

Crafting Chinese Cultural Identity: The Role of Traditional Artisans in George Town World Heritage Site

Niao Xu^{1,2} and Norfarizah Mohd Bakhir^{1*}

¹School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

²School of Fusion Media, Sichuan University of Media and Communications, 611745 Chengdu, China

*Corresponding author: farizah@usm.my

Submitted: 12 August 2025 • **Accepted:** 23 May 2026 • **Published online:** 30 September 2026

To cite this article: Niao Xu and Norfarizah Mohd Bakhir. 2026. "Crafting Chinese Cultural Identity: The Role of Traditional Artisans in George Town World Heritage Site." *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse* 25(2): 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2026.25.2.4>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2026.25.2.4>

ABSTRACT

George Town, Malaysia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is often discussed through its architectural legacy and histories of trade and migration. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among Chinese artisans, this study examines how cultural identities are produced through everyday craft practice in the context of urban transformation. Focusing on rattan weaving and paper effigy-making, the analysis traces how identity takes shape through routine judgements embedded in work processes and in the handling of materials and ritual forms. The two cases show that adaptation follows different practical logics in commercial craft and ritual production, as artisans recalibrate inherited repertoires in response to shifting conditions of work and use. The findings indicate that heritage emerges as a practical achievement sustained through embodied labour and everyday interaction and maintained through continual adjustment within craft worlds. By foregrounding craft-centred ethnography, the study contributes to discussions of cultural identity, living heritage, and urban change, and highlights the role of non-elite actors in shaping the social texture of heritage cities.

Keywords: cultural identity, Chinese, traditional artisans, ethnographic, George Town World Heritage Site

INTRODUCTION

George Town, located on Penang Island, Malaysia, has long been recognised as a multicultural port city shaped by waves of migration and trade since its founding in 1786 (Barber 2009, 88). Its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, alongside Melaka, highlights its cultural and commercial legacy and the continued presence of living multicultural traditions (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2008). Yet in both policy and popular narratives, heritage in George Town is still more often framed through buildings, streetscapes, and officially recognised traditions than through the everyday practices of those who work within these spaces. This emphasis risks obscuring how cultural continuity is sustained in daily life, through labour, skill, and routine social interaction. Existing studies have drawn attention to intangible heritage and community participation in George Town (MooiKwong 2017; Foo and Krishnapillai 2019; Ellisha et al. 2019),

and to the pressures brought by urban redevelopment and the repeal of the *Rent Control Act* (Jenkins and King 2003; Khoo and Lim 2019). These works have been crucial in showing how heritage policies reshape urban life. However, less attention has been paid to how artisans themselves, as non-elite actors, actively negotiate these conditions through their everyday work. Too often, craft practitioners appear either as passive bearers of tradition or as victims of structural change, rather than as agents who continuously reinterpret what cultural continuity means in practice.

This article shifts the focus from heritage as something to be preserved to something that is continually made and remade in practice. It asks how traditional artisans in George Town actively craft cultural identity through their everyday work. By approaching craft as a form of situated labour involving materials, moral judgement, and social relations, the article treats cultural identity not as a stable possession but as an ongoing accomplishment embedded in routine practice. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the analysis focuses on two forms of craft practice: rattan weaving and paper effigy-making. These cases are presented as contrasting sites through which different dimensions of cultural identity are enacted. Rattan weaving highlights how diasporic memory, material durability, and market adaptation are woven into everyday economic practice. Paper effigy-making foregrounds how ritual constraints, creative judgement, and institutional mediation shape the boundaries of tradition and innovation. Together, they show that “living heritage” in George Town is sustained through artisans’ ongoing negotiations with change.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND TRADITIONAL CRAFTS: THEORETICAL APPROACH

Globalisation at the turn of the 21st century renewed scholarly attention to “identity,” moving beyond essentialist definitions of fixed and stable attributes (Xu 2023) toward perspectives that view identity as discursive, relational, and contingent (Hall 1990; Bhabha 1994). Hall (1989; 2011) frames cultural identity as both a shared historical position and an ongoing process of negotiation, while Bhabha (1994) highlights its hybridity and formation in a third space. Giddens (1990) likewise emphasises the reflexive reshaping of identity under changing social conditions. These views converge in recognising identity as neither purely inherited nor entirely self-fashioned but shaped through lived practices in particular times and places.

In multicultural cities such as George Town, identity seldom rests on a single origin; it is formed through accumulated experience, tied to place, memory, and relationships (Hall 1990; Harvey 2001). In this setting, the work of traditional artisans offers a way to examine identity as it is enacted in daily life. Rather than simply preserving inherited forms, artisans engage their craft to connect with community and history (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012). Lévi-Strauss (1966) observed that craft practices embody the cultural structures and modes of thought of a group, while Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) underscored their role in shaping modern identity. From the perspective of tourism anthropology, Graburn (1987; 2004) and Nash (1993) have shown that traditional crafts are dynamic processes through which identity is expressed, adapted, and reworked, mediating between memory and change.

Drawing on these insights, this study examines how artisans in George Town negotiate identity through three dimensions: (1) inherited techniques and embodied knowledge sustained through long-term practice, (2) spatialised memory embedded in the shophouse environment, and (3) social interactions with customers, neighbours, and other city dwellers. These practices articulate a sense of belonging not through fixed symbols, but through repeated, situated acts. By tracing these dynamics, the study foregrounds cultural identity as a lived process central to sustaining heritage in multicultural urban settings.

METHODS

The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in George Town over three phases: May to July 2023, August to October 2024, and December 2024, amounting to a total of seven months. The wider research project also included other traditional craft sectors, such as trishaw making, joss-stick production, wood carving, etc. This article focuses on rattan weaving and paper effigy-making because these two sectors offer a productive contrast between commercial craft and ritual production for examining everyday mechanisms of practice, judgement, and adaptation.

