

**MEMORANDUM FOR THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**DECLARATION OF
TWO HISTORIC BUILDINGS AS MONUMENTS**

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' advice on the proposal to declare the following two Grade 1 historic buildings as monuments under section 3(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53) (the "Ordinance"):

- (a) Tin Hau Temple, Joss House Bay (佛堂門天后古廟), Sai Kung;
and
- (b) Former Chinese Young Men's Christian Association ("YMCA")
of Hong Kong Central Building (前香港中華基督教青年會中央
會所), No. 51 Bridges Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong.

HERITAGE VALUE

Tin Hau Temple, Joss House Bay

2. The Tin Hau Temple ("the Temple") located at the northern shore of Joss House Bay, commonly known as "*Tai Miu*" (literally, "great temple"), is believed to be one of the oldest surviving Tin Hau temples in Hong Kong. The actual year of construction of the temple building cannot be ascertained. Nevertheless, it is generally considered that the Temple is closely linked to the Southern Song dynasty, as suggested by the rock inscriptions at the back of the Temple.

3. The Temple is composed of five buildings in a row and considered one of the largest Tin Hau temples in Hong Kong. The main building at the centre is a two-hall-three-bay structure, and, on each side, it is flanked by two subsidiary buildings. The gifts offered by worshippers during the past two centuries – and still preserved inside the Temple including an incense burner dated 1803 and a bell cast in 1840 – bear witness to the history of the Temple and the continuity of Tin Hau worship in Hong Kong. Though the Temple has undergone several restorations over the years, its overall setting and the spatial layout remain intact as in its early days. Most of the building fabrics, such as the granite columns, the granite *gejia*, the murals at the incense pavilion, the screen doors, the timber cornice boards and the floor tiles, has been retained and well preserved. The unchanged environs of the Temple also make it a prominent example of the very few Tin Hau

temples in Hong Kong which are still close to the seashore.

4. Over the past few decades, the Temple has attracted thousands of worshippers from all over Hong Kong to pay homage to Tin Hau on her birthday. The Temple is of significant historical and social value to the territory, as it represents the traditional religious practices of fishermen and other members of the seafarer community and exemplifies the significance of Tin Hau belief in Hong Kong.

Former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building

5. Built in 1918, the former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building (“the Central Building”), currently known as “the Bridges Street Centre”, was the first headquarters building of the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong until 1966, when the headquarters moved to Waterloo Road, Kowloon. The establishment of the Central Building was funded by two YMCA members in Chicago, namely Mrs. W.E. Blackstone and Mr. C.H. McCormick, and with the donations of prominent local Chinese leaders and businessmen such as Huang Mou-lin, the president of the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong at the time, Lam Woo, a property tycoon, Ma Ying Piu, the founder of Sincere Department Store, Kwok Lok, the co-founder of Wing On Department Store, and Wu Ting Fang, the first Chinese Legislative Council member of Hong Kong, etc.. The contribution of the Chinese to the construction of the Central Building was indispensable and showed the growing influence of the Chinese leaders and businessmen to the society in early 20th century Hong Kong.

6. The Central Building is an iconic six-storey building with a symmetrical front façade and is mainly constructed by red bricks and concrete. The architectural plans of the Central Building were initially prepared by architects Mr Shattuck and Mr Hussey of Chicago, who specialised in the design and construction of YMCA buildings in America and China. The architect, Mr A.R.F. Raven adapted the architectural plans for local use with minor amendments and incorporated Western Neo-classical elements and Chinese vernacular elements into the building. Upon its completion, the building was equipped with the first indoor swimming pool with provision of warm water and the first elevated wok-shaped running track in Hong Kong. It also houses a gymnasium and an auditorium with a screening room. All these facilities are still in place. The multi-functional arrangement of the different spaces of this building is similar to and modelled after other YMCA buildings in North America of the same period. All of its special features and facilities contributed to making the building modern and advanced for its time.

7. Since its opening, the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong has been providing a wide range of social services at the Central Building, except during the Battle of Hong Kong when the building was used for Hong Kong’s Air Raid Precaution Department and to accommodate refugees, as well as during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945) period when the building was requisitioned by the Japanese Education Department to offer Japanese and German courses. Nowadays, the building provides rehabilitation services for the mentally disabled among other social services. The history of the building is a testimony to the development and

history of social services in Hong Kong.

8. The appraisals and photographs of the two historic buildings are at **Annexes A to D**.

GRADING AND DECLARATION

9. In recognition of their heritage values, the Board accorded Grade 1 status to the Tin Hau Temple, Joss House Bay on 17 May 2010 and to the Former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building on 18 December 2009.

10. At the meeting on 26 November 2008, the Board endorsed the establishment of formal relationship between the statutory monument declaration system and the administrative grading system for historic buildings. Under the endorsed arrangement, Grade 1 buildings, defined as “buildings of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible”, are included in a pool of highly valuable heritage buildings for consideration by Antiquities Authority (i.e. Secretary for Development) as to whether some of these may have reached the “high threshold” of monuments for statutory protection under the Ordinance.

11. The two historic buildings, i.e. the Tin Hau Temple, Joss House Bay and the Former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building as set out in paragraphs 2 to 8 above, have significant heritage value. They have reached the “high threshold” to be declared as monuments for permanent protection under the Ordinance. Consent for the intended declaration has been obtained from the respective owner, management department and tenant.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. In accordance with section 3(1) of the Ordinance, “the Authority may, after consultation with the Board and with the approval of the Chief Executive, by notice in the Gazette, declare any place, building, site or structure, which the Authority considers to be of public interest by reason of its historical, archaeological or palaeontological significance, to be a monument, historical building or archaeological or palaeontological site or structure.”. Members’ advice is therefore sought on whether the Tin Hau Temple at Joss House Bay and the Former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building should be declared as monuments. The intended monument boundaries of the declaration are shown in **Annex E**.

NEXT STEP

13. Subject to Members' recommendation of the proposal to declare the Tin Hau Temple at Joss House Bay and the Former Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong Central Building as monuments, the Antiquities and Monuments Office will take the matter forward in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
June 2023

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