

Historic Building Appraisal
Man Fat Nunnery
No. 99 Ngau Chi Wan Village, Kowloon

Man Fat Nunnery (萬佛堂) is one of the earliest surviving Taoist nunneries in Ngau Chi Wan (牛池灣). It was constructed in 1912-1913. Together with other Taoists, a female Taoist priest named Lai Yu-ching (黎玉清道長) bought land in the village to build the nunnery with a vegetable garden for their own use. Madam Lai came from Xijiao in Guangdong province (廣東省西樵) and had worked as a domestic servant in Hong Kong. *Historical Interest*

Man Fat Nunnery is a nunnery of Xin Tian Dao (先天道, one of the branches of Taoism). The nunnery is dedicated to deities including Kwun Yum (觀音), Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), Chai Tin Tai Shing (Monkey King, 齊天大聖), *Sanskrit* (Sakyamuni, 佛祖), Lu Zu (呂祖) and Kwan Tai (關帝). There was a vegetable garden within the area of the nunnery. It was used by the nuns for growing vegetables and other produce for their own consumption; however, it is abandoned nowadays.

Man Fat Nunnery had a number of social services for the deceased. For example, it once held mass with other Taoist organisations for the victims of the Race Course Fire (馬場大火) at Happy Valley, which broke out on 26 February 1918 and resulted in the death of more than six hundred people. The Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院, renamed Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (東華三院) in 1931) then offered a tablet of appreciation to the nunnery for their kindness in this accident. This tablet, in fact, is still kept in the nunnery. Inscribed with four Chinese characters “誠格幽冥” (Sincerity and Hades), the tablet is placed above the entrance.

Man Fat Nunnery also took part in another similar function in 1920 when it joined a ceremony for Fangbian Hospital to the west of Guangzhou (廣州城西方便醫院). The Hospital then offered a wooden tablet to the nunnery in appreciation of its participation. This tablet was originally hung in the centre of the main hall. However, as there was an acute shortage of wood after the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), this tablet was used as a pair of doors of the nunnery after the Chinese inscriptions were scrapped by the carpenter.

During the Japanese Occupation, the nuns were driven away by the Japanese, and they found a temporary shelter in a tenement house at No. 1075 Canton Road, Mong Kok. In around 1957, a group of philanthropists raised funds to establish a

Xin Tian Dao Elderly Home (先天道安老院) in Kowloon to accommodate some members of Man Fat Nunnery. A group photo of the executive officers (理監事) of the elderly home, taken in the presence of Governor Sir David Trench (港督戴麟趾爵士), is still hung on the wall of the nunnery.

The nunnery is a Chinese style building having two storeys of one hall and three bays. A pitched roof stone entrance gate house is at the boundary wall of the compound with the name of the nunnery above its gate. The nunnery building is probably constructed of bricks, stone and cement with its walls to support its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. The walls have been plastered and painted white. The three-bay front elevation is recessed with the entrance in the middle bay. A balcony is on the upper floor of each of the flanking bays with green glazed ceramic vase-shaped balusters. The name of the nunnery is engraved in the granite lintel above the doorframe flanked by a pair of couplets. Above the doorway are three windows, the middle one being in circular shape.

***Architectural
Merit***

The door of the southern bay is made of timber, the right door leaf is inscribed with “萬年有道” (literally meaning moral order exists for ten thousand years) and the left door leaf is inscribed with “佛法無邊” (the power of Buddha is limitless). They were originally a pair of wooden tablets placed on both sides of the door, but re-used as door leaves shortly after the Japanese Occupation.

It is a nunnery related to the Race Course Fire in 1918 and has some built heritage value. The building was renovated in 1946 and 1956. It is not in good condition due to lack of proper upkeep or maintenance.

***Rarity, Built
Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

Man Fat Nunnery is one of the early-established nunnery in Hong Kong and one of the oldest surviving religious building in Ngau Chi Wan. It was actively involved in social events such as the mass for the racecourse fire and some ceremonies in Guangzhou.

***Social Value,
& Local
Interest***

The nunnery is within walking distance of other historic buildings, including the Villa (別墅), Gate House (門樓) and Dormitory A (宿舍 A) of the St. Joseph's Home for the Aged (聖約瑟安老院, Grade 2), Sam Shan Kwok Wong Temple (三山國王廟, Grade 3), and the Headquarters Building (總部大樓), RAF Officers Mess (職員宿舍連食堂) and Annex Block No. 2 (職員宿舍第二座) of the ex-Royal Air Force Station (Kai Tak) (前皇家空軍基地(啟德), Grade 1).

Group Value