The fieldwork covered remaining rattan weaving and paper effigy-making shops in George Town, including four rattan workshops and three paper effigy shops (Table 1). All seven sites were visited for observation, which made it possible to map the broader structure of these two craft sectors and the shared constraints they face under contemporary urban and economic conditions. Within this small and clearly bounded field, two family-run workshops, one in each craft sector, were selected for more sustained and in-depth engagement. These focal cases were chosen as analytically generative sites through which the everyday mechanisms of craft practice, moral judgement, and adaptation could be examined in detail. Both workshops combine long intergenerational histories, ongoing interaction with customers, and visible processes of adjustment in materials, products, and work routines. This combination provides a basis for identifying practice-based mechanisms that operate across these craft worlds beyond the specific settings of the two focal workshops, and for analysing how cultural identity is actively crafted through everyday practice.

Table 1 Participants and ways of engagement.

Id	Craft	Years of operation	Generational continuity	Type of engagement
1	Rattan (case)	Since 1940s	Fourth generation	Observation, interview
2	Rattan	Since 1920s	Fifth generation	Observation only
3	Rattan	Since 1930s	Third generation	Observation only
4	Rattan	Since 1950s	Second generation	Observation only
5	Paper effigy (case)	Since 1990s	Second generation	Observation, interview
6	Paper effigy	Since 1920s	Fourth generation	Observation, interview
7	Paper effigy	Since 1980s	Second generation	Observation only

Field methods included participant observation in shophouses, repeated semi-structured interviews with artisans and their family members, as well as conversations with customers, neighbouring shopkeepers, and practitioners in related trades. The study draws on multiple rounds of interviews with the two focal families, supplemented by informal exchanges across the other sites. These materials are supported by detailed field notes, photographic documentation of shop spaces, tools, and products, and observations of daily work routines and customer interactions. In addition, historical sources on trade development and Chinese artisanal traditions were also examined to situate present practices within longer trajectories of continuity and adaptation. The analysis uses these sources to trace how artisans' everyday decisions about materials, techniques, and forms of work are shaped by, and respond to, shifting social, ritual, and economic conditions.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interpretive ethnographic approach (Geertz 2023, 3–39, see also Sun 2018), guided by the view that cultural identity is not a static possession, but an ongoing process negotiated in daily life. Rather than applying theoretical frameworks in a top-

down manner, the analysis builds inductively from field encounters, focusing on how cultural identity is expressed and reworked through practice, interpersonal exchange, and spatial memory. All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants, and the use of personal and shop names follows their expressed preferences. As a qualitative study centred on a small number of cases, this research does not aim for statistical representativeness. Its analytical goal is instead to develop a processual and practice-based understanding of how cultural identity is produced within specific craft worlds.

The study is also shaped by the researcher's position as a repeated visitor to these shophouses over an extended period. Linguistic and cultural proximity facilitated access and everyday interaction, but this proximity also required ongoing reflexive attention to what might be taken for granted in interpretation. In practice, some aspects of work routines and value judgements were so familiar to participants that they were rarely articulated explicitly, and certain topics related to business decisions or ritual authority required careful and repeated inquiry to avoid misinterpretation. These conditions are treated as part of the situated nature of ethnographic knowledge production.

RATTAN WEAVING: CRAFTING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH DIASPORIC MEMORY

The Cultural Roots of Rattan Weaving

Rattan weaving has deep historical roots in China, especially in the southern provinces of Hainan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian, where the tropical climate supports the growth of rattan. Valued for its flexibility, water resistance, and lightness, rattan has long been used in making furniture, utensils, and crafts. As early as the Northern Song dynasty, the *New Book of Tang: Geographical Treatises* (Xiu and Qi 1975) recorded rattan as a local tribute item in several southern regions. In the Qing dynasty, Qu Dajun (2008) detailed regional varieties in *Guangdong Xinyu*, noting that “two out of every ten households in Lingnan practised rattan weaving,” using white rattan for screens and trays, and bitter rattan for ox ropes and ship cables.

Compared to China, rattan weaving in Southeast Asia has its own unique characteristics in terms of raw materials and usage. The climate in Southeast Asia is conducive to the growth of rattan plants, which have long been used by residents for crafting furniture, household items, as well as for building houses and making boats (Piper 1992). At the turn of the 20th century, Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asia brought their hometown lifestyles and crafts with them (Deng 2019). As Chen (2016, 41) noted, within Penang's Chinese community, particularly among the Teochew people, many practised traditional crafts such as rattan weaving, barrel making, and clog making. The development of the rattan weaving industry in Penang began in the early 20th century and reached its peak by the mid-20th century. According to the rattan weaver Ms. Sim, the earliest rattan weaving shops were concentrated around the Penang Road area, where five or six rattan weaving shops gathered at the height of their prosperity.

This section examines rattan weaving as a field of everyday practice in which cultural identity takes shape through routine decisions about materials, techniques, and forms of work. The focus lies on how family memory, craft knowledge and market engagement intersect in the Sim family's workshop, and how these intersections generate practical judgements about durability, quality, and appropriateness. By following these judgements in action, the analysis shows how continuity is produced through adjustment within daily work processes.

Tracing Diasporic Memory: The Sim Family and Their Shophouse

As one of the last remaining rattan weaving shops in George Town, the shop run by the Sim family has witnessed the rise and decline of the rattan weaving industry in Penang. The rattan shop opened in the late 1940s and has been in operation for over 70 years. Today, the shop is managed by the fourth-generation inheritors, the Sim siblings. The Sim family hails from Puning, Guangdong (the Teochew region), and the two inheritors are fluent in several languages, including Hokkien, Teochew, Mandarin, Malay, and English. In their daily lives, they primarily communicate with family members and friends in Teochew, but when interacting with customers from different ethnic groups, they can switch languages as needed to meet the communication requirements. This routine multilingual adjustment forms part of the shop's everyday working environment and situates craft practice within a wider field of social interaction.

