

**Heritage Appraisal of Tin Hau Temple  
and the adjoining buildings, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon**

**Annex C**

Tin Hau Temple and the adjoining buildings (the “Temple Compound”) in Yau Ma Tei are significant in the history of Kowloon as a multi-functional place of worship, arbitration and study. The compound comprises five buildings, namely Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟), Kung Sor (公所) (Communal Hall) (now Kwun Yam Lau She Tan 觀音樓社壇), Fook Tak Tsz (福德祠) (now Kwun Yam Temple 觀音古廟) and the two Shu Yuen (書院) (Schools) (now a Shing Wong Temple 城隍廟 and exhibition centre).

***Historical  
Interest***

The Temple Compound is so well known that the neighbouring Temple Street is also named after it. It was initially administered by a temple management committee (天后廟值理會) formed by local merchants and residents. Its management was officially delegated to Kwong Wah Hospital<sup>1</sup> by the Chinese Temples Committee (華人廟宇委員會) in 1928<sup>2</sup>. The operating surplus of the Temple Compound was not only used by Kwong Wah Hospital to build the new labour room and to repay Tung Wah Hospital’s previous loans, but also served to finance the charitable services of the later Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs).

The Tin Hau Temple, which was the first building constructed within the compound, replaced an earlier Tin Hau Temple probably built in 1865 by the local community at around the junction of today’s Pak Hoi Street and Temple Street<sup>3</sup>. According to the inscription on the granite

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<sup>1</sup> Tung Wah Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital and Tung Wah Eastern Hospital were amalgamated into a single entity, and the name “Tung Wah Group of Hospitals” (TWGHs) was adopted.

<sup>2</sup> In November 1914, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs invited the Directors of Tung Wah Hospital and Kwong Wah Hospital and the management committee of Tin Hau Temple, Yau Ma Tei to a meeting on the handover of management of Tin Hau Temple to Kwong Wah Hospital, so that the temple’s income could be used to subsidise hospital expenses. However, the management committee of Tin Hau Temple adopted an uncooperative attitude. They refused to hand over the temple’s management and continued to elect the temple committee. It was not until April 1928, when the newly established Chinese Temples Committee intervened, that the management and HKD58,000 savings of Tin Hau Temple were handed over to Kwong Wah Hospital.

<sup>3</sup> Reference is made to the date inscribed on a small stone lion now placed in front of Tin Hau Temple. The small stone lion is inscribed “同治四年吉日”, i.e. the fourth year of Tongzhi reign (1865) of the Qing dynasty. It is widely believed that 1865 is the construction year of the original Tin Hau Temple and people relocated the stone lion from the former site to the present location. The 1875 restoration tablet 〈乙亥春月重建天后古廟碑記〉 states that the original temple was seriously damaged by the typhoon of 1874 (甲戌風災) and then restored in 1875.

lintel at its main entrance, which reads “光緒丙子遷建戊寅仲冬吉立”, Tin Hau Temple was relocated to its present site in the second year of the Guangxu (光緒) reign (1876) of the Qing dynasty and was completed in 1878. The characters “天后古廟” inscribed on the lintel were written by Pan Zhengheng (潘正亨)<sup>4</sup>.

Tin Hau Temple is dedicated to the worship of Tin Hau (Goddess of the Sea)<sup>5</sup>, whose altar is located in the central bay of the rear hall. The deities Shing Wong (城隍) and Twelve Nannies (十二奶娘) are enshrined on the left side of the main altar, while Bak Mo Sheung (白無常) is on the right. Shrines for Kwun Yam (觀音) and Pau Kung (包公) are in the rear hall's two bays. There are also two historic timber plaques inscribed in the 32<sup>nd</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1906) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Xuantong (宣統) reign (1910), as well as a bell cast in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1897).

The other four buildings adjoining the Tin Hau Temple were constructed subsequently in phases. Kung Sor at the left side and Shu Yuen at the right side of the Tin Hau Temple were built in 1894 and 1897 respectively<sup>6</sup>. Fook Tak Tsz at the northern end and the other Shu Yuen at the southern end of the compound were built in 1903 and 1920 respectively<sup>7</sup>.

