

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Kwong Fook Tsz

#### No. 40 Tai Ping Shan Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Originally called Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠) in the early decades and commonly known today as Pak Shing Temple (百姓廟), Kwong Fook Tsz (廣福祠), which literally means temple of common benevolence, was built in Sheung Wan in 1895. It is historically significant as it demonstrates the inseparable ties and cohesion among the Chinese community during the early British administration period and also stands as an embodiment of traditional Chinese beliefs about death. **Historical Interest**

The first Kwong Fook Tsz was proposed in 1851 at the instigation of the prominent businessman Tam Choy (譚才) and 13 other members of the emerging Chinese elite.<sup>1</sup> During the middle of the 19th century, many immigrants from Mainland China were attracted to Hong Kong to make a living in the city. Many of them died in Hong Kong before they were able to return to their hometown. It was a Chinese tradition to put up soul tablets (“神主牌”) for the deceased. To honour the Chinese tradition and deceased’s wish to be back to their ancestral roots, there was a need for a venue to house the soul tablets of the Chinese labourers from the mainland who died in Hong Kong, in the hope that “their fellow-villagers or connections visiting Hong Kong could carry them home”.<sup>2</sup> Tam Choy and his fellow donors raised funds and asked the Government to grant them a piece of land to construct a “common ancestral Chinese temple” intended “for the reception of tablets to the memory of their deceased countrymen”.<sup>3</sup> The Government agreed to allot a piece of land in Tai Ping Shan<sup>4</sup> (太平山) (designated as Inland Lot no. 361) for free as long as the site was used exclusively as a temple.<sup>5</sup> The first Kwong Fook Tsz was then built in 1856. It provided the final home of the souls of Chinese labourers who died in Hong Kong and a place

---

<sup>1</sup> “Report on the Tung Wa[h] Hospital by the Honourable T. H. Whitehead”, *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, 1896, pp.105-106.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The plan attached to Government lease of Inland Lot No. 361 (1895) shows that the area of the lot is 14,738 square feet.

<sup>5</sup> “Report on the Tung Wa[h] Hospital by the Honourable T. H. Whitehead”, *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, 1896, p.105.

for keeping the soul tablets of the deceased.

In addition to housing the soul tablets of deceased Chinese labourers, Kwong Fook Tsz later began providing refuge and medical services for the sick, homeless and elderly. As a result, it gradually became a dark and filthy place that was regarded as a “Chinese hospital” where the dead and dying as well as sealed coffins were accommodated. The situation revealed the inhumane living conditions of poor and sick Chinese and the lack of affordable medical services for local residents in the early decades. It later attracted the great attention of the Government in 1866 when 21 coffins containing bodies were discovered inside the temple, many of which had been stored there for as long as five years, making it a source of hygiene problems in the area.<sup>6</sup> The Government finally recognised the need to build a Chinese hospital to help improve these conditions when the problem came to attention again in the so-called “I Tsz Scandal” in 1869, which acted as a direct catalyst for the establishment of the Tung Wah Hospital (later renamed the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals) in 1870. Kwong Fook Tsz was placed under the management of the Tung Wah Hospital after it opened in 1872 and continues to be administered by the Hospital today.

When the bubonic plague broke out in 1894, the Tai Ping Shan area was the most seriously infected neighbourhood and the land there was consequently resumed (acquired by compulsory purchase) by the Government. After clearing the site, part of Inland Lot no. 361, where the first Kwong Fook Tsz was located, was lent to the Po Leung Kuk charitable organisation for the construction of their premises in 1895. At the same time, the current Kwong Fook Tsz was erected next to the Po Leung Kuk’s building. A foundation stone with Chinese inscriptions recording the lending of land to PLK was laid next to the main entrance of Kwong Fook Tsz.<sup>7</sup>

Kwong Fook Tsz has not only served as a temple for accommodating soul tablets, it has always been a venue for worshipping a number of different deities. The main deity at the temple is Ksitigarbha (地藏王), a Buddhist

