

Historic Building Appraisal
Yuen Kwan Yi Tai Temple
Yuen Long Kau Hui, Yuen Long

Yuen Long Kau Hui (元朗舊墟, literally, Yuen Long Old Market) is in the north-east of the present Yuen Long town centre with Nam Pin Wai (南邊圍) and Sai Pin Wai (西邊圍) in its south and west. The market lied along three streets where shops of mixed trades were located. Cheung Shing Street (長盛街) is the longest one. The other two shorter streets, Lee Yick Street (利益街) and Wine Street (酒街), form a parallel pair. There were two entrance gates to the market – Tung Mun Hau (東門口) and Nam Mun Hau (南門口), which were locked up after the market hours to guard against theft and robbery. Two temples, inns and pawnshops were also in the market. *Historical Interest*

Yuen Long Kau Hui was established during the reign of Kangxi emperor (康熙) under the leadership of Tang Man-wai (鄧文蔚). Tang was a 23rd generation member of the Kam Tin Tang Clan who attained a jin-shi (進士) degree and then decided to move the market from Tai Kiu Tun (大橋墩) to the present site. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the market was a hub of commercial activities of the Hong Kong region. Farmers, boat people and traders came as far as from the coastal districts of Guangdong province (廣東省) to buy and sell agricultural produce and daily necessities.

Yuen Kwan Yi Tai Temple (玄關二帝廟) in Yuen Long Old Market was built for the worship of two deities – Yuen Tai (玄帝), commonly called Pak Tai (北帝), a Taoist Emperor of divine bravery, as well as Kwan Tai (關帝), a symbol of loyalty, bravery and righteousness. A bell with the dating of 1714 indicates that the temple was probably built in the year. The temple is one of the only two temples in the market (the smaller one is the Tai Wong Temple (大王古廟) for the worship of Yeung Hau and others) at the far northern end of Cheung Shing Street (長盛街), the longest street of the old market.

It is a Qing vernacular temple on a north-south orientation with its door facing the south which is believed to be in good *fung shui* vein and would absorb wealth for the market users. The building is a two-hall structure with a courtyard (now covered) in between. The two deities are housed at the altar of the end hall. The roofs are in flush gable style. The recessed entrance has a system of granite and wooden bracket to support the roof. The main ridge of the temple is decorated with auspicious geometric patterns blended with the Eight Treasures including conch, wheel, umbrella, canopy, lotus, water bottle, goldfish and knotted cord. Other moulding decorations of floral motifs are also found in wall friezes. *Architectural Merit*

A temple housing two deities of Yuen Tai and Kwan Tai of equal status is rare in Hong Kong. *Rarity*

The temple is a building of high built heritage value. It bears witness to the development of the Yuen Long Old Market for well over 200 years. *Built Heritage Value*

There is a later added structure for a kitchen and keeper's quarters to the right of the temple. In recent repairs, the original walls of its façade have been plastered with false brick-lines. *Authenticity*

It has group value with other historic buildings in the old market, including Tai Wong Old Temple (大王古廟), Chun Yuen Pawn House (晉源押) and other shop-cum-residence buildings. *Group Value*

Market days fell on the 3rd, 6th and 9th days of each of the three ten-day periods of every lunar month; on these days, the place would be bustling with traders involved in the buying and selling of agricultural produce (e.g. rice, vegetables, sugar cane, wine, fish, meats, soy sauce, spices), farming and kitchen utensils, furniture and all kinds of daily necessities. *Social Value & Local Interest*

The market operated from 6 a.m. until dusk. It was managed by Kwong Yu Tong (光裕堂), a trust of a branch of the Kam Tin Tang Clan. The market was getting less prosperous and shops were closing down since the early 20th century, in face of competition of other markets especially when the Yuen Long New Market (元朗新墟) in its southwest opened in 1915.

The temple continues to be a social and communal centre for the residents of the nearby villages. It also acts as an ancestral hall for Dim Dang (點燈) ceremony on the 1st to 15th days of the first lunar month. During the Tai Ping Ching Chiu (太平清醮) of Yuen Long held every 10 years, Yuen Tai and Kwan Tai deity statues will be on their sedan chairs to 'watch' the activities of the festival. Birthdays of the deities, also that of Tin Hau (天后), are celebrated at the temple with offerings and basin meals.

The question of adaptive re-use does not arise.

Adaptive Re-use