

Heritage Appraisal of Tung Lin Kok Yuen
No. 15 Shan Kwong Road, Happy Valley, Hong Kong

Tung Lin Kok Yuen¹ (“TLKY”) is a Buddhist temple founded by Lady Clara Ho Tung (何張靜蓉) and her husband Sir Robert Ho Tung (何東爵士). Lady Clara was a devout Buddhist and lay patron who had a fervent wish to preach Buddhism and promote female education in Hong Kong. She used a gift of \$100,000 received in 1931 from Sir Robert to acquire the building site of over 12 000 square feet in 1933 and have TLKY completed in 1935. TLKY was built on Inland Lot No. 3645, on a Government Lease for 75 years, which was granted to Lady Clara at a cost of \$18,555. The opening ceremony of TLKY in May 1935 attracted thousands of guests from the Chinese community in Hong Kong. The visit of numerous well-respected Buddhist leaders and dignitaries gave further recognition to TLKY’s importance in the Buddhist community.

***Historical
Interest***

Sir Robert and Lady Clara were acquainted with many important figures in contemporary Chinese history. The plaques of calligraphy they presented still hang on the walls of TLKY. Among these important figures, to name a few, were Kang Youwei (康有為), Li Yuanhong (黎元洪), Xu Shichang (徐世昌), Hu Hanmin (胡漢民) and Zhang Xueliang (張學良).

Lady Clara in her autobiographical notes *Travelogue on Famous Mountain* 《名山遊記》 stated that TLKY “was meant to be a place to preach Buddhism as a universal moralising force, especially in times of uncertainty and disillusionment”. In view of the proliferation and achievements of Western Christian missionaries, and the presence of a general sense of a Christian community in Hong Kong, she believed that there should also be an institution to promote unity idea among Buddhists in Hong Kong. The local Buddhist mission should not only be spiritual, but also provide other secular and cultural functions, such as education and

¹ The name is derived from the name of Sir Robert Ho Tung and the Buddhist name of Lady Clara, Cheung Lin-kok.

charity, like the Western missionaries were doing. The founding of TLKY was an experiment based on such thought.

When TLKY was first opened, it housed the Po Kok Free School (寶覺義學校) and the Po Kok Buddhist Seminary (寶覺佛學社), which were two educational institutions for girls founded by Lady Clara in the early 1930s. Their Chinese names still appear on the two pillars at the entrance of TLKY. After the school moved out in the 1950s to the adjacent site at No. 11 Shan Kwong Road, TLKY still remains an important centre for Buddhist activities as well as for the education and training of monastic clergy. TLKY was also designed to house a library which still keeps invaluable Buddhist scriptures and publications.

The Ancestral Chambers of TLKY on the second floor was dedicated to Lady Clara and Sir Robert's close relatives. The large bronze dharma bell in the Main Hall (the Grand Buddha Hall 大雄寶殿) was cast with the names of all the members of Lady Clara's family inscribed on its inner surface. TLKY was therefore both a public and private Buddhist institution at the same time at its founding stage.

The building is an excellent example of the mixed Chinese and Western style of the 1920s and 1930s. This style generally comprises Western structural forms and engineering, combined with traditional Chinese designs, details and decorations, such as flying eaves, brackets and glazed tile roofs. The Chinese influence is predominant in the interior and exterior decorations of the building, while the internal floor planning is Western-influenced. The architect for designing the building was Fung Tsun², who was advised of Buddhist temple details by the Venerable Shi Ai Ting³.

***Architectural
Merit***

The building site slopes uphill from north to south, which required additional staircases between floors to adjust for the change in the levels. The building plan is of an unusual "arrow

² Fung Tsun was trained in Hong Kong and London and was elected as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1936 and admitted to the Hong Kong Institute of Architects in 1956.

³ Shi Ai Ting (釋靄亭) was a well-respected Buddhist monk from the Bamboo Grove Monastery (竹林寺) of Hangzhou who came to Hong Kong at Lady Clara's invitation to take up a supervisory role in her Buddhist institutions.

head” shape, which was necessary due to the triangular plot of land on which it was constructed. This shape also accounts for the visual representation that TLYK is like a great ship (the fundamental meaning of the word Mahayana⁴) that takes with it all beings seeking enlightenment. Although the first floor plan seems to be similar to a typical Western church with nave, aisles, and a semi-circular “apse” at the narrowest end of the site, the building indeed follows the sequence of space in Chinese Buddhist Monastery design.

