service to the community and worship was indivisible. Both Yiu Ming and Guan Di in Springvale have halls, kitchens and sitting areas for loitering (Figures 3 and 4). Although we cannot say for sure how this spatial arrangement played out around the Joss House at Weldborough, it could very well have had communal facilities surrounding it.

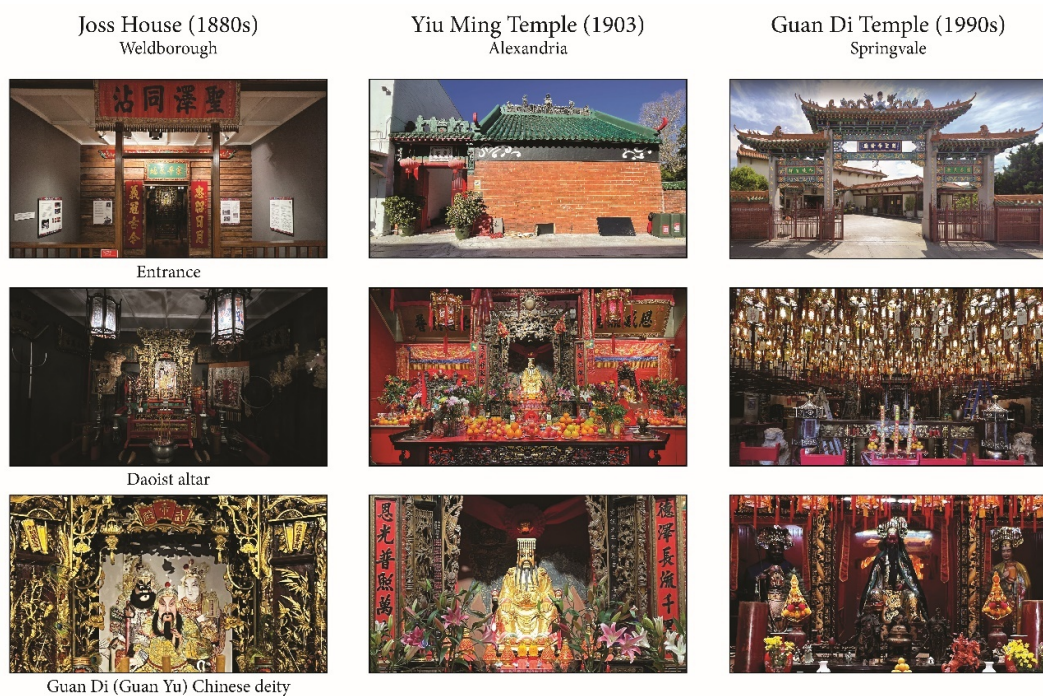


Figure 5. Comparison of the three temples. Joss House is displayed at the QVMAG museum, Launceston, while Yiu Ming Temple and Guan Di Temple remain in-situ (Photographs by David Beynon, Freya Su and Van Krisadawat).

Each of three temples' founding communities originate from the same province in China. Although we do not know the exact location of Weldborough's Maa Mon Chin's village of origin, it is known he was from the same province as the originators of the other two

temples: Guangdong.⁷ A majority of Australia's first Chinese migrants came from this southern province. The Cantonese are the majority population of Guangdong. The Teo Chew founders of the Springvale Guan Di Temple also have their ancestral origins in eastern Guangdong, though filtered through more intermediate diasporic family histories in Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia.

Our investigation identified two major similarities: the Australian temples were constructed in peripheral areas, outside of the main (Western/White/Anglo) town, suburb or village, and they served as the social hubs of their respective communities – in the cases of the Alexandria and Springvale temple, they still do. However, we must explore the differences that stem from their temporal and social contexts.

The Joss House at Weldborough was built in the heart of a Chinese camp, about half a kilometre north of the main township. Both were settled at around the same time. All Nations, the sole mining corporation that employed 'celestials' (the pejorative term given to Chinese by white settlers of the time), gave them a lease to construct the camp on Crown land. In 1876, the entire area was little more than a surveyor's camp, but within ten years, the Joss House was built, along with 30 structures housing 91 Chinese residents.⁸ Little of Weldborough remains now, and only the most tenacious explorers can find the location of the Chinese quarter.