Before stepping into their shophouse, one can spot the wooden signboard written in traditional Chinese characters, with the English name “Seang Hin Leong” (Figure 1). The English name reflects a distinctive Malaysian feature, as the local Chinese often transliterate dialect pronunciations into English. “Seang Hin Leong” is derived from the Teochew pronunciation. The shophouse is divided into two parts: the front area serves as the store, while the back and second floor house the living quarters of the owners. The counter is placed in the middle, acting as a divider between the shop and the living space. Surrounding the counter are various Chinese cultural artefacts, including a shrine dedicated to *Guan Gong*, a wooden chest of drawers, a carved signboard with the Chinese words “*Seang Hin Leong*,” and two pieces of calligraphy. In many Chinese-owned shophouses in Penang, one can find shrines and traditional artistic decorations such as calligraphy and Chinese paintings (Xu 2025). On the left side of the counter, photographs of the Sim family ancestors are displayed, including those of the shop owners’ parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Together, these spatial arrangements anchor daily work within a setting shaped by family memory and lineage, and they frame craft practice as an activity embedded in domestic and historical continuity.



Figure 1 The wooden signboard of Seang Hin Leong, George Town.

Source: Author's collection.

In fact, the Sim family's involvement in the rattan business in Penang dates back further than this shop. At the beginning of the 20th century, Sim's great-grandfather, along with fellow villagers, migrated to Penang and entered the rattan weaving industry, later establishing his own rattan weaving shop called "Seang Hin." Purcell (1967) points out that the Chinese in Malaysia often live with fellow villagers from the same ancestral hometown and tend to enter the same industries as their compatriots. Deng (2019) also mentions that, during the late Qing dynasty, small-scale artisans or craftsmen, primarily from Fujian and Guangdong, sought livelihoods in Southeast Asia through mutual social relationships based on blood, kinship, or geographical ties, and they used overseas remittance letters to maintain connections with relatives and friends in China.

... My grandfather earned money here [in Malaysia] and sent it back [to China]. At that time, Malaysia was not yet independent, so people could come and go freely" (Sim 2024b)

Before Malaysia's independence, the Sim family maintained frequent contact with relatives and friends in their hometown and often travelled back to China. After independence, these connections gradually diminished. As Chen (2016, 23) notes, before World War II, Chinese people had a strong sense of hometown attachment and a diasporic mindset, caring deeply about conditions in China. After the war, with the rise of the Malaysian independence movement, the British colonial government issued the Immigration Act (1948) to restrict Chinese immigration, thereby weakening the ties between the Chinese in Malaysia and China. The Sim family's current shop was purchased by their grandfather during this period. His elder brother continued to run the original shop on Penang Road, while the younger brother opened another workshop in Butterworth. Over time, family members shifted occupations, and only Seang Hin Leong remained in operation under the Sim siblings. This trajectory situates the present workshop within a longer history of migration, settlement, and occupational reorientation.

Weaving Chinese Nostalgia: The Large Rattan Baskets

The large rattan basket once formed the core product of the shop and connected rattan weaving to patterns of migration and return. From the early to mid-20th century, every Chinese migrant returning to China would use it to carry their belongings. This basket was locally referred to as the Tangshan basket. Sim mentions that Teochew people who migrated to Southeast Asia would refer to "returning to China" as "going back to Tangshan." Li (2022) discusses the origin of the term "*Tangshan*," explaining that "*tang*" symbolises the glorious history of the Tang dynasty, while "*shan*" (in Chinese, it means mountain) reflects the longing of the overseas Chinese for their homeland.

... Back then, when the Chinese returned to China, they would order this luggage. Old clothes, bicycles, and grains would all be packed in it. Also, cold medicine was hard to find in China, so they would bring as many daily necessities as they could. (Sim April 2023)

In the early 20th century, due to China's low economic development, Chinese people used rattan baskets to send scarce goods from Malaysia back to China. As China's economy grew and Malaysia restricted the return of Chinese after independence, this practice gradually declined. From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the total trade between the two countries also shows a decline in China's imports from Malaysia, while exports continued to rise (Shan 2022, 54). These shifts altered the social role of the Tangshan basket and repositioned it within the workshop's production repertoire.

In the past, Chinese migrants returning to China would follow a set process. Firstly, they would register at an inn, which would also purchase their boat tickets. Then, they would order a Tangshan basket (Figure 2) from a rattan shop, each about four feet tall and capable of carrying 200 to 250 kilograms. Since these large-sized baskets could not be stored at the shop for long,



Figure 2 Transport Tangshan basket to the inn, George Town.

Source: Photographed by Sim in 1989.

the shop typically began making them a few days before the migrants' departure. Once finished, they were delivered to the inn, where staff would help with packing, and the packages were then sent to the Weld Quay. The "inn" mentioned by Sim served as an important intermediary for the Chinese migrants. In addition to providing accommodation and boat tickets, it also handled remittance services.

The Tangshan basket not only served practical purposes but also brought economic value to Chinese migrants. Typically priced based on weight, large baskets were sold for RM50 to RM60 each. Made from thick rattan, these baskets were durable, slightly water-resistant, and often disassembled upon arrival in China, where the rattan materials could be resold for as much as RM100. This practice of recycling rattan reflects the Chinese life wisdom and the traditional values of "*Jie jian*" (thrift) and "*Wujin Qiyong*" (making full use of resources). The concept of *Wujin Qiyong* signifies the efficient and creative use of materials during times of scarcity, ensuring that objects are used to their fullest potential. For rattan products, their economic and functional value could be rediscovered through processes of disassembly and reassembly. In this sense, the basket exemplifies a mode of material reasoning in which economic value and practical function continue to circulate through processes of disassembly and reassembly.

Practices of repair extend this material reasoning into the present. At Seang Hin Leong, for example, the shop not only manufactures and sells new rattan products but also offers repair services. This dual focus on production and maintenance is common among traditional artisan businesses and stands in stark contrast to modern consumerism's "dispose after use" mindset (Baudrillard 2014, 26). Instead of encouraging frequent replacement, the artisans emphasise quality and durability, often suggesting low-cost repairs to prolong a product's lifespan. Sim repeatedly uses the term "durable" to describe the quality of rattan products. For instance, she highlighted that rattan material undergoes an oil-boiling process to prevent insect infestation. However, many imported rattan products from Indonesia lack this step, compromising their longevity. Moreover, given that many of their customers are elderly, Sim often recommends simple, thick-rattan designs over trendier, fine-woven pieces, citing their greater durability and ease of repair.