From the north is the Entrance Gate (山門), the Front Hall (housing the Skanda Hall (韋馱殿) on the ground floor and the Ancestral Chambers and Library on the upper floors), the Courtyard with a flight of stairs, and the Main Hall. On the sides of the Main Hall are the dharma bell and dharma drum. Behind the Main Hall was once an open space sited a Chinese style pagoda, which was redeveloped in 1954 into the three-storey Lin Kok Memorial Building, also designed by Fung Tsun, that has since integrated with the original TLKY building of the same style and now houses the Bhaisajyaguru Hall (藥師殿).

Internally, the most impressive of the splendidly decorated spaces is the Main Hall, which extends the full height of the building and displays the impressive modern form of a hammer-beam roof structure. Internal decorations are in strong Chinese colours and designs and Chinese craftsmanship can be seen everywhere in profusion, down to the minute details of aisle railings, wall and ceiling moulding, door frames and panels, stained glass windows, etc. The internal decorations are particularly rich in traditional Chinese Buddhist references and specialist artwork, such as the multi-colour terrazzo and cement floor tiles with floral and geometric patterns. On the principal axis near the entrance is a seven-storey pagoda representing Bhaisajyaguru (Medicine Buddha) (藥師佛), followed by a finely crafted timber shrine in the form of a Chinese temple for the Three Buddhas across the time and space dimensions and for the Avalokitesvara (觀音菩薩),

⁴ Mahayana is the major branch of Buddhism widely practised in China. The Sanskrit word Mahayana translates literally as the “Great Vehicle”, the vessel that ferries all beings to salvation.

Samantabhadra (普賢菩薩) and Manjusri (文殊菩薩) on the other side. The statues of the Buddhist deities, the furnishings and the shrines in TLKY were made at the Falls (also known as Ho Tung Gardens) by skilled wood carvers from Shanghai.

The most significant external feature is the Chinese pitched roofs rendered by yellow glazed tiles, which are supported by collar-beams and hammer-beams in reinforced concrete. The usage of yellow glazed tiles is a rare example, as existing buildings of similar mixed Chinese and Western style from the same period were usually rendered by green or blue glazed tiles. The pitched roof design of TLKY is a nice and rich demonstration of Chinese traditional architecture. It consists of roofs in the styles of hip-and-gable (歇山), double-eave hip-and-gable (重檐歇山) and cross-shaped ridge (十字脊), which are featured by full sets of ceramic ornaments, including the “Twin Dragons Fight for a Pearl” (二龍爭珠) figures that adorn the main ridge of the Main Hall, and a number of main-ridge-end ornaments (鴟吻), descending-ridge-end ornaments (垂獸), corner-ridge-end ornaments (戩獸), running animals (蹲獸) and corner animal mask (套獸) on various roofs. Decorative Chinese bracket sets (斗拱) are attached to the under eaves along roof edges, while gable boards are decorated with hanging fish pattern (懸魚).

The original TLKY building was extended in 1954 by the three-storey Lin Kok Memorial Building on the extremely narrow south end of the building, all to a similar design and materials to match the original building. There have been no major alterations to the original fabric of the building and it appears to be in a basically unaltered condition. ***Authenticity***

TLKY is a rare example of a complete and authentic building which combines Western classical and traditional Chinese architectural elements, with the added merit of being in the same continuous religious use since the time of its original construction, which has contributed to the retention of its rare collection of traditional Chinese artwork within the building. ***Rarity***

The social value of the TLKY building lies in the valuable religious and educational role it has played in the Chinese community, both locally and throughout Hong Kong particularly in its strong association with the early development of girls' education. Also, it continues to provide a fine present-day example of the practical development and teaching of modern Chinese Buddhism. The location of TLKY in the urban residential area of Happy Valley signified the emergence of "Urban Buddhism" (市區佛教) in Hong Kong, in contrast to "Rural Buddhism" (山林佛教), the traditional mode of Buddhist existence.

***Social Value
& Local Interest***

TLKY, together with the adjoining Jewish Cemetery with a historic chapel (Grade 3), forms an outstanding and important example of Hong Kong's multi-religious built heritage situated in the heart of a busy urban environment. From the 1910s to 1930s, Happy Valley was redeveloped from a rural setting into a residential area. In TLKY's neighbourhood, there still stand some historic apartment houses of this period, for example Nos. 11 and 15 Yuk Sau Street (Grade 3 and Grade 2 respectively), as well as Nos. 16, 17, 23 and 24 Fung Fai Terrace (all Grade 3).

Group Value

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