

GES1005/SSA1208

Temple Visit Report



Bao Gong Temple 包公庙

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1. Introduction

Our group was assigned to visit Bao Gong Temple, which is part of the Jalan Kayu Joint Temple located at 70 Sengkang West Avenue. Despite the small scale, it is regarded as a holy place by numerous worshippers and it is the only temple named after Bao Gong among all the Singapore temples consecrating him. The Bao Gong Temple Council have dedicated considerable efforts to public welfare which attracted more devotees. They even supervised a publication of *The Book for the Treasures of Singapore Bao Gong Temple* (《新加坡包公庙典藏书》) in 2015 to further spread Bao Gong culture and to document the history of the temple. A free PDF version can be found on the temple website <https://www.singaporebaogongtemple.com>.

We would like to express our gratitude here to the Chief of general affairs, Master Chen Yucheng (H/P: 82288478) for his generous help throughout our visit.

2. The Folk Belief in Bao Gong

The belief of Bao Gong was derived from the folklores of Bao Zheng (999-1062). Born in Hefei, Bao Zheng started rendering government service in 1037 and gained continuous promotion from the then highest ruler, Emperor Renzong of Song in the next 26 years. Among all his political achievements, he was most well-known for the impartial adjudication when he served as the mayor of Kaifeng (the capital of Northern Song). Remediating corruption and impeaching guilty nobles, Bao Zheng always upheld the interests of the masses, was loyal to the nation and disciplined himself. He was generally acknowledged to be an ideal official and was respected by many.

The legends of Bao Gong's judgments were very popular in Chinese fictions and operas, rooting the image of a black face with a bright crescent on the forehead in many people's minds. Gradually, the folk belief for Bao Gong merged into the Yama faith of Taoism and he eventually became a native Chinese God. It is said that he imposes sentences for live cases during the day and turns via the crescent to chasten the sinners in the hell at night (日审阳, 夜审阴). The deification of Bao Gong denotes common people's desire for justice and has spread across nation boundaries to wherever Chinese people go.

3. The History of Bao Gong Temple

The history of Bao Gong Temple dates back to the 1960s, when a villager covertly shipped a small gold-plated Bao Gong statue from China to Singapore and placed it in an attap house in a kampong village in Pasir Panjang. These fishermen villagers often prayed to Bao Gong before setting out to the sea and Bao Gong provided his blessings to them. To express their gratitude to his blessings, the fishermen carried out performances and processions on Bao Gong's birthday. In the early 1970s, the Bao Gong statue yielded to the local development and was shifted to a temporary shelter in the Kim

San Leng Rubber Forest near Ang Mo Kio where the villagers honoured him. That was when Xuan Tian Shang Di came to his assistance. In the 1980s, the statues were once again forced to move and then relocated into a HDB flat at Block 13, Lorong 7, Toa Payoh for 30 years. It was not open for regular visiting and worshippers had to call before they can visit the temple. Although the temple had flourished with more secondary gods joining in and more worshippers attending the religious activities, the progress was held back owing to the temple's irregular location.

For the future of Bao Gong temple, a Temple Council was established in 2005 and undertook the search for a formal settlement. Finally, under the support of the government and donors, the temple is currently located at 70 Seng Kang West Avenue. It constitutes the Jalan Kayu joint temple together with Leong Nam Temple and Ubin Thai Buddhist Temple and shares the site with Chong Yee Temple. On 22nd May, 2011, Bao Gong Temple greeted the gods and was officially opened.

The present Bao Gong Temple can be divided into two sections: the ground floor and the basement. The ground floor consists of a vestibule for normal rituals, a main hall enshrining the gods' statues and a back hall of commemoration (“怀思堂”) offering centralized accommodation for the memorial tablets of people's ancestors. The basement of the ten Yamas' Courts was built according to the divine portraits which Master Chen received from a Putian monk. In the Taoism belief, the ten Yama Kings will judge and punish sinners according to their misdeeds committed during his life. Apart from the one at Haw Par Villa, this basement is the only exhibit of the ten Yamas' courts in Singapore. The aim of constructing this basement is to advocate for the traditional Chinese value of filial piety, which was one of the values that Bao Gong held. He was renowned as a filial son by postponing his official career for ten years because his parents were too old to move with him. Through the ten Yamas' court, visitors will understand that any form of disrespect to parents is unacceptable and they may have to repay their sins in the future. Master Chen also told us that they are currently raising funds to carve pictures of the 24 stories of filial piety onto the other walls of the basement which can further bring the message of filial piety across to the visitors.