In Alexandria, the Chinese have continuously occupied the Retreat Street precinct since the 1870s. Their continuing presence is perhaps due to its proximity to Haymarket, where they sold their produce and established a major centre for Chinese occupation. The land was otherwise an unusable, marshy swamp along Sheas Creek, a low-value place, used for the dumping of waste and sewerage. Although they were not the first to take advantage of the opportunity, in the 1880s, they soon became the majority. Settling in and around their crops, by 1890 about 100 Chinese lived in Retreat Street. Yiu Ming Temple was paid for by subscription and built between 1908 and 1910. It replaced a wooden structure that had previously housed an altar.⁹ Between the wars, Chinese market gardens disappeared as bigger industry moved in, filling in the swamp, and claiming it for their own purposes.¹⁰ Both the Joss House at Weldborough and the Yiu Ming Temple were established in a time of extreme social prejudice against foreigners. Muggings and murders of Chinese were not uncommon in and around Weldborough, often in full view of the local policeman.¹¹ In Alexandria, the 1891 Royal Commission on Alleged Chinese Gambling and Immorality targeted the Chinese in Retreat Street but

eventually found there was no basis for the investigation. At federation in 1901, the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act legislated discriminatory requirements upon Chinese entry into the country, such as the requirement for letters of recommendation and fingerprints. In this context, the tendency for relegating the Chinese population to undesirable precincts was understandable. And perhaps it is not surprising that the Chinese self-segregated; physically protecting themselves behind fences and gateways or congregating in numbers to provide some semblance of safety. However, it is not immediately clear why the Springvale temple is in an industrial area; built in a utopian time of multiculturalism, one would expect the temple to occupy a more celebratory site in the community. In planning terms, this is a subject that has been explored in the authors' previous papers, drawing on local histories of planners coming to terms with the needs for unfamiliar types of buildings as well as the political and social forces that have influenced their decisions.¹²

At Springvale, refugees from Vietnam were initially accommodated in the Enterprise migrant hostel in east Springvale and then spread out from there. Arriving from around 1976, in the early 1990s with businesses set up early on and now thriving, there was a desire to create a community organisation and temple. A warehouse stood on the temple site on Newcomen Road and was big enough to house not only a temple but also the Teo Chew community centre. The building was retained and the interior refitted. Noise and visitors had to be considered. In early religious temples around Springvale, southeast Asians experienced harassment and complaints from neighbours. It seems that multicultural acceptance did not extend past a specific sound barrier, and choosing a site in an industrial area meant these unpleasant exchanges could be avoided, as well as offering land that was relatively economical to occupy.

Urban Identities and Streetscapes

The former Chinese settlement at Weldborough consisted of a number of buildings, including "a main street in which stood the two 'clan' stores, the joss house, the bandstand, and a number of fan-tan houses and 'week-end' dwellings, with the permanent homes of Maa Mon Chin and three part-Chinese families set behind the street."¹³ As such, its Chinese identity was recognised both internally and externally/governmentally, with the physical separation between the settlement and the 'white' settlement of Weldborough acting as a clear delineation or boundary. While both the temple and its surrounding settlement had a relatively short life, from the founding of the temple in 1883 to its dismantling and its contents being removed to Launceston

in 1934, the temple was reinforced as a centre of Chinese religion and culture, and not just for the immediate surrounding settlement. When the other temples of North East Tasmania closed (all earlier than the Weldborough temple), their most important elements – wooden plaques inscribed with dedications, ‘floating Golden palaces’ mounted on walls, incense racks and burners – were brought to the Weldborough temple for safekeeping. The temple remained a core element of the local culture and streetscape until the settlement ceased to exist.



Figure 6. North-east Tasmania context map showing the location and network of Chinese temples and mining settlements in the late nineteenth century (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data).