Kung Sor used to be a place of arbitration where disputes between members of the community were settled. A shrine for the God of Soil and Grain (社稷之神) is located in the middle of the open courtyard and the altar for Kwun Yam is in the central bay of the rear hall. Dragon Mother (龍母) and Lady Kam Fa (金花娘娘) are enshrined in the left side bay while Kwan Tai (關帝) and Pak Tai (北帝) are in the right side bay. There is a timber plaque inscribed in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1894).

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<sup>4</sup> Pan Zhengheng (潘正亨), courtesy name Bolin (伯臨), was a Chinese calligrapher who lived in Panyu county in Guangdong province.

<sup>5</sup> Tin Hau is a popular patron deity of seafaring folk, particularly in Guangdong and Fujian provinces.

<sup>6</sup> Reference is made to the inscriptions “光緒甲午年吉立” and “光緒丁酉吉旦立” on the granite lintels of the main entrances of Kung Sor and Shu Yuen respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Reference is made to the inscriptions “光緒二十九年季冬穀立” and “民國九年元月吉立” on the granite lintels of the main entrances of Fook Tak Tsz and Shu Yuen respectively.

Free education was offered at the two Shu Yuen for the children of boat people and land dwellers in the area. The Shu Yuen located to the right of Tin Hau Temple was built in 1897 and was converted into a Shing Wong Temple in 1972. There are also a bell cast in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1888) and a pair of timber couplets inscribed in the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1895). The other Shu Yuen located at the southern end of the compound was closed in 1955<sup>8</sup> and then in 2016 was converted into an exhibition centre, in which the temple's historic relics, such as the old incense burner (1879) and candle holder (1891), are displayed.

Fook Tak Tsz is a place where people pray for blessings and help from the Earth God. Kwun Yam, Kwan Tai, Lady Kam Fa and the Year God (太歲) are all enshrined in the temple. There is also a timber plaque inscribed in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the Guangxu reign (1881) of the Qing dynasty.

The Temple Compound was situated close to the coastline when it was first built, which was the typical physical setting for a Tin Hau Temple in Hong Kong. It is now situated in an inland location due to several reclamations along the coastline of Yau Ma Tei. The present boundary wall made of red bricks with bamboo-shaped balusters and a tiled capping is believed to have been built around the early 1970s when the stalls in front of the Temple Compound were cleared.

*Architectural  
Merit*

Tin Hau Temple, which is located in the middle of the Temple Compound, is the largest and most elaborately decorated of the five buildings. The temple is a Qing vernacular two-hall-three-bay building with an open courtyard between the two halls. The roofs are laid with green-glazed tiles on timber battens and purlins supported by gable walls and granite columns. It is fronted by an entrance porch with drum platforms to either side. The drum platforms have granite columns with exquisitely carved bases. The courtyard is flanked by side corridors with humpbacked roofs. The roof of the rear hall has a concrete slab and beam construction and is supported on brick walls,

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<sup>8</sup> Waters, Deric Daniel. "The Temples off Public Square Street" in *In the Heart of the Metropolis: Yaumatei and its People*, eds. Hase, Patrick. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Company Limited, 1999.

granite eave columns and concrete inner columns.

Many of the temple's architectural elements are highly decorative; for instance, the granite auspicious animals, flowers and birds found on the tie-beams and supporting brackets. There are also painted and gilded depictions of Chinese folk stories on camel's humps in the entrance porch. Murals with auspicious floral and calligraphic elements are also to be found on the building's facade. The timber fascia boards both at the exterior and interior are finely carved with auspicious motifs such as the Eight Immortals (八仙).

Exquisite historic Shiwan (石灣) ceramic figurines can be found on the main ridge of Tin Hau Temple's entrance hall. The ridge was made by Junyu in Shiwan (石灣均玉造) in 1914. On the upper tier of the main ridge are a set of double dragons with a pearl finial (雙龍戲珠), flanked by a pair of dragon fish (鰲魚). The lower tier mainly consists of figurines portraying Chinese folk stories. The front gable ridge ends are decorated with a pair of ceramic figurines of the God of the Sun (日神) and the Goddess of the Moon (月神).

Kung Sor is a two-hall-one-courtyard structure with a subsidiary building on its southern side, which is linked by a semi-circular archway. The entrance hall's facade has a recessed facade design. The main hall is supported by purlins and brick walls, while the porches at either side of the courtyard were built using the humpbacked rafters-and-purlins system. There are painted murals combining calligraphy and Chinese folk stories, as well as fascia boards carved with auspicious motifs.