These judgements connect inherited values of frugality and integrity with contemporary conditions of production and consumption, and they show how diasporic memory and moral evaluation continue to inform everyday work in the workshop. They also point to a craft-based ethic of maintenance and material care that resonates with broader discussions of environmental sustainability, even though artisans themselves frame these choices primarily in terms of quality, economy, and responsibility.

Navigating Change: Resilience of the Rattan Weaver

Over the past 70 years, Sim's shop has undergone transitions in its primary products to adapt to changing market demands. From the early-20th-century rattan baskets and trunks to mid-20th-century rattan school bags and ship pumpers, and now to furniture and handicrafts (Figure 3), the shop has gradually shifted from custom-made rattan products and raw material sales to finished rattan goods. Along with this transformation, the variety, aesthetics, production processes, and display of the products have evolved. Sim recalls that earlier shop layouts were rudimentary. For instance, the old shop in Butterworth was primarily a storage space for raw materials. Today, it showcases more finished rattan products with aesthetic considerations incorporated into the displays. Many items originally intended for practical use have been reimagined as handicrafts through "miniaturisation" and "simplification."

In an oral history recorded by the Penang Heritage Trust, Mr. Sim (2014), the third-generation predecessor, recalled selling rattan "pig baskets," a craft mastered by few artisans. He also mentioned his father's advice that the skill should remain a family secret, passed down within the family. However, as traditional methods of livestock transport evolved, the market for pig baskets diminished, and the craft lost its commercial secrecy. Eventually, the family began teaching this skill to anyone interested and repurposed the technique into making small souvenirs, such as pig-basket-shaped lampshades, which now hang decoratively from the shop's ceiling. These items are both sold and used as display pieces.

Graburn (1979), in his study of handicraft production in the Fourth World, observed that handmade goods often adapt over time, evolving in form and aesthetic value. Techniques like "miniaturisation" and "simplification" transform functional objects into decorative ones, adding new economic value. Sim's transformation of rattan crafts is a clear example of this trend. Ms. Sim reminisces that the idea of using rattan weaving techniques for lampshades originated from a Hong Kong designer visiting Penang, who suggested repurposing semi-finished rattan baskets into lighting fixtures. Sim (2024a) stated, "The weaving technique has been the same for generations, but we need to change."

The shop's transformation also reflects changes in its customer base. In the past, Chinese migrants travelling between Malaysia and China were the primary buyers of rattan baskets. Today, residents and tourists are the primary source of their customers. The shift in product



Figure 3 The changing product of Sim's shop over the course of a hundred years.

Source: Illustrated by the authors.

offerings illustrates Sim's efforts to respond to new business environments and customer preferences. Currently, not all the rattan goods sold at Seang Hin Leong are handmade by Sim's family. High labour costs mean only a few bespoke items are handcrafted in-house; the majority now come from regional suppliers. Yet rather than a simple decline, this shift reflects the craftsmen's ongoing negotiation with changing economic conditions and social expectations.

To conclude, the Sim family's rattan workshop shows how cultural identity is crafted through everyday material practice. The changing role of the Tangshan basket, from a container of diasporic mobility to a historical reference point, demonstrates how memory is reworked through shifting economic and social conditions. Practices of repair, selective outsourcing, and product transformation involve continuous moral and technical judgement about durability, quality, and appropriateness. Through these decisions, rattan weaving becomes a practical way of negotiating what counts as continuity in the present. Cultural identity takes shape through choices about materials, forms, and modes of work, which recalibrate the relationship between past and present. This case shows how "living heritage" is sustained through situated labour and everyday adjustment, anchored in routine work rather than in fixed cultural forms.

PAPER EFFIGY-MAKING: MEDIATING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH RITUAL CRAFT

Paper Effigy-making Across Historical Shifts

Paper effigies (*zhizha* in Chinese) are traditional Chinese offerings, primarily made from paper as the main material, and crafted through techniques such as cutting, glueing, and carving to create replica items or human figures. Commonly used in funerals and religious ceremonies, they replicate everyday items or human figures to serve the needs of the deceased or deities (Zhang 2017, 2018). Originating as "*mingqi*" substitute burial goods, paper effigies reflect the Han (206 BC–AD 220) belief that "serving the dead should be like serving the living," as expressed in the *Li ji* (Book of Rites). Early tombs featured material offerings such as gold, pottery, or clothing to support the dead in the afterlife.

With the invention of paper in the Eastern Han, material grave goods were gradually replaced by paper-based substitutes, known as paper *mingqi*. This transformation not only reflected evolving funerary beliefs, but also made ritual practices more accessible across social strata (Hunter 1978; Blake 2011). Archaeological findings indicate that the earliest paper *mingqi* were unearthed in the Astana Ancient Tombs of Turpan, Xinjiang, dating from the late Northern and Southern dynasties (AD 420–589) to the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907). These *mingqi* included items like shoes, hats, coffins, and human figures (Lu 2006). Possibly influenced by Buddhism, the custom of burning paper *mingqi* began to emerge during the Tang dynasty (Gao 1989). Over time, paper effigies evolved beyond funerary use. By the Tang and Song dynasties, they appeared in ancestral rites during the Hanshi and Zhongyuan festivals. In the Ming and Qing periods, their use expanded to include offerings to deities for protection and fortune. For example, *Dijing Jingwu Lue* by Liu Tong (1997) records the practice of burning paper horses to Guan Gong and offerings to the moon deity.