In contrast, the immediate area around the Yiu Ming Temple has transformed from being a place of Chinese market gardens in the later nineteenth century to being a predominantly industrial suburb in the mid-twentieth century to its gentrification as a part of inner south Sydney. The walled compound of the temple precinct provided comparative insulation for, and isolation of, the temple. It has seen an evolution of the area and dispersal of its community of worshippers through much of the twentieth century. However, in the density and boundedness of its urban form, the complex relates more clearly to its Australian context as an inner-urban presence than a rural compound. In more recent times, starting with the influx of Chinese migrants in the 1980s, the temple’s presence has become more prominent, and its status as one of Australia’s few surviving early Chinese temples has brought the building and its adjacent development listing on the New South Wales Heritage Register.¹⁴ This recognition, as an intrinsic part

of the built fabric of the state, highlights the temple's part in Retreat Street as an enduring adaptation of patterns of settlement of a particular community to its surroundings.

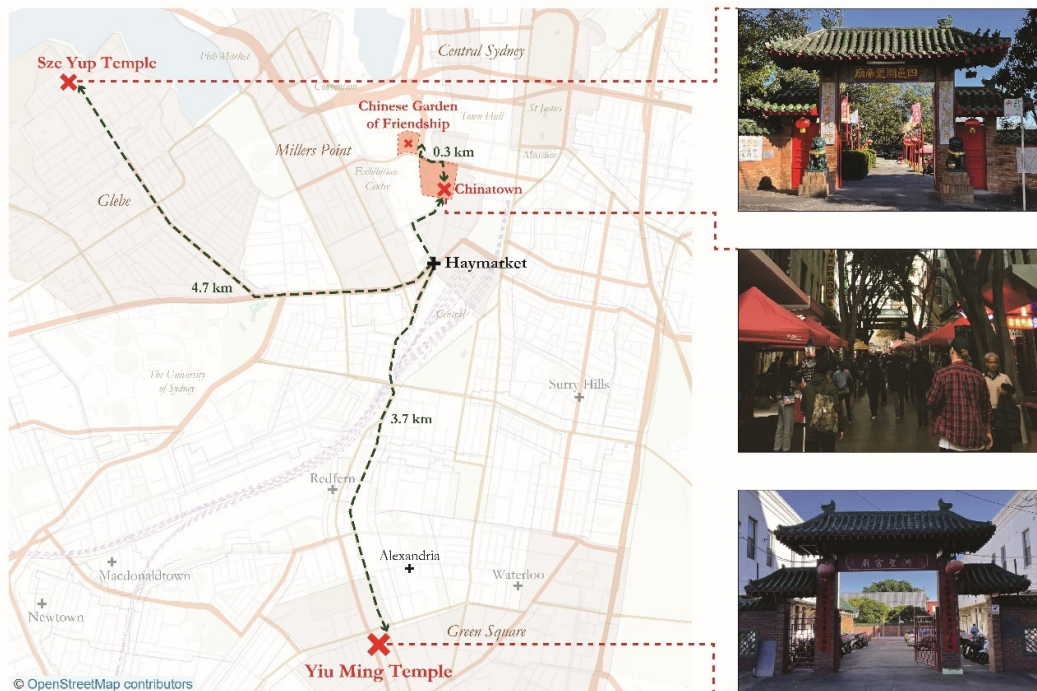


Figure 7. Sydney context map showing the location of China Town, Chinese Garden, Yiu Ming Temple in Alexandria and Sze Yup Temple in Glebe (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data, photographs by Freya Su).

