

Historic Building Appraisal
Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Kau Yan Church
No. 97A High Street, Hong Kong

Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Kau Yan Church (基督教香港崇真會救恩堂) was previously a church for Hakka people (some of whom fled to Hong Kong from China during the time of the Taiping Rebellion in the mid-19th century. A church known as Sai Kwok Lau (四角樓) was established in 1861 by the Rev. Rudolph Lechler of the Society of Basel Mission (巴色傳道會) whose missionaries first came to Hong Kong from Switzerland in 1847.

***Historical
Interest***

After various moves and changes of name a permanent home was found and the present church was built in 1931-1932. In December 1941, when Hong Kong came under Japanese invasion, the Church became a refugee shelter for the residents nearby. In 1944, Mr. Aw Boon-par (胡文豹, a Burmese Chinese entrepreneur and philanthropist best known for introducing Tiger Balm) donated rice through the Church to alleviate the food shortage suffered by members of the public. In 1952, after a visit by the Governor Sir Alexander Grantham (葛量洪), the Government provided a loan (\$150,000) to the Church.

The Church was believed to have been designed by the well known local architectural firm of **Palmer and Turner**. The architectural style is **Neo-Gothic** with some **Tudor** features externally, but internally **Romanesque** arches, and **Neo-Classical** columns and beams are found. This mixture of styles gives the church a transitional feel of moving from one architectural style to another which is not uncommon in early churches. The north-south orientation of the church is unusual. The church is three stories high with a turreted tower at the north end and a Tudor style entrance porch at the south end. The fenestration of the facades consists of regular rows of paired lancet windows in bays separated by buttresses. There are four corner canted bays. The first and second floors are supported by a trabeated structure of moulded beams supported by square shaped columns in debased classical style. The chapel on the second floor has great transverse arches supporting the pitched roof and a tripartite arched screen separating the nave from the chancel. Externally a Gothic style parapet wall and entrance gates surround the elevated site.

***Architectural
Merit***

The style of the church is unusual in Hong Kong and the mixture of styles in which the architect has tried to introduce a transitional feeling is quite rare. The church therefore definitely has built heritage value. No evident alterations or additions can be observed apart from minor building services works. The overall condition of the building is good.

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

The church originally aimed at Hakka people before the Second World War, but after the War the language medium was changed to Cantonese as the Hakka population declined. Kan Yan Church believes in spreading the words of God by educational development, and runs the Kau Yan School (救恩學校) next door as well as the Kau Yan College (救恩書院) in Tai Po. Due to its distinctive Neo-Gothic style which is rare in the area, and also due to its prominent elevated position in Western Street it is a well known local landmark.

Social Value & Local Interest

The Church has group value with the masonry facade of the Old Mental Hospital (舊精神病院) and King's College (英皇書院) in the same street. Another historic building nearby is the Old Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital (舊贊育醫院) in No.104 Western Street. The Church is also geographically close to the Hong Kong University compound on which a number of declared monuments stand.

Group Value

As Kau Yan Church is likely to remain as a place of worship for many years to come, the question of adaptive re-use does not really arise.

Adaptive Re-use