Paper effigies are widely used in folk activities across China. While their core purposes, such as ancestor and deity worship, warding off evil, and blessing rituals, are shared universally (Zhang 2018), variations in local customs, belief systems, and ceremonial practices have given rise to distinct regional styles and forms (Blake 2011, 65). This diversity is not limited to China itself. Hunter (1978, 209) notes that China's ritual ceremonies and paper effigy craftsmanship spread to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, along with waves of migration, and gradually became an important part of the cultural landscape in these regions.



Figure 4 Chinese calligraphy with Koh's shop name.

Source: Author's collection.

In Malaysia, Chinese paper effigies have not only preserved traditional meanings and uses from China but also evolved and innovated in the process of localisation. As one of the last remaining paper effigy shops on Penang Island, Koh's paper effigy shop is highly regarded for its solid craftsmanship. Since the end of the 20th century, the shop has been making and selling paper effigies, with the skill now passed down to the second generation. The Koh family, originating from Anxi, Fujian, shares a master with the owners of George Town's two other remaining paper effigy shops. In 1997, Koh's family opened their first paper effigy shop at Pengkalan Weld but relocated several times due to changes in property ownership and government planning. Upon entering, one could immediately notice the traditional Chinese decorations. A calligraphy piece bearing the Chinese name of their shop is displayed on the central wall (Figure 4). On the right side of the shop are the two shrines. The upper shrine is dedicated to a three-headed, six-armed Nezha,¹ while the lower shrine honours Da Bo Ye.²

This section approaches paper effigy-making as a form of ritual craft in which cultural identity is shaped through decisions about symbolic form, ritual propriety, and social obligation. Centring on Koh's workshop, the analysis follows how inherited conventions are interpreted in relation to families' expectations, religious specialists, and intermediaries in the funeral industry. The focus lies on how design choices, colour schemes, and iconographic themes become sites of judgement that organise everyday work and guide creative extension within ritual boundaries. In this setting, cultural continuity takes shape through ongoing calibration between craft practice, ritual authority, and institutional arrangements.

Sustaining Chinese Ritual: Funeral Paper Practices

Koh mentioned that funeral rites and ancestor worship are the most fundamental uses of paper effigies, and their designs reflect certain geo-cultural characteristics. In Penang, it is common for Chinese families to purchase paper effigies for ritual offerings after the death of a family member. Common items include houses, vehicles, household utensils, and human figures. Among these, the "paper mansion" is the most basic item. Koh said that "there must be a house, a place

to rest, a place to go” (Koh 2023). This may be linked to the significance of “houses” in Chinese cultural and social life (Hsu 1971, 27–53). Most paper mansions are modelled after architectural styles from the Qing dynasty or the Republican era, though a smaller number feature Western-style designs. Scott (2013), in her fieldwork on Chinese paper effigies in Hong Kong, observed that many paper mansion designs are rooted in the late Qing and Republican periods but did not elaborate on the reasons for this choice. When asked about the sources of inspiration for paper mansions, Koh (2023) stated that most derive from craftsmanship passed down during the *Xia Nanyang*,³ period and highlighted their stylistic features and evolving trends:

... The house designs in Hokkien, Cantonese, and Teochew each have their own style, but now they are all unified... Over time, the houses have become simplified and are not as complex as before...

While paper mansions once reflected the ancestral origins of the deceased through distinct regional styles, modern designs have become increasingly uniform for efficiency. Yet elements such as ancestral halls and couplets, seen in Hokkien-style paper houses (Figure 5), still evoke traditional architecture in George Town. Through these design choices, paper mansions link ritual expectations with practical considerations of production, and they position craftwork within a field shaped by both inherited conventions and present-day constraints.

Apart from the paper mansions, the “sedan chair” is also a common item used in funeral rituals among the Chinese in Penang. The mourning wake (*Tingling*) ceremony typically lasts for five days, with the sedan chair primarily used during the funeral procession to carry the deceased and guide them to the afterlife. However, not all Chinese families follow the same ritual. Koh (2024) noted that paper effigies are primarily used in funeral rituals, with variations depending on ancestral origins and beliefs:

... In Cantonese traditions, there is no sedan chair; people walk. But for those from Hokkien and Teochew, there is a sedan chair to carry them. The Taoist priest conducts the ceremony, and the [paper-made] deceased sits in the sedan chair as they are carried to the pure land.



Figure 5 A paper mansion of Hokkien style.

Source: Koh (2023).

Within this ritual landscape, the sedan chair appears primarily in Hokkien and Teochew funerals, while Cantonese families often follow other procedures, such as crossing the “gold and silver bridge.” In these ceremonies, family members, guided by a Taoist priest, accompany the deceased’s tablet across a paper bridge that symbolises passage and transformation. Koh also observed that the repertoire of paper effigies remains open to adjustment. Some families, for instance, request a “car” in place of a sedan chair. Over time, the forms and contents of paper effigies have evolved, incorporating elements of modern life, such as contemporary houses, household appliances, and transportation, reflecting an adaptation to and representation of changes in material life in contemporary society (Blake 2011, 14). These shifts show how ritual practice draws on established forms while accommodating changing social expectations and material imaginaries.

Scott (2007; 2013) observed that paper effigies, as a form of material culture, are flexible, constantly absorbing new elements and technologies, and playing an important role in modern cities. However, changes in paper effigies are not without boundaries and must respect certain constraints. For paper effigies, the most essential material is “paper.” As Koh emphasised, “It is called ‘paper effigies’ because it must be associated with paper” (Koh 2024). Koh explained that there is a traditional saying, “first paper, second soil, third wood, fourth stone, fifth metal.” “Paper” is considered the most spiritually receptive material. Xue (2011, 81) explained that “paper” is commonly used in Taoist rituals, such as “spirit paper” and “paper horses,” as a medium to communicate with the “gods.” Moreover, the colour of paper effigies is significant. For example, a newly deceased person cannot be decorated with “red” paper effigies because “red” symbolises joy and celebration in Chinese traditions. However, after the deceased has passed for three years, red can be used in rituals to celebrate the completion of mourning. Koh’s discussion of colour preferences is tied to traditional funeral customs. In ancient funeral rites, there were distinctions between “mourning rites” (Xiong Li) and “auspicious rites” (Ji Li). The rituals before burial were considered “mourning rites,” while post-burial ceremonies, focused on ancestor worship, were regarded as “auspicious rites” (Xue 2011, 70). Through such material and chromatic choices, paper effigy-making becomes a site where ritual knowledge, craft technique, and practical judgement converge in everyday work.

Shaping Chinese Folk Belief: Deity Effigy-Making

In addition to funerals, paper effigies are also an important component of Chinese folk belief rituals. The Chinese in Malaysia primarily come from Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, and other regions, and their belief systems are diverse and rich. In Penang alone, there are temples dedicated to deities and festivals related to ancestor and deity worship, such as Tian Gong Dan (the birthday of Tian Gong) and Zhongyuan Festival. People burn paper effigies to express respect for their ancestors or to seek blessings from the gods. The longest and most significant festival is the Zhongyuan Pudu, also known as the Hungry Ghost Festival or Yulan Festival. It is an important event in the Malaysian Chinese community, lasting throughout the entire seventh month of the lunar calendar.

Compared to China’s Zhong Yuan Festival, the Zhongyuan Pudu in Malaysia differs in terms of its beliefs, rituals, and scale (Wang 2016). China’s Zhong Yuan Festival is typically focused on ancestor worship at the family level, while Malaysia’s Zhongyuan Pudu involves both ancestor worship and the worship of deities, emphasising publicness and community participation (DeBernardi 2004; Choo 2011; Liu 2020). As Wang (2016) pointed out, Malaysia’s Zhongyuan Pudu combines Buddhism’s Yulan Festival, Taoism’s Zhong Yuan Festival, and Confucian traditions of ancestor worship. During the festival, temporary altars are set up in public spaces such as car parks, streets, markets, or temples, with large paper effigies of gods and offering tables to facilitate public participation (Choo 2011). DeBernardi (2004) noted that there is a significant

socio-economic gap within the Chinese society in Malaysia. However, traditional festivals can enhance solidarity and identity across different social classes and maintain vertical social ties. Koh also mentioned that after George Town was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, many locals moved out of the heritage area. This relocation has affected the number of participants and the scale of activities during Zhongyuan Pudu.

For Zhongyuan Pudu, the most significant offering is the paper, Dashi Ye. The Dashi Ye is typically depicted with a blackened face, a large belly, and a small Guanyin statue atop its head. During the festival, temples, communities, streets, and clan associations across Penang burn paper Dashi Ye to pray for peace. Local narratives trace the origins of Dashi Ye rituals in Bukit Mertajam to a plague in the early 20th century (*Guang Ming Daily* 2010), highlighting how paper effigies became embedded in collective memory and community resilience. Although the precise origins of this legend are difficult to trace, the custom has been practised since the mid-20th century and continues to this day. Notably, the Dashi Ye paper effigy burning event at Pek Kong Cheng is recognised as the largest of its kind in Asia. During the Zhongyuan Pudu period, Koh's paper effigy workshop also received orders for Dashi Ye effigies, contributing to this vibrant tradition.

In fact, Koh's shop not only provides paper effigies for Chinese but also accepts orders from other ethnic groups. Since 2021, they have been making paper effigies of the bull-headed, human-bodied deity for a Hindu temple every year, meant to ward off evil and protect against negative influences (Figure 6). Additionally, within Chinese funeral paper effigies, one can also see representations of figures from other ethnic groups. For instance, the figure of a Punjabi guard frequently appears in Chinese paper effigies. Punjabis, also known as Sikhs, are known for their strong physique and loyalty. During British colonial times, they were often recruited as guards or policemen. In the past Straits Settlements, Chinese communities also hired Punjabis to guard their clan associations or residences. Consequently, many Chinese people, after passing away, would have a paper effigy of a Punjabi guard made. Through such figures, paper effigy-making connects ritual imagination with layered histories of interethnic encounter, embedding social memory and everyday coexistence within the material language of craft.



Figure 6 Koh's paper effigy of a Hindu deity, Penang.

Source: Koh (2024).

Negotiating Change: Redefining Ritual Through Contemporary Practice

As the new generation successor, Koh has not adhered to old practices but instead made numerous improvements and innovations in the materials, themes, and designs of paper effigy works. In addition to traditional paper effigies, Koh has created many *zhi hu* works (Figure 7), which can be preserved for a longer time and are not limited in terms of theme and design. Koh frequently mentioned that making paper effigies requires imagination. For this reason, Koh prefers making deity statues, calling them intangible art that relies on human creativity.

Scott (2007, 178) made a similar point when interviewing Hong Kong paper effigy artisans:

... The followers had to learn by themselves, they had to think about the paper pitching to see if there were other ways to make it better. The master could not teach you this talent, not the creation and changes... So, making these kinds of items needs one's creativity.

However, this creativity is often missing in current practitioners. Many workers see paper effigy making as a temporary livelihood, simply imitating their bosses without independent thinking. This lack of autonomy undermines the creativity of paper effigy craftsmanship, and this situation is closely tied to shifts in apprenticeship and changes within the funeral industry. Once a respected craft passed down through long-term apprenticeship, paper effigy-making is now shaped by short-term employment and economic precarity, leading to a decline in both skill transmission and artisanal autonomy. As artisan Loh (2024) mentioned:

... Paper effigy making is complex and time-consuming, from splitting bamboo, making frames, cutting paper, to painting... it takes at least five to six years to become a master.