---

<sup>6</sup> In 1866, 21 coffins containing dead bodies were discovered inside Kwong Fook Tsz, 20 of which were solid Chinese coffins that had been kept there for up to five years. These unhygienic conditions in the temple made it susceptible to outbreaks of epidemics and contagious diseases. Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> A stone plaque entitled the renovation of Kwong Fook Tsz in 1869 recorded in its content the funds raised for the establishment of Tung Wah Hospital as well as the breakdown of the expenses in details. It serves to testify the association between Kwong Fook Tsz and the founding of Tung Wah Hospital.

bodhisattva who protects and releases the souls of the deceased from purgatory. When the well-known Chai Kung (濟公) Temple in Tik Lung Lane (迪龍里) in Wan Chai was demolished during the redevelopment of the district, the statue of Chai Kung and other relics, including the historic plaque inscribed with the characters 威伏炎瘟, literally meaning “to eliminate epidemics”, and the “tiger head gate” (虎頭門) that it was home to were temporarily stored in the “Ma Miu” (孖廟) (“double temple”, also called Shui Ching Pak Tin Hau Ma Miu (綏靖伯天后孖廟), Sam Yuen Kung (三元宮) or Shui Yuet Kung (水月宮)) at 38 Tai Ping Shan Street from 1984 until they were relocated to Kwong Fook Tsz in 1991. At the request of the Ma Miu temple keepers, Kwong Fook Tsz additionally houses statues of other deities from the Ma Miu, including Shui Ching Pak and Tai Sui (太歲). The inclusiveness of Kwong Fook Tsz allows believers in different deities to continue to worship their gods.

Kwong Fook Tsz is a one-storey building situated on an elevated platform, which is divided into two levels: the lower level accommodates the shrine of the Earth God; the upper level is where the Kwong Fook Tsz building is located. The shrine of the Earth God is housed in an alcove under a tiled roof with pan, roll and drip tiles decorated in auspicious patterns that also has a chimney for burning paper offerings. The shrine was designed to echo the typical Earth God shrine of a local village, with a raised rectangular platform serving as the foundation and a gable-shaped decorative screen at the back. This background is also topped with a ball-shaped finial, a feature more commonly adopted for decorating Chinese graves than Earth God shrines. A block of granite inscribed with the characters 社稷之神 (“the God of Earth and Grain”) is placed along the central axis of the shrine alongside a stone dog.

*Architectural  
Merit*

The Kwong Fook Tsz building itself has three halls and two courtyards each one bay in width, with a forecourt at the front. The roof structure consists of timber purlins and load-bearing walls, while the corridors along the sides of the two courtyards comprise “humpbacked” rafters and a purlin system. The timber structure is topped with pantiles with green end tiles and drip tiles. The most prominent architectural feature on the exterior is the Shiwan (石灣) ceramics on the ridge of the entrance hall. These were manufactured in 1895 when the temple was built and feature the repertoire of characters from the 16th-century Chinese novel *The Investitures of the Gods* (《封神演義》).

The building is mainly constructed in grey brick and granite; used for wall bases and door frames, granite features predominantly. The granite lintel above the doorway of the main entrance in the recessed façade is engraved with the characters “廣福慈航”, which literally mean “blessings and benevolence”. A set of couplets flanks the doorway. Another notable decorative feature is the timber fascia board decorated with fine relief and fretwork presenting auspicious motifs.

The internal layout is basically symmetrical, with each courtyard including a pair of covered passages that connect the individual halls. A pair of ceremonial screen doors is located along the central axis of the entrance hall in conformity with the typical setting in traditional Chinese architecture, while a latticed horizontal screen decorated with a floral motif is placed between the door lintel and the ceiling.

Around the well-paved granite courtyard behind the entrance hall are two pairs of brick pillars erected to support the roofs of the side passages, where timber tie beams in the shape of “prawn beams” (蝦弓樑) sit between the pillars. With the aim of creating a symmetrical perception for people walking down the passages, decorative humpbacked roofs fixed on purlins and cylindrical posts are installed underneath the actual roofs. Exquisitely detailed timber fascia boards are fixed beneath the eaves facing the courtyard.

The sacrificial hall for worshipping the deities is located in the middle of the temple. “Dragon boat ridges” (龍船脊) decorate the gable ridges. A fine wooden board (彩門 *caimen*) with fretwork featuring dragons, phoenixes, oriental magpies and grapevines is placed at the entrance to the hall. The colourful ornamental altar table, where the main incense burner is placed, also bears the Chinese characters for the year that the temple was built. Near the right end of the rear wall is an arched doorway leading to the next courtyard, which contains similar designs to the courtyard of the front hall.