4. The Gods Worshipped in Bao Gong Temple

4.1 The Main God

Undoubtedly, the main god of the temple is Bao Gong. He is mainly in charge of issues within the Yang world during the day and the Yin world at night. The Temple Council has commissioned a craftsman in Huian to wood-carve a new statue of 2.1 metres tall for him. His official uniform is in vermilion since he was promoted to the second highest ranking position (二品官) in the heavenly court a thousand year after his birth. The sword (尚方宝剑) he holds symbolizes his prerogative to act first and report later (先斩后奏). Furthermore, the layout of the main shrine imitates a typical scene in literary works, where Bao Gong sits majestically in the middle, sided by the cavalier Zhan Zhao, the

counsellor Gongsun Ce and the four bodyguards Wang Chao, Ma Han, Zhang Long and Zhao Hu. Bao Gong's unique instruments of execution—the three bronze guillotines (Figure 5)—are also on display under the main shrine: the dragon head one for royal personages, the tiger for government officials and the dog for commoners.

The second main god is Xuan Tian Shang Di. He is a high ranking god in charge of the North in Taoism, controlling issues related to the water and military affairs. He was the first god to come to Bao Gong's aid in the temple, and his small statue (Figure 4) is now positioned in front of Bao Gong on the main shrine.

4.2 The Secondary Gods

The secondary gods worshipped in Bao Gong Temple are introduced below:

- Guan Yin (Figure 11): Guan Yin is a massively worshipped Bodhisattva who shows universal mercy to sentient beings and commits herself in rescuing people from miseries. Bao Gong Temple has set up an independent shrine for her on the right side of the main shrine.
- Sixty Tai Sui Gods (Figure 7): Praying to Tai Sui is to get rid of bad luck when one's zodiac clashes with the corresponding Tai Sui on duty in a particular year (犯太岁). The statues of Tai Sui are placed on the left side of the main hall.
- Hu Ye: Hu Ye is said to be the gods' mount so it has been endowed with the function of blessing and protection. People worshipping Hu Ye believe that the process is similar to "hitting the villains" (打小人) and helps to remove bad luck. Bao Gong Temple has altars for him both in the vestibule (Figure 9) and under the left shrine in the main hall (Figure 8).
- Da, Er Ye Bo: Derived from the legend of the two sergeants: the white-faced, long-tongued Da Ye Bo, Xie Bi'an (谢必安), and the black-faced, stout Er Ye Bo, Fan Wujiu (范无救). They are servants to the Yama Kings and have particular power over issues within Hell, different types of diseases and luck concerning one's fortune. Bao Gong Temple has altars for them both on the left side of the main hall (Figure 6) and in the basement (Figure 15). According to Master Chen, Da Er Ye Bo are Bao Gong's subordinates and they had been helping with chasing away supernatural spirits from the temple in the past.
- Confucius (Figure 12): Confucius was the founder of Confucianism and deified as the Culmination of the Greatest Sage and Teacher (大成至圣先师). Parents will bring their children to pray to Confucius for good grades and a bright future.
- Ten Yama Kings (Figure 13-19): Taoism borrowed the concept of "Yama" from Hinduism and Buddhism and transformed it into the belief of ten Yama Kings: King Qin Guang, King Chu Jiang, King Song Di, King Wu Guan, King Yan Luo, King Bian Cheng, King Tai Shan, King Du Shi, King Ping Deng, King Zhuan Lun. Dead man will have to go through the ten courts to

receive adjudication, suffer the punishments he deserves and finally be born again through one of the six paths of the Reincarnation based on his previous deeds.

