Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City
& Chinese Vernacular Shrines in Singapore
Screening & Discussion

4 Nov 2025, 4-6pm
Research Division
Seminar Room





Featuring
Prof Khun Eng Kuah (NUS Chinese Studies),
A/P Francis Lim Khek Gee (NTU Sociology),
& Lynn Wong (Bridging Generations)

NUS National University of Singapore
GL LOUIS RELIGIOUS PLURALISM RESEARCH CLUSTER
Singapore Research Nexus
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

SINGAPORE RESEARCH NEXUS & GL LOUIS RELIGIOUS PLURALISM RESEARCH CLUSTER

Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City and *Chinese Vernacular Shrines in Singapore*

Screening and Panel Discussion of Film and Book

Tuesday, 4 November 2025, 4:00 to 6:00 pm

NUS FASS Research Division Seminar Room (Shaw Foundation Bldg., Blk AS7, Level 6, Room 42)

4:00 pm to 4:10 pm	Registration
4:10 pm to 4:15 pm	Opening Remarks by Associate Professor Jack Meng-Tat CHIA (NUS History & FASS Assistant Dean of Research)
4:15 pm to 4:45 pm	Screening of *Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City*
4:45 pm to 5:25 pm	Discussion of *Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City* and *Chinese Vernacular Shrines in Singapore* with Professor KUAH Khun Eng (NUS Chinese Studies), Associate Professor Francis LIM Khek Gee (Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NTU), and Lynn WONG (Bridging Generations)
5:25 pm to 6:00 pm	Refreshments & Networking with Participants

ABOUT THE FILM

Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City

In a secularised, densely populated, and rapidly evolving global city, how do ordinary people create sacred spaces in unexpected places?

Gods on Earth: Everyday Sacred in a Global City takes you on a journey into the Chinese vernacular shrine culture in Singapore. The small, unformalised shrines, often found beside big trees and at roadsides, nestle in the nooks and crannies of public spaces. Ubiquitous but often ignored by passers-by, these humble sites hold immense social and cultural significance.

Hear the stories from devotees, witness the fascinating rituals, and gain insights into the multi-ethnic communities that sustain these shrines. Meet Chinese and Hindu deities, Datuks, Erawan, Nang Kwak, animal spirits, and other sacred entities that showcase the rich spiritualism practised daily. These shrines also play a pivotal role in cementing local community bonds in a dynamic urban setting.

This documentary is narrated by religion scholars, Francis Lim and Kuah Khun Eng, and directed by Lynn Wong.