Furthermore, the funeral industry itself is undergoing change. The most direct impact on paper effigies comes from the “intermediaries” in the funeral industry, the “funeral service companies.” In the past, funeral arrangements were usually handled personally by the deceased’s family, including contacting funeral homes, coffin shops, and paper effigy shops. Funeral service companies, however, can offer a “one-stop service,” with a single phone call from the deceased’s family. As a result, paper effigies have become one part of a “one-stop” funeral service. Xue (2011, 178–179) pointed out that “funeral service companies” are not a modern invention. As early as the Northern Song dynasty, commercial agencies called *Sisi* provided services for organising funerals and other ceremonies. In modern times, there were also *Shiqi* shops that handled wedding and funeral ceremonies. However, compared to earlier funeral service companies, modern ones lack an understanding of and respect for tradition. As Lee (2024) noted,



Figure 7 Koh's paper statue of Ninja Turtle.

Source: Author's collection.

many funeral companies in Malaysia have insufficient knowledge of traditional rituals and tend to “simplify” funeral processes, handling matters in a fast-food style. Koh also mentioned that many funeral service companies, aiming to maximise profits, lower prices for rituals and items, including paper effigies. This not only diminishes respect for the deceased but also undermines the value of paper effigies and craftsmanship.

In sum, Koh’s paper effigy workshop illustrates how cultural identity is shaped through ritual craft as an ongoing practical process. The making of paper mansions, sedan chairs, deity figures, and contemporary themed effigies involves continuous decisions about forms and ritual appropriateness. These decisions draw on inherited conventions while responding to changing expectations from families and intermediaries in the funeral industry. Craft practice here depends on embodied skill, imaginative judgement, and sensitivity to ritual boundaries, all of which guide how tradition is interpreted and extended in everyday work. Through negotiations with clients, religious specialists, and commercial organisers, the workshop participates in redefining the scope and meaning of ritual production in contemporary Penang. Cultural identity takes shape through this ongoing calibration of craft and social relations, sustained through routine labour and practical judgement in a changing urban environment.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION: RETHINKING THE VALUE OF TRADITIONAL ARTISANS

Traditional crafts in George Town, such as rattan weaving and paper effigy-making, function as active sites where cultural identity is continuously shaped and lived. The rattan practice links technical skill with values of durability, repair, and material care, weaving diasporic memory into routine decisions about production and use. The paper effigy workshop draws ritual knowledge and social negotiation into the making of offerings that continue to mediate relationships between families, deities, and communal events. Across these craft worlds, cultural identity emerges through practice and interaction, taking form in the rhythms of work rather than in abstract cultural categories.

Three analytical insights follow from this study:

1. Cultural identity is transmitted through embodied labour that carries values and memories beyond technique. In both cases, knowledge appears through hands-on engagement with materials and through repeated assessments of quality. These assessments shape how traditions are interpreted and extended across generations.
2. Artisans negotiate tradition and innovation, responding creatively to social and market pressures. The transformation of rattan goods into new forms and the evolving repertoire of paper effigies show how craft practices remain responsive to shifting markets and ritual expectations. Across the two cases, processes of combination and adaptation take different forms in commercial craft and ritual production, indicating how cultural hybridity unfolds through distinct regimes of everyday practice.
3. The sustaining of heritage depends on social relations embedded in everyday work. Interactions with customers, ritual specialists, intermediaries, and neighbours form part of the process through which craft practices gain meaning and authority in the city.

Taken together, these findings clarify the role of artisans as cultural agents whose work participates in the ongoing production of heritage. Heritage here appears as a practical achievement grounded in routine labour, material judgement, and social negotiation. This perspective aligns with practice-oriented approaches to culture and with scholarship that

emphasises heritage as a lived and contested process shaped by everyday actors. It also brings attention to forms of moral labour involved in decisions about repair, reuse, ritual propriety, and craft quality, decisions that rarely enter official heritage frameworks yet remain central to the endurance of craft worlds. In this sense, the analysis gives empirical substance to process-oriented views of cultural identity by showing how positioning takes shape through everyday judgements about materials, form, and quality in craft work.

The cases from George Town further suggest that cultural continuity in heritage cities depends on the conditions that allow such practices to remain viable. Shophouses function as sites where work, family life, and social interaction intersect, and where skills and values circulate across generations. Changes in rental regimes, urban redevelopment, and the restructuring of craft-related industries alter these conditions and reshape the possibilities for everyday practice. Attention to these dynamics helps situate heritage within the material and social infrastructures that sustain it. By foregrounding craft-centred ethnography, this study contributes to discussions of cultural identity, living heritage, and urban change. It shows how identity takes shape through practical engagement with materials, rituals, and social relations, and how heritage persists through ongoing adjustment in everyday work. An approach centred on practice and process makes it possible to recognise the cultural significance of non-elite actors whose labour continues to shape the texture of heritage cities such as George Town.

NOTES

1. Nezha, a deity in Chinese folk belief, embodies both a youthful image and the characteristics of a warrior god. He symbolises courage and justice.
2. Da Bo Ye is a ghost messenger in Chinese folk belief, responsible for guiding souls and maintaining afterlife order. He symbolises the reward of good and punishment of evil.
3. *Xia Nanyang* refers to the historical migration of Chinese to Southeast Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contemporary scholarship often avoids this term due to its implicit China-centric perspective, favouring alternatives like “Chinese migration to Southeast Asia,” which offer an inclusive and transnational framing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. We are deeply grateful to all interview participants who generously shared their knowledge and experiences. We also thank the artisans who provided photographs and other research materials for this study. Their contributions were invaluable to this research.

ETHICS OF STUDY

This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee USM (Approval code: USM/JEPeM/PP/24080782). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews.