The Springvale Guan Di Temple at first appears isolated in its immediate surroundings, situated in a light industrial area next to cabinetry workshops and small factories. However, a closer look at the surrounding streets reveals it as being part of a culturally rich mixture of uses, including a Vietnamese-Australian Women's Association, a Greek Orthodox Church and a Hakka Chinese Community Association alongside numerous businesses making both culturally specific and generic goods (Figure 4). This is evidently more than an industrial precinct. On the one hand, the fact that cultural and religious places can be found here is a function of the low esteem in which this peripheral landscape of unheroic light industrial buildings was previously held by the existing majority population. In this light, the location of the temple is a matter of enforced circumstance, a combination of limited means to purchase land in the city, and, once land has been occupied, the relative lack of planning and other overarching governmental controls. On the other hand, in becoming a regional centre for Melbourne's Teo Chew/Chinese/Daoist community, the temple is a prominent example

of spatial occupation that, however unprepossessing its siting on the margins of an outer suburb, has become a productive focus for that growing community, and an example of the transformative potential of such siting with the changing demography of the city.



Figure 8. Melbourne context map highlighting Daoist Chinese temples and migrant hostels (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data).

City and Regional Connections

The Weldborough temple's location and immediate surroundings are evidence of the separation of its Chinese community from the dominant 'white' population of the town and the broader area of North Eastern Tasmania. While it existed, there was a clear physical separation between the temple and its surrounding Chinese settlement and the rest of the town of Weldborough. Yet some of these settlements were, relative to the sparsely populated region of North East Tasmania of the time, quite prominent. Despite the separation (Figure 2), there was an acceptance extended to the Chinese in Weldborough, allowing them to partially integrate into its social fabric. Their children attended the public school and the Chinese included European settlers in their Chinese new year celebrations. Such events are documented in letters and journals of the time.¹⁵

The Chinese New Year celebrations centred around Garibaldi's Joss House in 1912 were reported to have attracted hundreds of visitors, making it a major regional event.¹⁶ The reconstitution of the Weldborough temple (and elements from the other former Tasmanian temples) in a Launceston Museum speaks of this broader geographic scope, not only because Launceston is around 120 kilometres from Weldborough. The reconstituted temple, while essentially a museum exhibit, speaks of its value, most immediately to the former Chinese mining communities, but now more generally as an important part of Tasmanian history and culture.

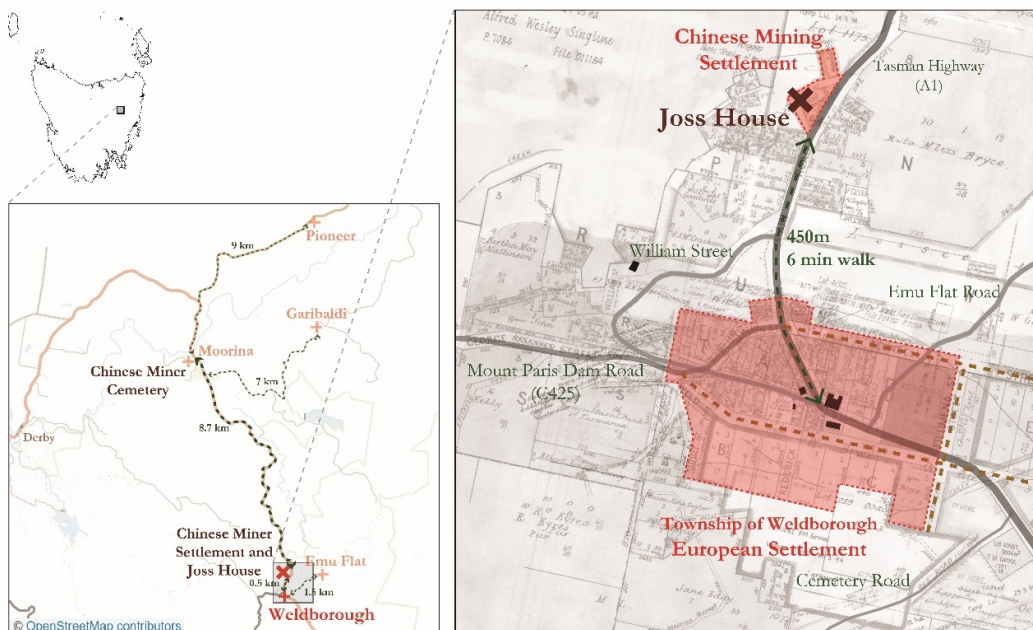


Figure 9. Map showing the network of mining camps and Weldborough Chinese settlement located 450 metres north of the European township (Map by Van Krisadawat, traced from Map - Weldborough W13 (Tasmanian Archives: AF819-1-364), with OpenStreetMap data).

