

Historic Building Appraisal
St. Joseph's Chapel
Yim Tin Tsai, Sai Kung, New Territories

St. Joseph's Chapel (聖若瑟堂) is situated on a hilltop in Yim Tin Tsai (鹽田仔). It was one of the first Catholic churches in Sai Kung built in the late 19th century. Initially, missionaries used the ancestral house of Chan Fok (陳福), a representative of Yim Tin Tsai, as the place to preach Gospel; however, the house was destroyed by a typhoon. Then, the villagers donated a larger site to construct the church. It is believed that the Chapel was constructed in **1890** as one of the first Catholic churches in Sai Kung. *Historical Interest*

Yim Tin Tsai is a Catholic majority village where the Catholic priests played religious, social and educational roles. Ching Po School (澄波學校), for example, was founded there. On the 1866 Pentecost (聖神降臨節) feast, 19 people of Yim Tin Tsai were baptized and they were the first group of converts in Sai Kung. The faith further spread to other surrounding villages.

During the Japanese Occupation from 1941 to 1945, missionary work was terminated for a short time. Yim Tin Tsai was afflicted. The bigger bell in the tower of the Chapel was seized by the Japanese troops. Father Francis Wong Ji-him (黃子謙神父), Father Rene Kuo (郭景雲神父) and Father E. Teruzzi (丁味略神父) were killed during the wartime. After the war, the church underwent renovation.

The Chapel is a simple **Romanesque Revival** style mission church featuring arched windows and doorways, stepped buttresses, gable end walls, and side and front entrance porticos. The walls are plainly rendered and painted. External decorations include ornamental pinnacles on the gables and entrance porch, moulded architraves to doors and windows, moulded column capitals and bases, a scroll pediment over the side entrance, and an ornamental buttress or pilaster on the west elevation supporting a cross. Internally, the main features are transverse arches supporting the roof, stained glass windows and the altar with decorative designs in red, white and gold. *Architectural Merit*

The simple unspoilt design of the Chapel and its remote location make it a rarity with special built heritage value. The Chapel has been recently restored and won a 2005 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award. The press release of which is as follows: *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

“The rehabilitation of the abandoned St. Joseph's Chapel demonstrates the success of a community initiative that has garnered the whole-hearted support of multiple stakeholders amongst the local residents and the Hong Kong Catholic community. Within the confines of a limited budget, the

modest conservation project has consolidated a fine example of a rural Roman Catholic chapel through undertaking urgent repairs to the chapel and the affiliated Ching Po School [澄波學校]. By re-initiating the liturgical function of the chapel and adapting the school into a museum, the project ensures historical continuity of the pilgrimage site while, at the same time, promises to catalyze the larger-scale restoration of Yim Tin Tsai Island as an emerging cultural and eco-tourism destination.”

The Chapel shows the importance of Sai Kung as one of the earliest and most important Catholic parishes in Hong Kong. Yim Tin Tsai has been a Catholic village since the 1860s and St. Joseph’s Chapel has been the centre of religion, education and social activities. The Chapel was also concerned with the welfare of the villagers bearing the cost of the village school and the causeway. In hard times when crops failed, the Chapel also helped out. Although the population has now sharply declined from the old days, some Catholics still visit the Chapel at holidays. The Chapel is a landmark of Yim Tin Tsai and often visited by tourists.

The rehabilitation and restoration of St. Joseph’s Chapel and the affiliated Ching Po School (澄波學校) which has been adapted into a museum, have ensured historical continuity of the buildings and promise, at the same time, to catalyze the larger-scale restoration of Yim Tin Tsai Island as an emerging cultural and eco-tourism destination.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

***Adaptive
Re-use***