The end hall houses the soul tablets and is functional in nature. The main ridge and gable ridges here are decorated with a *kuilong* (夔龍) motif.

Kwong Fook Tsz has undergone some renovations since it was first erected on its current site. The site was originally enclosed by a brick parapet set on a retaining wall built using random undressed stones, which was later

***Authenticity  
& Rarity***

reinforced and rendered in red in the 1990s with a plaque with the characters “勝地” was affixed to it. The plaque was later removed before being replicated on a granite tablet placed in the forecourt in 2017.

Although some decorative elements, such as a pair of wall-edge brick sculptures (*chitou* 墀頭) on the edge of the gable walls and patterned plastered strips on these walls, have been removed, many of the original features of Kwong Fook Tsz remain intact. For example, the most prominent decoration on the exterior is the Shiwan ceramics on the main ridge of the entrance hall. They were manufactured in 1895 when the building was erected at its current site. In addition, there are also a pair of dragon fish and a pair of lions. The main ridges and gable ridges of the hall housing the soul tablets are decorated with *kuilong* motifs. Moreover, the grey bricks and granite door frame of the front elevation, including the granite lintel and couplets flanking the doorway, are all well preserved. The shelters added in the forecourt were removed after the renovation in 2017, restoring the forecourt to its original appearance.

Kwong Fook Tsz is a rare example of a temple with a three-hall-one-bay layout and two courtyards in Hong Kong. In its early years, it was used to provide physical and spiritual refuge and medical services for the sick, homeless and elderly as well as to appease the souls of the dead. There is no other surviving temple that performed these functions in the history of Hong Kong. It is of exceptional historic significance, as it not only bears witness to both the rise of local Chinese leaders and the development of Sheung Wan, but was also the direct catalyst for the establishment of the Tung Wah Hospital. The stone plaque entitled the renovation of Kwong Fook Tsz in 1869, which recorded in detail the donations received for the opening of Tung Wah Hospital, is one of the few artefacts of the first-generation Kwong Fook Tsz that still preserved up to present day after its relocation to the current building in 1895.

Kwong Fook Tsz played a significant role in providing communal services when it was first built. Located in the historic Chinese neighbourhood of Sheung Wan, it embodies exceptionally high local interest. In addition to its role as a temple housing soul tablets, its outstanding social value derives from accommodating the statues of deities and relics from other temples that were forced to close due to urban development or dangerous building conditions. The relocation of Chai Kung and its relics to Kwong Fook Tsz has allowed rituals related to Chai Kung to be continued, such as “passing the gate” (過關). It also

***Social Value  
& Local  
Interest***

houses the statues of other deities from the Ma Miu temple, including Shui Ching Pak and Tai Sui. Worshippers seeking the blessing of Ksitigarbha and Chai Kung still devotedly pay tribute to these deities at Kwong Fook Tsz.

In addition, Kwong Fook Tsz features several plaques presented by believers living in the district and its environs that confirm its strong social value and local interest for the local community. One plaque, 顯鎮威靈, which literally means “prominent and powerful deity”, was presented by worshippers from D’Aguilar Street (德己立街), Wing Wah Lane (榮華里), Lan Kwai Fong (蘭桂坊) and Wo On Lane (和安里) in the 34th year of the reign of the Emperor Guangxu (1908).

Kwong Fook Tsz shares a group value with the Man Mo Temple Compound (文武廟) (declared monument) and Tung Wah Hospital Main Block (東華醫院主樓) (Grade 1), as they all started performing charitable work for underprivileged Chinese in the middle and late 19th century. It also forms a group value with Tung Wah Coffin Home (東華義莊) (declared monument) at Sandy Bay, which played an identical role serving deceased Chinese. The Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Hong Kong (香港中華基督教青年會) (declared monument) and Bridges Street Market (必列啫士街市場) (Grade 3) are also historic buildings in the vicinity of Kwong Fook Tsz. ***Group Value***

## REFERENCES

### **Records of the Hong Kong Government**

Report on the Tung Wa[h] Hospital by the Honourable T.H. Whitehead, Hong Kong Government Sessional Papers dated 1896, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

The Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance, 1894, Notification No. 84 dated 7 March 1895, Hong Kong Government Gazette dated 9 March 1895, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

Notification No. 329 dated 19 August 1896, Hong Kong Government Gazette dated 22 August 1896, from Hong Kong Government Reports Online.