Bao Gong is known as King Yan Luo in the fifth court. Many believe that the crescent on his forehead enabled him to travel between both the yin and yang world. He is the leader of the ten Yama kings and was supposed to be in the first court. Due to his empathetic nature, he often took pity on those who died from injustice, and allowed them to return to the living world to clear their name. He was thus “demoted” to the fifth court. There is a separate altar (Figure 15) for King Yan Luo in the basement of Bao Gong Temple whereby visitors can pray to him. This is also where the procession of Da Er Ye Bo is usually conducted.

5. Activities conducted by Bao Gong Temple

The Temple Council has placed great emphasis on conducting activities to attract worshippers. This includes processions on Bao Gong’s birthday (the 10th October in the lunar calendar), possession of Da, Er Ye Bo every Wednesday night and support services from Xuan Tian Shang Di on the 1st and 15th of every lunar month. Every year in the 6th lunar month (农历六月), they will organize a temple fair (庙会). There will be Ge Tai (包公之夜), possessions, divination on the Sedan chairs as well as Taoism rituals (Figure 23) that can usually draw a large crowd (Figure 20).

Bao Gong Temple has also maintained connections with many related associations around the world. In September 2014, a group of one hundred people visited the Bao Long Tang in Tangkak, Malaysia (Figure 21) upon invitation and joined in the celebrations. The same year in November, the Temple Council sent out a pilgrimage group of thirty people on an exchange programme to Kaifeng and Hefei in China and they visited Bao Gong Ci, the Kaifeng Ya Men and Bao Gong’s cemetery (Figure 20). They even consulted the local experts to learn more about Bao Gong’s culture and history. They are currently planning a grand gathering (包公下南洋) in November 2018 to welcome the holy statues of Bao Gong from China to Singapore.

Apart from these activities, the Temple Council has also made contributions back to the society. They organized banquets during Chinese New Year that cater to the elderly and distributed red packets to them (Figure 25). There are also health-preservation lessons conducted on the third floor every Tuesday night.

6. Special Artifacts in Bao Gong Temple

- The Plaque (the Front Page): The plaque with four golden characters “正大光明” replicates the one in Kaifeng’s Bao Gong Ci. It can be easily noticed from afar hanging beneath the second story eaves.

- The Temple Gate (Figure 29): The Temple Council found two 3-meter tall timber logs in Huian for the temple gate. The logs were sawed in half and a door god was carved onto each plank—two military generals (Qin Qiong and Yuchi Gong) on the main gate and two civil officials (Di Renjie and his son) on the side gates. Master Chen had a difficult time looking for the timber of the right size. Fortunately, the dealers managed to find one just when he was about to give up.
- The Bell and the Drum (Figure 26-27): There is a large bell hanging on the right side of the gate and a large drum on the left. This represents the custom of matin bells and vesper drums (晨钟暮鼓) in temples.
- The Dragon Sink (Figure 28): The Dragon Sink in the vestibule was designed in concert with the nearby altar for Hu Ye to achieve the apotropaic pattern of “dragon on the left and tiger on the right” (左青龙, 右白虎). People can wash away bad luck by using this sink (青龙洗霉运).
- Couplets: Most couplets in the temple are complimenting Bao Gong.