The Yiu Ming Temple, in contrast, remains on its original site and has been gradually surrounded by the metropolis of greater Sydney. While the market gardens that originally surrounded the temple have long since disappeared, the temple and its adjacent buildings still form a distinct street precinct reinforced by surrounding walls and accessed through gateways. In its contemporary setting, it appears that the temple complex has had little influence on the built environment beyond its walls, though traces of the former waterway can be detected in maps of the immediate area. However, one of only two Chinese temples (the other being the Sze Yup Temple in Glebe) to remain

in operation in Sydney during the 'white Australia' period of the twentieth century, its influence amongst the city's Chinese inhabitants was geographically wide.

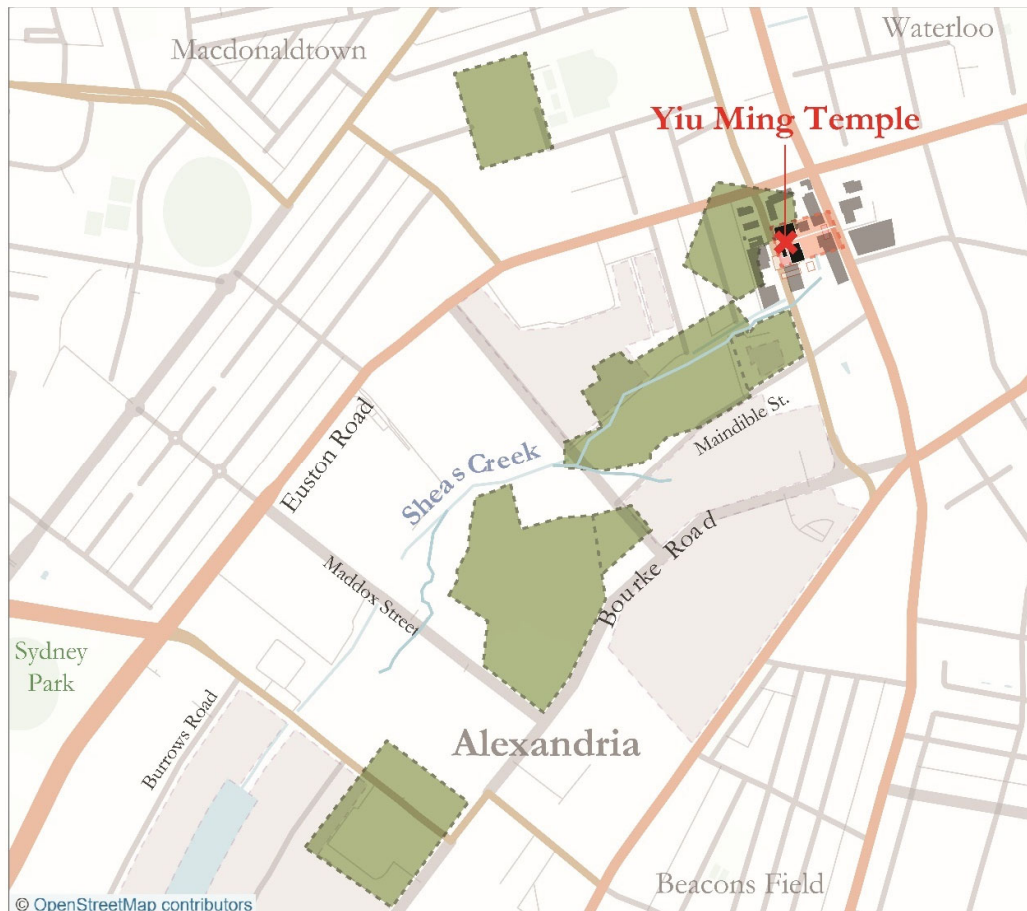


Figure 10. Map of Alexandria, Sydney, showing Yiu Ming temple, with the Chinese market gardens along Shears Creek highlighted in green (Map by Van Krisadawat and Freya Su from OpenStreetMap data).