### **Document Records at the Land Registry Office, Hong Kong**

Property Particulars of Inland Lot No. 361.

Property Particulars of The Remaining Portion of Inland Lot No.361.

Property Particulars of Inland Lot No.1356.

### **Archives at Public Records Office, Hong Kong**

HKRS57-6-3799. "I.L. 1356", 1942 - 1945.

### **Aerial Photos of the Hong Kong Government**

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 8 May 1949 (Photo Ref.: 81A\_128-6042)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 16 May 1967 (Photo Ref.: 1967-5607)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 8 September 1979 (Photo Ref.: 26585)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 3 February 1989 (Photo Ref.: A16433)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 18 November 1996 (Photo Ref.: CN15688)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 24 May 2010 (Photo Ref.: CS28796)

Survey and Mapping Office, Aerial photos dated 11 January 2022 (Photo Ref.: E145555C)

### **Maps of the Hong Kong Government**

Survey and Mapping Office, Map of 1922 (Map Ref.: CL-SW-9)

Survey and Mapping Office, Map of 1960 (Map Ref.: 196-SW-5)

Survey and Mapping Office, Map of 1999 (Map Ref.: 11-SW-8A)

Survey and Mapping Office, Map of 2015 (Map Ref.: 11-SW-8A)

Survey and Mapping Office, Map of 2023 (Map Ref.: 11-SW-8A)

### Maps from Other Sources

UK National Archives, “Plan of the City of Victoria 1889, Printed by Stanford's”, <https://www.hkmaps.hk/map.html?1889>, accessed on 5 February 2024.

UK National Archives, “Plan of the City of Victoria, Hong Kong”, <https://www.hkmaps.hk/map.html?1901.3>, accessed on 5 February 2024.

### Inscriptions

〈重修廣福慈航碑誌〉，1869 年。

廣福義祠正門〈甲午年東華醫院當年總理盧文瑞等刊〉基石，1894 年。

「廣福慈航」石額，1895 年。

〈重修廣福義祠碑記〉，1977 年。

〈廣福義祠重修碑記〉，2017 年。

### Newspapers

“THE YEE-TSZE HOSPITAL INQUEST”, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 26 April 1869.

“THE YEE-TSZE HOSPITAL ADJOURNED INQUEST”, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 28 April 1869.

“THE YEE-TSZE HOSPITAL ADJOURNED INQUEST”, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 30 April 1869.

“THE YEE-TSZE HOSPITAL”, *The China Mail*, 26 April 1869.

“Old temple renovated”, *South China Morning Post*, 14 January 1977.

「濟公活佛搬到水月宮裏」，《灣仔星報》，1984 年 9 月。

### Books, Articles and Other Sources

Sinn, Elizabeth. *Power and Charity: A Chinese Merchant Elite in Colonial Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003.

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. *One Hundred Years of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals 1870-1970*. Hong Kong: Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, 1971.

李東海，《香港東華三院一百二十五年史略》（香港：中國文史出版社，1998 年）。

劉潤和、王惠玲、高添強、冼玉儀，《益善行道：東華三院 135 周年紀念專題文集》（香港：三聯書店，2006 年）。

周樹佳，《香港諸神：起源、廟宇與崇拜》（香港：中華書局香港有限公司，2009 年）。

何佩然，《源與流：東華醫院的創立與演進》（香港：三聯書店，2009 年）。



丁新豹，《善與人同：與香港同步成長的東華三院，1870-1997》(香港：三聯書店，2010 年)。

馬素梅，《屋脊上的戲台：香港的石灣瓦脊》(香港：馬素梅，2016 年)。

「灣仔迪龍里濟公廟記載抗疫歷史 虎頭門、牌匾書展攤位復刻重現」，《香港 01》，2022 年 7 月 20 日上載，

<<https://www.hk01.com/sns/article/794657>>，accessed on 5 February 2024.