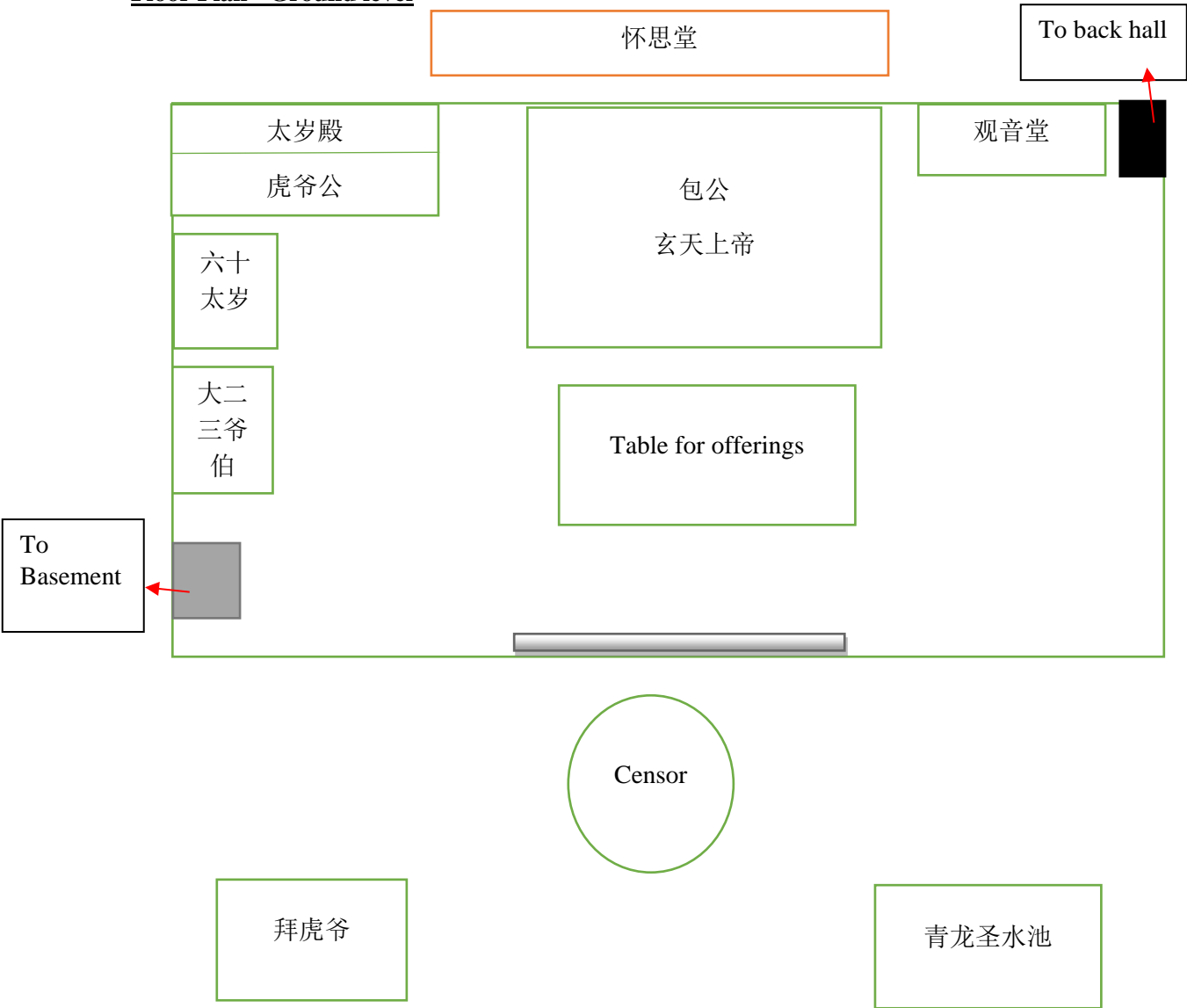
7. Group Reflection

The Temple Council did a great job for Bao Gong Temple, thriving from a small unknown temple to one that many Singaporeans know about. They did not resist shouldering their social responsibilities and acknowledged the significance of conducting regular activities, keeping records of Bao Gong Temple and spreading culture. A website was created recently to keep up with digital advancements as well as to reach out to a larger audience. However, obeying Bao Gong’s spirit of honesty, the Temple Council refuse to raise money through channels of injustice, hence the lack of funds is a significant problem to them as they solely rely on donations. The scales of their activities are also restricted due to the inevitable complaint of noise from vicinal residents. Moreover, due to the lack of young successors and the eventual expiration of the 30 years land lease, the temple might not be able to maintain a positive future development. In conclusion, the future of Bao Gong Temple remains uncertain unless they acquire more financial support and help from younger generations to pass on the legacy.

