

Man Mo Temple Compound
124-126, 128 and 130 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan

Brief History

Located at Hollywood Road, the Man Mo Temple Compound (文武廟) is a place of significant historical and social values to the Chinese community on Hong Kong Island. The compound now comprises three blocks, namely Man Mo Temple, Lit Shing Kung (列聖宮) and Kung Sor (公所). Man Mo Temple is generally believed to be built in the 27th year of Emperor Daoguang (道光) of the Qing Dynasty (i.e. 1847) by two wealthy and influential leaders of the Chinese community, Lo Ah-guo (盧亞貴) and Tam Ah-choy (譚亞財). The Lit Shing Kung was built nearly the same time as Man Mo Temple. The Kung Sor was added to the Temple in the first year of Emperor Tongzhi (同治) (i.e. 1862) for resolving matters related to the Chinese community in the area. Two alleys, namely Po Yuet (步月) and Lei Chong (履中) as inscribed on the entrance gateway, are separating the three blocks. There used to be a study hall attached to the right of the Man Mo Temple, which had been demolished and rebuilt into a primary school.

2. Man Mo Temple was built for the worship of Man Cheong (文昌) [God of Literature] and Mo Ti (武帝) [God of Martial Arts]. Pau Kung (包公) [God of Justice] and Shing Wong (城隍) [City God] are worshipped at the side bays. Two sedan chairs made in 1862 and 1885 respectively are displayed in the front hall, which were used for carrying the statues of Man Cheong and Mo Ti to participate in parades in the past. Adjacent to the Man Mo Temple, Lit Shing Kung was built for the worship of all heavenly gods including Kwun Yum (觀音), Lu Tso (呂祖) etc.

3. The Kung Sor used to be a place to settle community matters. The function of the Kung Sor is reflected on the couplet of the entrance door frame, which reads “公爾忘私入斯門貴無偏袒·所欲與聚到此地切莫糊塗” (exhorting those who entered to abandon their selfish interests and prejudices, and to be upright, just and clear-headed). It explained that judicial decisions of the community were made in Kung Sor¹. By 1857, the four districts, namely Sai Ying Pun, Tai Ping Shan, Sheung Wan and Central, had set up a Yulan Procession Committee (四環盂蘭公所) in the Kung Sor, whose duty was to make preparation for the Yulan Festival (i.e. Hungry Ghost Festival). The practice in Kung Sor reflected the desire of the Chinese community to take care of their own affairs beyond the interference of the colonial government.

4. Since the establishment of Man Mo Temple, a Temple Committee was formed for the management of the Temple. In 1850, the Temple was renovated and enlarged with the financial support from various Chinese ethnic groups and guilds in the territory. The expansion testified to the prosperity of the Temple and the rise of Chinese community leaders in the area. According to E.J. Eitel, the Temple Committee secretly controlled native affairs, acted as commercial arbitrators, negotiated for the sale of official titles, and formed an informal link between the Chinese residents of Hong Kong and Guangdong authorities².

¹ Sinn, Elizabeth 2003 *Power and Charity: A Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. pp.17

² Eitel, E. J. 1983 *Europe in China*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press. pp. 282.

5. In 1880, Leung On (梁安), who was both the Chairman of the Founding Board of Tung Wah Hospital and a Temple Committee member of the year, together with other Chinese community leaders from Tung Wah Hospital and Man Mo Temple, advocated to establish a free school at Hollywood Road named Man Mo Temple Free School (文武廟義學) with the income of the Temple. The Free School was under the management of Tung Wah Hospital and became the predecessor in the provision of free education in Hong Kong. By 1903, eight free schools had been founded and funded by the revenue of the Temple.

6. With the establishment of Tung Wah Hospital in 1870, apart from religious function, the other social functions of the Temple in the Chinese community were gradually taken over by the Hospital. In fact, the Hospital was also a member of the Temple Committee and the Temple was practically managed by the Tung Wah Directors. In 1906, when the registration of Man Mo Temple was discussed, it was found that most of the trustees of the Temple were either dead or unable to be traced. The Government therefore proposed to entrust the Temple to Tung Wah Hospital with a view to better management of the Temple and its properties. The Temple was officially handed to Tung Wah Hospital with the enactment of the Man Mo Temple Ordinance (文武廟條例) in 1908. Since then, the Temple has become an important benefactor of Tung Wah Hospital.

7. In 1931, the Tung Wah Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital and Tung Wah Eastern Hospital were amalgamated into a single entity, and the name “Tung Wah Group of Hospitals” (TWGHs) was adopted. In the ninth month of each lunar year, Directors of TWGHs and community representatives congregate in the temple for the Autumn Sacrificial Rites to pay homage to the two gods as well as to pray for the prosperity of Hong Kong. The ritual arose from the Chinese tradition of offering thanks-giving to gods for an abundant harvest.

8. Due to its popularity, the Temple has become a renowned tourist attraction for both local and overseas visitors. Even Princess Anne also called upon the Temple on 27 November 1971 during her visit to Hong Kong.

Architecture

9. The Man Mo Temple Compound is mainly composed of three green brick structures with pitched roofs. Man Mo Temple is a three-bay and two-hall building fronted by two granite drum platforms. A pair of screen doors is placed in the front hall. Following the traditional Chinese architectural layout, the rear hall housing the altars of the deities is a few steps higher than the front hall. Between the two halls is a covered courtyard flanked by two side chambers of humpbacked roofs (捲棚頂). The courtyard is covered with a double eaved hip-and-gable roof (重檐歇山頂), which is supported by four granite columns at the corners of the courtyard.

10. The Lit Shing Kung attached to the left of Man Mo Temple is originally a three-hall-two-courtyard building. The two courtyards were later covered by steel roofs. The Kung Sor is a simple one-hall structure. The historic granite doorframe on which the construction year of Kung Sor can be found is still well preserved. The Kung Sor has been converted into a souvenir shop. The modern structure attached to the back of Kung Sor named Virtue Court (善德宮) was added in 1994 for people to worship their ancestors.

11. The magnificent Temple Compound is exquisitely decorated with *Shiwan* ceramic figurines, granite and wood carvings, plastered mouldings and murals, reflecting the superb craftsmanship of the old days. Two types of gable walls are found in the Temple, i.e. curvilinear gable of Man Mo Temple and pointed gable of Lit Shing Kung and Kung Sor. The delicate *Shiwan* ceramic ridge of Man Mo Temple made in 1893 is of ceramic figurines displaying a Cantonese opera stage setting. A pearl in the middle and two dragon fishes at ridge ends are placed on top portion of the ridge. It is interesting to note that brick carvings are found on the gable front (墀頭) of Man Mo Temple and Kung Sor while the gable front of Lit Shing Kung is decorated with *Shiwan* ceramic figurines.



An overview of Man Mo Temple



Shiwan ceramic figurines on the ridge of Man Mo Temple



Front view of Lit Shing Kung



The historic granite doorframe of Kung Sor