

# Exhibition sheds light on architectural influence between Fujian, S'pore

Venessa Lee

A new exhibition on Hokkien architecture shows the impact that immigrants from southern Fujian had here after they began pouring in during the 19th century and, in turn, the influence Singapore eventually had on their home province in China.

One of these Hokkien immigrants was Mr Lim Loh, whose 11th son was war hero Lim Bo Seng.

Mr Lim Loh was a successful building contractor who built several well-known buildings here, including Goodwood Park Hotel, Victoria Memorial Hall, Old Parliament House and Hong San See Temple.

Photographs of his 99-room house in Nan'an in Fujian province, where Mr Lim Bo Seng was born, are part of the exhibition titled Hokkien Architecture: From Thian Hock Keng To Lim Loh House, which opened last Saturday.

While Thian Hock Keng temple – Singapore's oldest Hokkien temple, completed in 1842 – in Telok Ayer Street clearly shows Fujian influence, the exhibition also demonstrates “how our culture influenced southern Fujian province through the immigrants and Hokkien pioneers”, said Dr Chen Yu, curator of the exhibition and an adjunct assistant professor at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) architecture department.

The exhibition also commemorates the 75th death anniversary this year of Mr Lim Bo Seng, whose anti-Japanese activities during World War II led to his capture and death in Japanese custody in 1944.

The exhibition is organised by the NUS architecture department, which has been sending its students on field trips to southern Fujian in recent years.

Dr Chen said the exhibition also



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aimed to encourage “confidence in Singapore Chinese culture among the younger generation, which is an issue clan associations worry about”.

She pointed out typical Fujian architectural features at Thian Hock Keng temple, such as the upward-tilting “swallow-tailed ridges” on its roof and timber support structures flanked by representations of Chinese women.

Singapore's architectural influence is visible in Mr Lim Loh's house in China, she said.

The same pattern in Thian Hock Keng temple's British-made tiles can be found in the house in his home town of Houpu in Nan'an.

The house was built around the same time as a massive renovation at the temple in 1906, when these decorative tiles were installed.

Curved doorway arches, similar to those in some colonial buildings here, can also be seen in Mr Lim Loh's house. A Sikh figure with a turban adorns an ornamental timber structure there.

The exhibition runs until Nov 30 at 137 Telok Ayer Street, opposite Thian Hock Keng temple. It also features other Hokkien pioneers, such as calligrapher and poet Pan Shou and renowned philanthropist Tan Kah Kee. It is supported by partners including the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

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