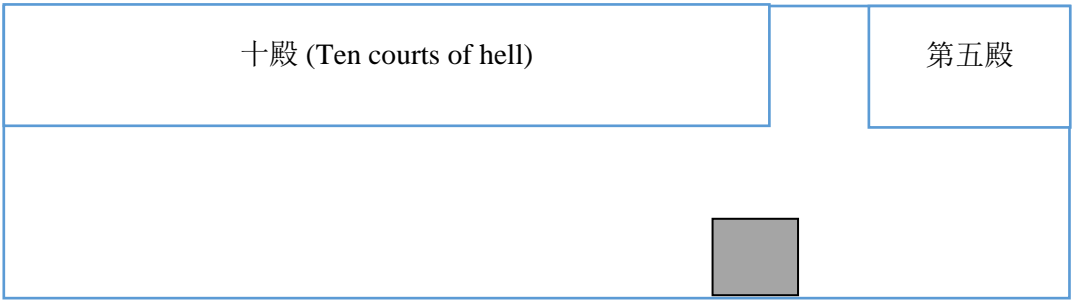
We encountered some difficulties and had to make two trips to the temple as Master Chen was not around during the first trip. Fortunately, Master Chen was really helpful and answered all our queries. The trips were very meaningful for us as we had never pay attention to this aspect of Singapore and through this project we gained more awareness on the cultural aspect of Chinese Singaporeans. We learned a lot from Master Chen and hope that the temple will continue to flourish with the help of successors so that the efforts by the Temple Council will not go to waste.

Appendix

Floor Plan - Ground level



Floor Plan - Basement



风调雨顺:
Wind and
rain come
timely.

有求必应:
All requests
will be
granted.



Figure 1: Main Entrance of Jalan Kayu Joint Temple

出入平安:
Safe trip
wherever
you go.

一片冰心清正宇: The
heart of jade has cleaned
up the universe.
千秋铁面振廉心: The
face without mercy has
inspired probity for a
thousand years.

正气塞乾坤事属公私
须有别: The
righteousness is
brimming the world;
public and private
affairs should be dealt
with differently.
丹心昭日月人归善恶
自心明: The Sun and
the Moon testify the
sincerity; people have
the self- awareness
whether they are good
or evil.



Figure 2: Outside View of Bao Gong Temple

功臣社稷物华民廉:
The meritorious
officials lead the
country to abundance in
products and upright
people.
政顺天心邦宁国固:
The policies adhere to
the gods' ideas, making
the nation peaceful and
stable.

吏治分明天地肃:
The governance by
officials is
reasonable and the
universe gets
cleansed.
官箴公允右今钦:
The code of
conduct for
officials is fair and
admired by people
today.



Figure 3: Main Hall

公心著在竹帛千秋共赤胆: The unselfishness was recorded in the
archive and people in a thousand years have all admired the same loyalty
正气披之管弦百皆呼青天: The righteousness was widely spread and
numerous commoners have called for the just officials.



Main Gods



**First Main God:
Bao Gong**

**Second main god:
Xuan Tian Shang Di**

Figure 4: Main Gods (Back: Bao Gong; Front: Xuan Tian Shang Di)