The Guan Di Temple in Springvale is of far more recent origin, and so its influence on the broader area of Springvale and south-eastern Melbourne is less a matter of historical traces, and more a reflection on its purpose within the wide expanse of the city's outer metropolitan area. Here, the temple's identity as specifically if not exclusively Teo Chew has a bearing, evidenced by its usage as a Teo Chew community centre as much as a specific place of worship, overlapping with the ethnically Teo Chew origins of some of its members as refugees from Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁷ This broader influence is illustrated by the greater mobility of the temple's users, in contrast to the earlier buildings, with worshippers of Daoist/Teo Chew/Chinese origins visiting from a wide catchment area of south-eastern metropolitan Melbourne.

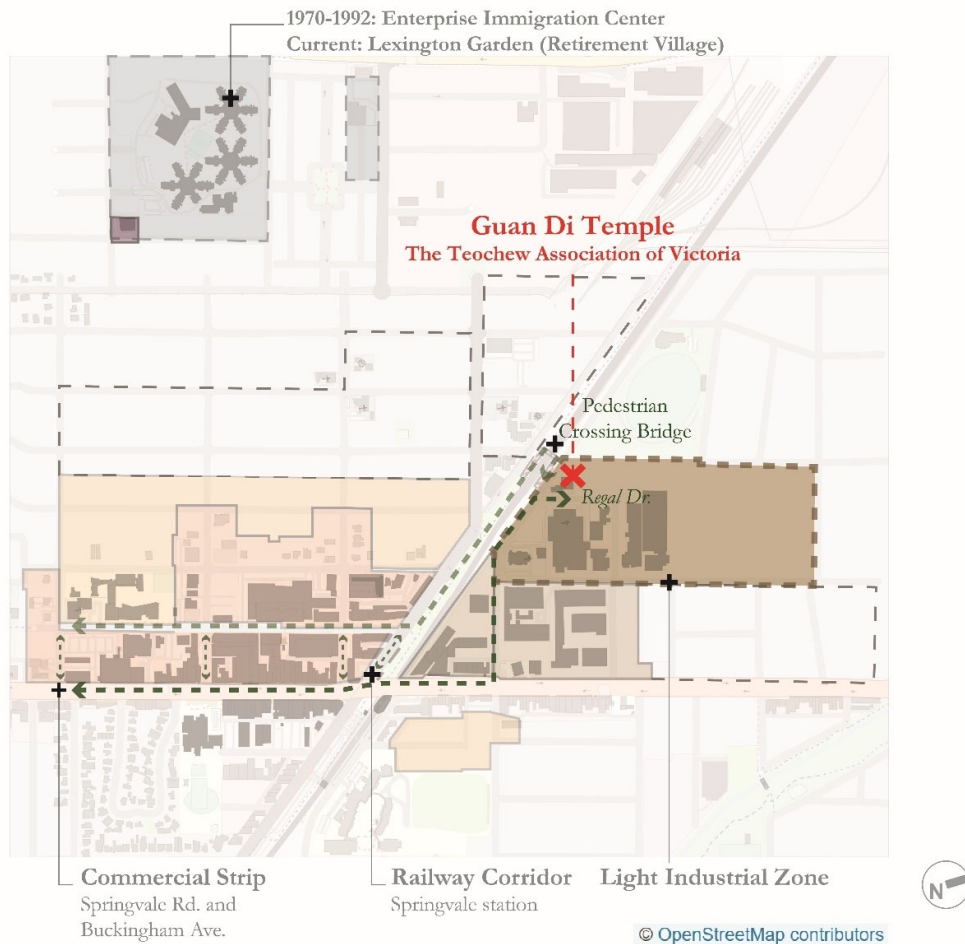


Figure 11. Map of Springvale, Melbourne, showing the location of Guan Di Temple within the light industrial zone (Map by Van Krisadawat from OpenStreetMap data).

