

Historic Building Appraisal
Immaculate Conception Chapel
Tai Long, Sai Kung, New Territories

Immaculate Conception Chapel (聖母無原罪小堂) in the eastern part of Sai Kung (西貢) dates back to about 1867 when missionaries had been preaching in Tai Long Tsuen (大浪村) where a majority of the villagers were converted to Catholicism, making it one of the most successful areas in Catholic preaching in Hong Kong. The capacity of the Chapel is a few hundred and it was one of the greatest ones in Sai Kung in 1879, when over 500 converts took part in the Sunday mass in the Chapel in this climax. The Chapel had a residing priest from 1893 onwards. The missionaries also helped the establishment of the Yuk Ying School in the village.

*Historical
Interest*

During the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), the missionary activities in Sai Kung were interrupted. Immaculate Conception Chapel became one of the army stations. The Japanese troops lived in the Chapel in the last three months of the occupation period. But neither the altar nor the Chapel itself were destroyed. The troops employed the villagers for digging air-raid shelters in the adjoining hills. The Chinese guerrillas lived there for a few days after the Japanese army had departed.

In recent decades the population of the village has drastically declined as the residents moved away in search of employment. In the late 1970s, the front portion of the Chapel was rebuilt, as one of the bays of the Chapel was dismantled due to typhoon damage. Cardinal John B. Wu Cheng-chung (胡振中), the fifth Bishop of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, presided over the Inauguration Ceremony, the Great Mass and the Eucharist Progress on 14 November 1981. Since 1980, the Chapel had been subordinate to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Tai Po (大埔聖母無玷之心堂) which served the Chapel monthly from 1983 to 1987. The Chapel has not functioned since 1988.

The Chapel is built in the style of an Italian or Spanish mission church with a pantiled pitched roof and stuccoed or plastered walls featuring simple arched windows and doors. Internally the roof is supported by arches springing from octagonal columns in **Romanesque** style. The roof timbers are exposed and the walls are plastered and painted. The main feature is the beautifully decorated altar at the end on a raised stepped dais of Canton tiles. The seating area is separated from the entrance area by simple low height balustrades on each side of the aisle featuring green glazed urn-shaped classical balusters. The floor is simply screeded and the usual wooden pews replaced by cheap folding chairs. An unsuitable porch has been erected at one end of the chapel to replace the main entrance bay which collapsed during a typhoon in the late 1970s.

*Architectural
Merit*

This kind of 19th century mission church incorporating Western architectural styles and local rural construction methods is quite rare in Hong Kong. Another similar church can be found in Yim Tin Tsai (鹽田仔), Sai Kung which is called St. Joseph's Church. Although not of traditional Chinese vernacular architectural style it has built heritage value. Apart from the porch, the Chapel appears to have retained much of its authenticity.

**Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

The Chapel shows the importance of Sai Kung as one of the earliest and most important Catholic parishes in Hong Kong. A unique characteristic of Tai Long Tsuen is that almost all of the villagers have been Catholics since the Qing dynasty, and the Chapel is a witness to that part of history. In the past the Catholic priest and mission sisters administered to the spiritual needs of the villagers and also provided medical assistance and ran the village school. The Chapel is now only visited by weekend hikers and indigenous villagers who return at public holidays. Its local interest has therefore faded with the village.

**Social Value
& Local
Interest**

Tai Long Tsuen (大浪村) is one of the few remaining historic villages in Hong Kong with all the traditional architectural and layout preserved intact. Most of the village houses are generally in good condition. All the buildings in the village face east and shares similar architectural features. The style of construction of the Chapel is very similar to a church in the neighbouring Yim Tin Tsai of Sai Kung – Catholic Church (St. Joseph Church).

Group Value

Unless life can return to the village it is unlikely that the Chapel will ever become the centre of community life that it once was, and it is difficult to think of an adaptive re-use in the present circumstances.

**Adaptive
Re-use**