Figure 5: Bao Gong's Instrument of execution

Secondary Gods



Figure 6: Da Er Ye Bo



Figure 7: Sixty Tai Sui



Figure 8: Tiger God in the main hall



Figure 9: Tiger God outside of main hall



Figure 10: Tai Sui Dian



Figure 11: Guan Yin Tang



Figure 12: Confucius



Figure 13: Ten Yama courts

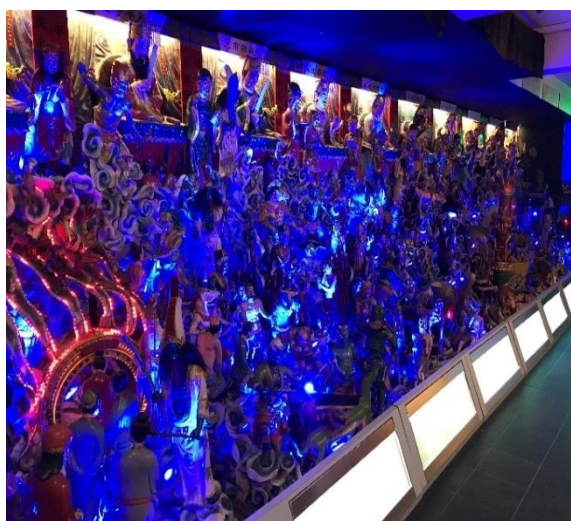


Figure 14: Overview of the 10 courts



Figure 15: Separate altar for Bao Gong in the basement



Figure 16: The First Court

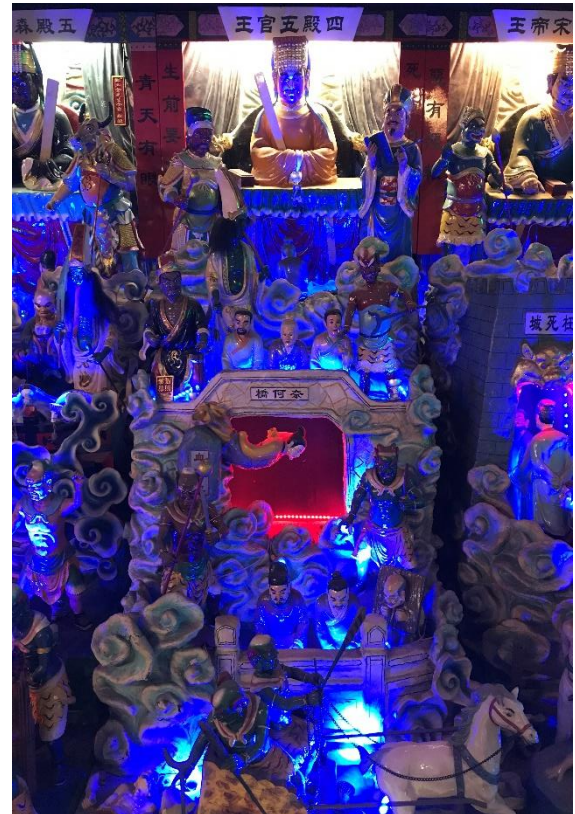


Figure 17: The Fourth Court



Figure 18: The Fifth Court

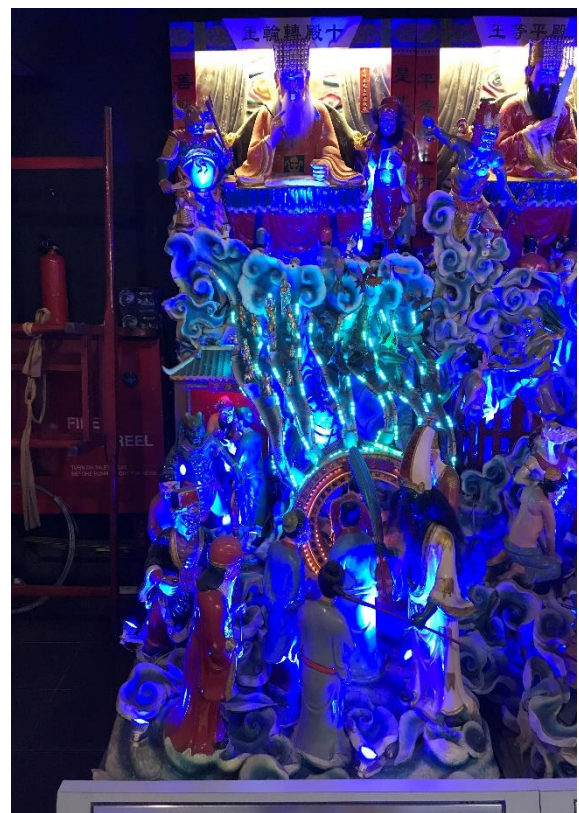


Figure 19: The Tenth Court

Connections with other temples



Figure 20: Exchange Program to China



Figure 21: Group Photo in Tangkak Malaysia

Events



Figure 22: Crowds during celebration



Figure 23: Taoism rituals during temple fair



Figure 24: Procession



Figure 25: Volunteer distributing red packet during Chinese New Year Catering

Special Artefacts



Figure 26: Bell



Figure 27: Drum



Figure 28: The Dragon Sink



Figure 29: Door Gate carved using timber

Photo Credit: Figure 12,20-25,29

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