

Historic Building Appraisal
Ceramic kiln, Hin Fat Lane,
Castle Peak Road, Tuen Mun, N.T.

This kiln is located in Tuen Mun off the Castle Peak Road near the 19.5 mile-stone. It is locally called “Castle Peak Pottery Kiln” [青山陶窯] or “Dragon Kiln” [龍窯]). The kiln was itself constructed of bricks probably in about 1940. It was founded by an overseas Chinese named Szeto Nu Tao (司徒怒濤). The story goes that Szeto’s initial aim to build the kiln was to produce potteries for export to overseas market, but the kiln under his operation was not capable of producing pottery items fine enough for overseas customers; therefore, the kiln was used to produce village potteries and cooking utensils for domestic uses. *Historical Interest*

A pottery craftsman Leung Sum (梁森) took over the kiln in 1951. Having started making pottery in Shiwan, Guangdong province (廣東省石灣) since the age of 8, Mr Leung came to Hong Kong in 1949 when the pottery industry in Shiwan underwent a downsizing. He at first worked as a foreman at the kiln, but later, in 1951, he bought the kiln. He took over the kiln’s operation together with his native place compatriots and his wife (a native from Foshan 佛山, who married him in in 1947). The firewood for the fire chamber of the kiln was obtained from the hillside nearby.

Under the management of the Leung family, the kiln produced a variety of household ceramic items (缸瓦) such as cooking utensils, flower pots, small saucers for lighting oil (點油燈碟), traditional Chinese money boxes (古老錢罌) which were sold to Kowloon, Hong Kong Island and elsewhere in the territory. The items were sold in the style or firm name of “Tao Sing” (陶星), later “Kung Hop Pottery Kiln” (工合陶窯) and “Hong Kong Ceramic Arts Studio” (香港陶瓷藝術室). In its heyday, the kiln had more than 30 employees who engaged in firewood collection, packing of products and delivering products to city areas.

Later on, due to the competition from the cheaper products from other parts of Asia, the business gradually diminished. During the late 1970s the kiln was used only occasionally used by local artists to have their own pottery works be fired there for the special kiln effects on the glazes which were not readily accomplished in modern electric kilns. The kiln stopped operation in 1982 and the area has since then been used for residential and storage purpose.

The wood-fired brick kiln is of an old design known as “dragon kiln”, which had a lengthy history of at least two millennia in South China, especially popular during Song and Yuan dynasties. Its fire chamber is long in shape usually lying *Architectural Merit*

along an upward slope, which earns the name “dragon kiln”. This kiln in Tuen Mun was built following the Shiwan model. Constructed of bricks, it is vaulted, and has a length of about 20 meters. Two entrances at the south side lead into the fire chamber for the stacking of pots.

At the ceiling of the fire chamber there are rows of firing holes, with 5 holes at each row, from where workers can observe the firing inside the kiln and put the lighting woods into the chamber. An experienced operator can gauge temperatures by watching the fire through the holes at the roof. Firing temperatures normally range between 1200°C and 1300°C. The method is simple but relies on the experience of the workers. At the end of the fire chamber there is a chimney of about 7 metres high for emission of smoke during the process. At the outside along the fire chamber there are brick pillars for supporting an old roof covering the kiln in the past, which had been damaged and dismantled. There is also a slope at each side of the kiln as the path for workers to go up and down the kiln during the firing process.

The kiln in Tuen Mun is a rare example of dragon kiln, a type in early use in China, peculiar to Fujian Province and later adopted in Korea. It is probably the only remaining dragon kiln in Hong Kong with intact condition, although remains of dragon kiln were unearthed at Sheung Wun Yiu Village, Tai Po (大埔上碗窑村) during the archaeological investigations in the 1990s.

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

The fact that the Tuen Mun kiln was built following the Shiwan model signifies the connection of pottery technology between Hong Kong and mainland China. It is also a testimony of the entrepreneurship of Hong Kong’s immigrants. The kiln is still structurally sound and it remains its authentic appearance, though the area around the kiln is used for storage purpose.

The wood-fired “dragon” type kiln constructed of bricks is of certain social value and local interest in the past as it was used to produce village potteries and cooking utensils for domestic uses in all parts of the territory including Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The kiln has group value with the other old buildings in its environs, such as Shing Miu at Sam Shing Hui (三聖墟聖廟) (Grade 2).

Group Value