REFERENCES

- Barber, Andrew. 2009. *Penang Under the East India Company, 1786–1858*. Kuala Lumpur: AB&A.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 2014. *The Consumer Society*. Translated by Chris Liu and Zong Quan. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Blake, C. Fred. 2011. *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824835323.001.0001>
- Chen, J. 2016. *Homeland and Foreign Land: A Study of the Teochew Community in Penang*. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore.
- Choo, Simon. 2011. "Meeting in the Market: The Constitution of Seasonal, Ritual, and Inter-Cultural Time in Malaysia." *Continuum* 25(5): 619–635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2011.597844>
- DeBernardi, Jean. 2004. *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity, and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Deng, Dashun. 2019. "Letters from the Overseas Chinese During the End of the Qing Dynasty: Documentary Evidence of Transoceanic Handicraftsmen's Conflicts and Integration." *Overseas Chinese Studies* (2): 3–26.
- Ellisha Nasruddin, Yeni Rosilawati, Mohammad Reevany Bustami, and Krisna Mulawarman. 2019. "Culture Heritage and Local Community Engagement: Analyses of Kotagede and George Town Heritage Sites." *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 6(5): 825–839.
- Foo, Ruth, and Gengeswari Krishnapillai. 2019. "Preserving the Intangible Living Heritage in the George Town World Heritage Site, Malaysia." *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 14(4): 358–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2018.1549054>
- Gao, Guofan. 1989. *Dunhuang Folklore Studies*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literary and Art Publishing House.
- Geertz, Clifford. 2023. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Translated by Han Li. Nanjing: Yilin Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graburn, Nelson H. H. 1987. "Inuit Art and the Expression of Eskimo Identity." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 17(1): 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02722018709480976>
- Graburn, Nelson H. H. 2004. "Authentic Inuit Art: Creation and Exclusion in the Canadian North." *Journal of Material Culture* 9(2): 141–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183504044369>
- Graburn, Nelson H. H., ed. 1979. *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Guang Ming Daily. 2010. "Guang Ming Unveils the Historical Veil: The Celebration of Zhongyuan in Bukit Mertajam Began with the Great Plague a Century Ago." 14 August.
- Hall, Stuart. 1989. "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference." *Radical America* 23(4): 9–20.
- Hall, Stuart. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford, 222–237. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Hall, Stuart. 2011. "Who Needs 'Identity'?" In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 1–17. London: SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n1>
- Harvey, David C. 2001. "Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7(4): 319–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13581650120105534>
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. 2012. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636>
- Hsu, Francis L. K. 1971. *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Chinese Culture and Personality*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hunter, Dard. 1978. *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Jenkins, Gwynn, and Victor T. King. 2003. "Heritage and Development in a Malaysian City: George Town Under Threat?" *Indonesia and the Malay World* 31(89): 44–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810304441>
- Khoo, Suet Leng, and Lim Yoke Mui. 2019. *Sustainable Management of Built Heritage: George Town World Heritage Site, Penang*. Tanjong Malim: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Koh. 2023. Personal interview by the author. Penang, July 2023.
- Koh. 2024. Personal interview by the author. Penang, September 2024.

- Lee, Eng Kee. 2024. "Disappearing Traditions: A Study of the Funerary Customs of Malaysian Fujianese." In *Collective Essays on Malaysian Chinese Folk Culture*, edited by C. Chen and W. Liao, 335–350. Kajang: New Era University College.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Li, Huawen. 2022. "'Tangshan' and the Emotion of 'Family-Country' of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia." *Nanjing Journal of Social Science* (4): 153–160.
- Liu, S. 2020. "The Orderly Diversity of Traditional Religious Identity of Malaysian Chinese: A Case Study of the Taoist Zhong Yuan Festival in Kuala Lumpur." *The World Religious Cultures* (6): 35–41.
- Liu, Tong. 1997. *Dijing Jingwu Lue*. Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Loh. 2024. Personal interview by the author. Penang, December 2024.
- Lu, Xi. 2006. "A Study of Ancient Tomb Paper Funeral Objects in Turpan." *Western Region Studies* (3): 50–55.
- MooiKwong, Anthony Tee. 2017. "Capacity Building Activities in Sustaining the Intangible Living Culture Among Traditional Artisan Trades at George Town World Heritage Site." *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality* 6: 280. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0269.1000280>
- Nash, June C. 1993. *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Piper, Jacqueline M. 1992. *Bamboo and Rattan: Traditional Uses and Beliefs*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Purcell, Victor. 1967. *The Chinese in Malaya*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Qu Dajun. 2008. *Guangdong Xinyu [New words on Guangdong]*. Vol. 12. Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House.
- Scott, Janet Lee. 2007. *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: The Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789882200524>
- Scott, Janet Lee. 2013. "Traditional Values and Modern Meanings in the Paper Offering Industry of Hong Kong." In *Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis*, edited by Grant Evans and Maria Tam, 223–241. London: Routledge.
- Shan Yuxiang. 2022. *Treatise on the Nanyang Trade*. 2nd ed. Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House.
- Sim Buck Teik. 2014. *Sim Buck Teik: Rattan Weaver*. Oral history interview. Penang Heritage Trust.
- Sim. 2023. Personal interview by the author. George Town, April 2023.
- Sim. 2024a. Personal interview by the author. George Town, August 2024.
- Sim. 2024b. Personal interview by the author. George Town, September 2024.
- Sun, Q. Y. 2018. *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 2008. *Melaka and George Town (Malaysia) Nomination File 1223bis*. Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1223bis.pdf>
- Wang, R. 2016. "Cultural Succession: From 'Ritual Transmission' to 'Ritualized Transmission'." *World Ethno-National Studies* (3): 94–103.
- Xiu Ouyang and Qi Song, comps. 1975. *Xin Tang Shu (New Book of Tang): Geographical Treatises*. Vol. 33. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Xu Mingyu. 2023. *A Study of Stuart Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity*. Beijing: Jiuzhou Publishing House.
- Xu Niao. 2025. "Practicing Space Through Rituals: Everyday Interaction of Small-Scale Traders in George Town." *Space and Culture*, online first, 11 November. <https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312251386717>
- Xue Li Yong. 2011. *Funeral Customs*. Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Press.
- Zhang Xiaoyan. 2018. "An Analysis of the Evolutionary Vein of Paper Effigy in Chinese Religious Culture." *Folklore Research* (2): 80–88.
- Zhang Xu. 2017. "Exploring Religious Art Symbols and Ritual Functions in Ceremonies: Taking Paper Tying in the Meizhou Fragrant Flower Ceremony as an Example." *Studies in World Religions* (6): 126–135.