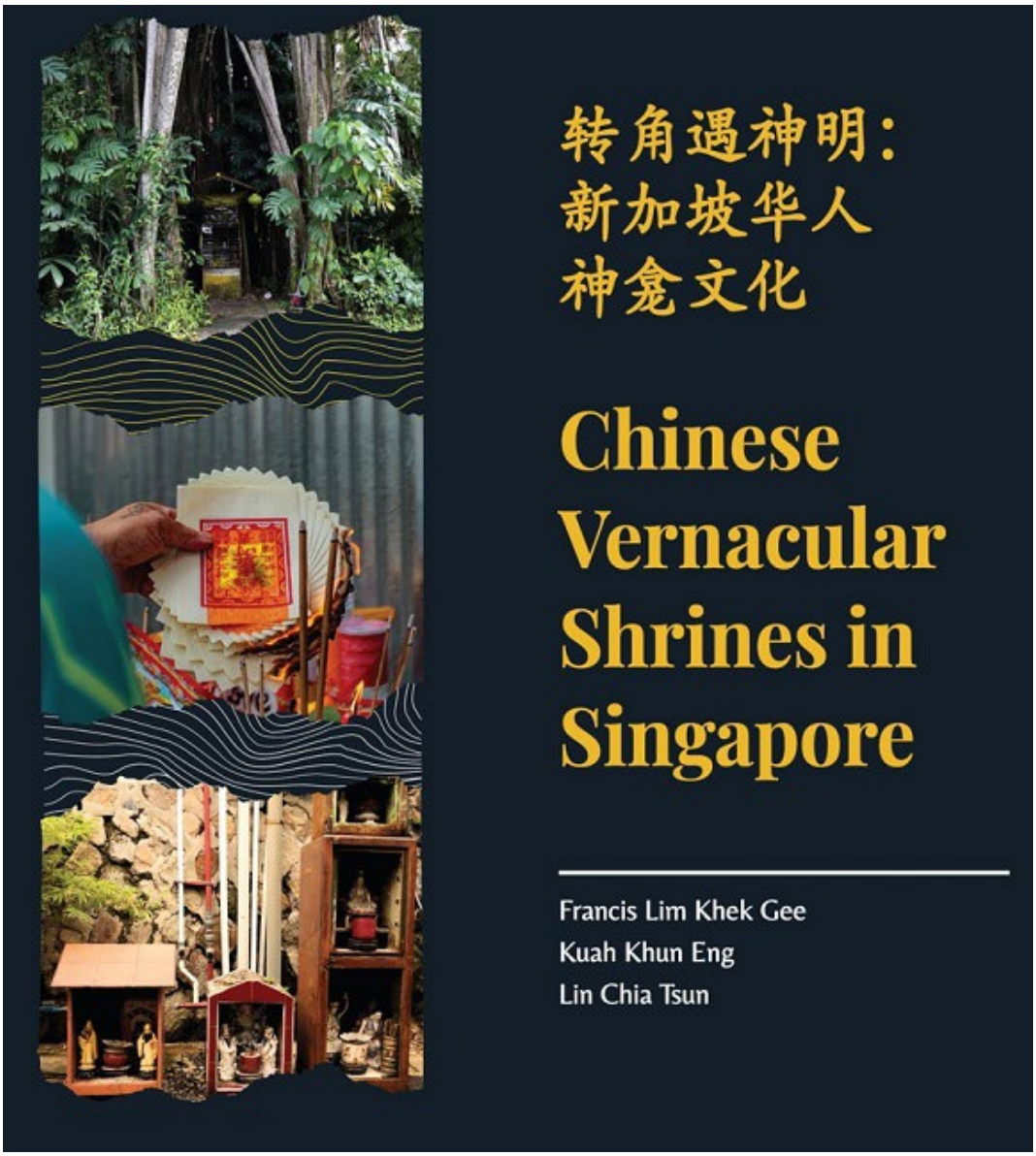


ABOUT THE BOOK

Chinese Vernacular Shrines in Singapore

Embark on a captivating cultural journey of discovery into the enchanting realm of Chinese vernacular shrine culture in Singapore. Vernacular shrines are small, unformalised shrines located next to trees, in hawker centres and bus interchanges, at the roadsides, and other public spaces. They may appear humble but hold immense social and cultural significance.

Through interviews, fieldwork data, and striking photographs, this book explores the history, evolution, and a panoply of deities, traditions, peoples, and communities associated with these shrines. Prepare to be mesmerised by the blending of belief systems and multicultural practices, where popular Chinese gods and goddesses sit alongside Hindu deities, Datuk Gong, and Nang Kwak. These shrines not only manifest a pluralistic character but also function as social spaces for forging inter-ethnic and community identities on a micro-societal level. Discover the captivating stories, myths, and rituals that make these shrines an integral part of Singapore's cultural heritage.



PANELLISTS AND CHAIR

KUAH Khun Eng

NUS Department of Chinese Studies



Kuah, Khun Eng is presently adjunct professor at the Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore. Her research specializations include (1) Chinese Diaspora-China Connections (hometown connections, migration and identity, Chinese entrepreneurship, heritage and traditional Chinese medicine and herbal tea; and (2) Reformist Buddhism, Buddhist compassion and philanthropy in East and Southeast and Asia. Her latest books are *Ancestor Worship in the Diaspora Chinese and China Universes: The Making of a Collaborative Cultural Basin* (Routledge, 2024*); The Social Production of Buddhist Compassion in Chinese Society* (Routledge, 2022) and *Rebuilding the Ancestral Village: Singaporeans in China* (Routledge, 2022, 3rd imprint); *Vernacular Chinese Shrines in Singapore.* 2023. Singapore: Pagesetters. (co-authored); *Covid-19 Responses of Local Communities around the World: Exploring Trust in the Context of Risk and Fear* (co-edited., Routledge 2023).

Francis LIM Khek Gee

Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NTU



Francis Lim Khek Gee is associate professor of sociology at the Nanyang Technological University. He holds research interests in religion, technology and society in various Asian societies. He is the author and co-editor of 7 books. His peer-reviewed studies have been published in journals such as Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Journal of Contemporary Religion, Religions, Global Media and China, and Asian Studies Review. He was a recipient of the Emslie Horniman Scholarship from the Royal Anthropological Institute. He research has been supported by the Radcliffe Brown Dissertation Grant, the University of London Fieldwork Grant, the Asia Research Institute, the Singapore Ministry of Education, Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre. He earned his Ph.D. from SOAS, University of London.

Lynn WONG

Bridging Generations



Lynn is on a mission to uncover, document, and revive disappearing foods, festivals, spaces, and communities in Singapore.

Besides driving academic research projects on different aspects of the Chinese diaspora - clan associations, historical temples, everyday customs - Lynn has helped numerous organisations amplify the impact of their rich

histories by curating memorable exhibitions, organising festivals that engage intergenerations, as well as providing capacity-building trainings.

Well recognised for her heritage efforts, she also empowers individuals to discover and leverage their origin story for personal and professional success.

Jack Meng-Tat CHIA

NUS Department of History & FASS Assistant Dean of Research



Jack Meng-Tat Chia is the Foo Hai Associate Professor in Buddhist Studies at the National University of Singapore, where he also serves as Assistant Dean of Research at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. He is a historian of religion specializing in Buddhism and Chinese religions in Southeast Asia. He is the author of *Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity Across the South China Sea* (Oxford, 2020), which received the 2021 EuroSEAS Humanities Book Prize, and *Dongnanya fayin: Xinjiapo fojiao yanjiu lunji* 東南亞法音：新加坡佛教研究論集 [Southeast Asia's Dharma: Essays on Buddhism in Singapore] (Boyang, 2025). His edited volume, *Figures of Buddhist Diplomacy in Modern Asia* (Bloomsbury, 2026), supported by the 2020 Social Science and Humanities Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council, Singapore, traces twenty-two monastic, lay, and political figures engaged in Buddhist diplomacy from the early twentieth century to the present. Chia is the founding chair of the Buddhist Studies Group and the convenor of the GL Louis Religious Pluralism Research Cluster at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS.