

Heritage Appraisal of Lin Fa Temple
Lin Fa Kung Street West, Tai Hang, Hong Kong

Lin Fa Temple (蓮花宮), literally means temple of lotus, ***Historical Interest*** on Lin Fa Kung Street West, Tai Hang was probably constructed in 1863¹ for the worship of Kwun Yam (觀音), the Goddess of Mercy, or the Chinese reincarnation of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara².

It is believed that Lin Fa Temple was once in the ownership of a family surnamed Tsang (曾). It was located on a hill slope facing the sea with the nearby old Tai Hang village to its west. There was an old temple bell bearing the dating of the twelfth lunar month of the 3rd year of Tongzhi (同治) reign (i.e. 1865). Since 1975, Lin Fa Temple has been put under the management of the Chinese Temples Committee.

Apart from the main deity Kwun Yam, the temple is also dedicated to other deities including Tai Sui (太歲), God of Wealth (財神), Wei Tuo (韋馱) and Fook Tak (福德). The temple is also popular for its association with the Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance which is a traditional event with a history of over one hundred years and was inscribed onto the third national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2011. The Fire Dragon Dance is held in the evening of the 14th, 15th and 16th of the eighth lunar month every year. The “fire dragon” (joss sticks are planted in a dragon-shaped form) is to be first blessed by Kwun Yam of Lin Fa Temple before starting the parade of the fire dragon throughout the Tai Hang area on the 14th of the eighth lunar month.

¹ It is made reference to the dating inscribed on the ceramic decorations on the main ridge of Lin Fa Temple, i.e. the 2nd year of Tongzhi (同治) reign of Qing dynasty.

² Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is also known as *Guanshiyin Pusa* (觀世音菩薩) in Putonghua which literally means a bodhisattva observing the sounds or cries of the world.

The architecture of Lin Fa Temple is very unique. Unlike *Architectural Merit* the conventional design of other two-hall Chinese temples with a courtyard in between, Lin Fa Temple is a building with its front hall in half-octagonal shape. The front hall is connected to the rectangular main (rear) hall without internal courtyard in-between. Since the temple is situated on a hill slope, its front hall with a double-eaves-tended (重檐攢尖頂) roof is built on a granite arched terrace while the main hall with a pitched roof (人字頂) sits on rocks where a big boulder is exposed on the ground surface. Right in the middle of the façade is an arched opening with a balustrade. Access to the temple is through two staircases on the left and right ends of the front hall, unlike other traditional Chinese temples with its main entrance in the middle of the façade.

In the front hall, the half-octagonal ceiling is supported by a series of brick arches. In the main hall, timber staircases on two sides lead up to the platform above the boulder where the main altar for Kwun Yam is located in the middle. The main ridge of the temple is richly ornamented with Shiwan (石灣) ceramic figurines in the middle and geometric plaster moulding at its both ends.

The base of the arched granite terrace and the accessing staircases of Lin Fa Temple have almost been covered due to the uplift of the level of the surrounding roads. The temple has undergone a number of repairs and renovations in 1975, 1985, 1990, 1991, 1998 and 2003. The last one was carried out after a fire which had damaged half of the building. Although previous renovations have put up modern materials to the temple, such as the modern stone effect ceramic tiles were applied on the external grey brick walls, the main structures and the shape of the temple are still preserved intact. The relics such as the bell of 1865, the granite crafted offering table of 1864, the altar of 1885, the *caimen* (彩門) of 1909, and the name board of 1925 can still be found in the temple. *Authenticity*

Lin Fa Temple in Tai Hang is not only the oldest and the best Kwun Yam Temple on Hong Kong Island, but also one of the seven existing graded Kwun Yam Temples in the territory³. Besides, the temple fronted with the half-octagonal entrance hall is a unique and rare example of its kind in Hong Kong amongst all the conventional Chinese buildings. ***Rarity***

Kwun Yam festivals on the 19th of the second, sixth, ninth and eleventh lunar months are celebrated in Lin Fa Temple by the worshippers. It also has strong association with the Fire Dragon Dance of Tai Hang, an intangible cultural heritage inscribed onto the third national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2011. The temple is an important historic landmark to the local community in the Tai Hang area. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

Apart from Lin Fa Temple, Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟) (declared monument) at 10 Tin Hau Temple Road, Scout Den of Queen's College (皇仁書院童軍室) (Grade 2), No. 12 School Street (Grade 3) and No. 4 Second Lane (Grade 3) are all located within walking distance of the area. These historic buildings have depicted the historical and socio-cultural development of the local community in Tai Hang. ***Group Value***

³ The other six graded Kwun Yam Temples include the Kwun Yam Temple (觀音廟) (Grade 1) on Station Lane, Hung Hom, Kowloon; Pat Heung Kwun Yam Temple (八鄉觀音古廟) (Grade 2) in Pat Heung, Yuen Long; Kwun Yam Temple (觀音古廟) (Grade 3) in Tung Tau Tsuen, Yuen Long; Shui Yuet Temple (水月宮) (Grade 3) at 181 Main Street, Ap Lei Chau; Shui Yuet Temple (水月宮) (Grade 3) at No. 90 Shan Tung Street, Mong Kok, Kowloon; and Kwun Yam Temple (觀音宮) (Grade 3) in Ta Tit Yan (打鐵坳), Tai Po.