Conclusion: Boundaries, Culture and Otherness

While any place has the potential for meaning to be attributed to it in this manner, religious buildings are predisposed to be sites of difference. A Daoist temple first marks the presence of a particular identity and world-view by its establishment, and then reinforces this through the performance of rituals; from initial establishment, to the events and holy days that it celebrates, to the daily and individual activities that occur within it. However, the physical fact of each temple as a building or complex of buildings is that they are bounded, whether by actual walls, or by boundaries of their site. The activities that occur within these temples are also more or less bounded, and particularly since they are surrounded by quite different uses and users, must constantly be aware and considerate of neighbouring uses and activities. Relations beyond the temples' communities are determined not only by the purposes of buildings within and outside the temples' boundaries, but also with preconceptions and perceptions of temple

insiders, the broader population around the temple, and governing bodies. By their presence, these temples offer (or have offered) connection and reference to Chinese and Daoist identity, an identity that transcends the limitations of their buildings' siting within physical neighbourhoods. A temple represents a narrative that fills a particular imagined space, despite other narratives that appear beyond its spatial limits (and in the sense of the power of governmental planning and authority, sometimes within it). The space of the Daoist temple is one in which an alternately centred space (focused on Chinese syncretic beliefs and worldview) is promoted, one that remains 'other' to the dominant and hegemonic space of local society.¹⁸

Such buildings are most commonly thought of in terms of the adaptation of Chinese architecture to the otherness of Australian conditions. However, in addition to this, given the long history of Chinese architecture in Australia, it is also worth considering how the apparent otherness of Chinese architecture has itself been influential. That one of the three subject temples for this paper has been removed from its original location (and largely from its original purpose) indicates that the relationship between migration and settlement is a threshold between movement and fixity, ephemerality and permanence, residence and citizenship in the fullest sense. The removal and reconstitution of the Weldborough temple illustrates how struggles against power and hegemony that engage the everyday lives of marginalised people can be brought to bear on physical spaces. Comparison of the siting of these three Daoist temples – one from the nineteenth century that was dismantled and partially reconstituted as a museum exhibit, one that has survived over a century on a site that has changed from being amidst market gardens to part of a gentrified inner suburb, and one founded recently on a light industrial site in southeastern Melbourne – suggest that while much has changed about the reception of different cultures in Australia, a sense of otherness remains in relation to Chinese being Australian. The presence of consciousness in decision-making about practices, retention and usage of tradition, mean that the cultural environment for a Chinese temple, whether constructed in 1880 or 1990, is not tacit. It is the result of a diasporic community's active invocation of culture in unfamiliar conditions, a teleological as well as pragmatic exercise. The presence of these temples reminds us that minority communities produce architecture as one means of reconciling affiliations of faith, ethnic background and location, the "place you're at" versus the "place you're from."¹⁹ As a nation, Australia still needs to fully come to terms with this as central, rather than marginal, to national identity.

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Endnotes

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² "Joss House" is a Western term for a Chinese temple, derived from the Portuguese *deos* (god). Some view the term as prejudicial though it remains widely used for Chinese temples in the West.

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⁴ Alexandria Municipal Council, *1868-1943 Alexandria*.

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¹⁰ Alexandria Municipal Council, *1868-1943 Alexandria*.

¹¹ Richardson, *Tin Mountain*.

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¹⁶ Sue Walden, "The Tin Fields of North-East Tasmania – A Regional Variation," *Histories of Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, 177-87.

¹⁷ Wong, Interview.

¹⁸ J. Yolande Daniels, "Black Bodies, Black Space: A-Waiting Spectacle," in Leslie Naa Nokko (ed.), *White Papers, Black Marks: Architecture, Race, Culture* (London: Athlone, 2000): 199.

¹⁹ Ien Ang, "On Not Speaking Chinese," *New Formations*, 24 (1994): 1-18.