The Shu Yuen located to the right of Tin Hau Temple (now the Shing Wong Temple) is a two-hall-one-courtyard structure. The courtyard has side porches built using the humpbacked rafters-and-purlins system. On the front elevation, the two side bays each have a window with plaster moulding panels above. The main ridge of the entrance hall is decorated with floral scrolls and *bogu* patterns. The front elevation is decorated with fascia boards carved to depict Chinese folk stories and painted murals comprising auspicious floral motifs and calligraphy, while further fascia boards carved with auspicious floral and animal motifs are also found inside the building.

The other Shu Yuen, at the southern end of the compound, is a two-hall-one-courtyard structure. The entrance hall's facade has a recessed design. The courtyard has side porches built using a humpbacked rafters-and-purlins system. Painted murals depicting Chinese folk stories with floral, landscape and calligraphic elements are found on the front elevation of the building.

Fook Tak Tsz is located at the northern end of the Temple Compound. It is a two-hall structure that originally had an open courtyard, but this is now covered with a humpbacked roof. The entrance hall's facade has a recessed design. There are *bogus* on the gable ridges of the entrance hall and Chinese folk stories on the fascia board. Fook Tak Tsz is the smallest of the five buildings within the compound.

The Temple Compound's five buildings are interconnected by four shared corridors, each of which has a tiled roof with a *bogu* on the top.

According to the surviving stone tablets, the Temple Compound **Authenticity** underwent several major episodes of renovation and expansion in 1890, 1894, 1897, 1916 and 1971<sup>9</sup>. A recent fire occurred at Shing Wong Temple in 2015, which was followed by large-scale restoration works completed in 2017. Although the Temple Compound has experienced several restorations and repairs over the years, in general it retains much of its original architectural form and aesthetic appeal. Most of the Temple Compound's historic relics, including the Shiwan ceramic figurines, wood and stone carvings, tablets and couplets, and cast iron bells are still preserved on site.

The Temple Compound's combination of five buildings **Rarity** dedicated to the worship of a wide variety of deities is very rarely found in Hong Kong. It is also the largest surviving Tin Hau Temple Compound in Kowloon. Besides, the Temple Compound is one of the few temples directly associated with the development of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. The Temple Compound also bears witness to the development of the physical and cultural landscape of Yau Ma Tei, and

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<sup>9</sup> Reference is made to 〈重建天后聖母古廟碑記〉, 1890年 and 〈重修天后廟碑〉, 1971年。

is still closely associated with the local community.

The Temple Compound established by the boat people and land dwellers serves as an important religious focus and marker of collective cultural identity for the local community. In addition, it was also a venue for settling public disputes and providing education for the neighbouring community.

***Social Value  
& Local  
Interest***

The Temple Compound houses a number of deities. Festivals for different deities are held at the Temple Compound and attract many worshippers and tourists; for instance, Tin Hau Festival (天后誕) is on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third lunar month, Shing Wong Festival (城隍誕) is on 11<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth lunar month, and Kwun Yam Treasury Festival (觀音開庫) occurs on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> days of the first lunar month.

The public open square in front of the Temple Compound has long been a landmark and gathering place for the locals. The square is well known as Yung Shu Tau (榕樹頭), or Poor Man's Nightclub, because of the large banyan trees that grow there. The "nightclub" nickname refers to the many entertainers who gather in the vicinity offering fortune-telling and Cantonese opera singing at night, which attracts large numbers of spectators. For the locals, especially the senior citizens, Yung Shu Tau is regarded as a historic landmark where the common people have long experienced the enjoyment of life.

The Tung Wah Museum (Declared Monument), Kowloon Union Church (Declared Monument), Old South Kowloon District Court (Grade 1), Former Pumping Station of Water Supplies Department (Grade 1), Yau Ma Tei Theatre (Grade 2), Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market (Grade 2), Yau Ma Tei Police Station (Grade 2), The Manse of Kowloon Union Church (Grade 3), and Kowloon Methodist Church (Grade 3) are all located within walking distance of the Temple Compound. These historic buildings collectively reflect the historical and socio-cultural development of the local community of Yau Ma Tei.

***Group Value***

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