

Historic Building Appraisal
Tsing Shan Monastery – Devotee’s Forest (alias Nunnery)
Castle Peak, Tuen Mun

Much have been mentioned in county gazetteers (縣志) and other sources on Castle Peak (青山, literally meaning green mountain) in Tuen Mun. It was said that Master Pei Tu (杯渡禪師, water-crossing on a cup) from Southeast Asia visited the mountain in the Lau Song dynasty (劉宋, 420-479). The mountain had since then long been called Pei Tu Mountain (杯渡山), or holy mountain, for its association with the eminent monk. Master Pei Tu then returned to Southeast Asia in his old age. The story goes that after his departure, the Pei Tu Cave (杯渡岩) he had resided was worshipped by a nun, who also established a Buddhist nun hermit (菴堂). In 1829, the To (陶) clan, which had settled in Tuen Mun since the fifteenth century, built a Taoist temple named Tsing Wan Kwun (青雲觀) and the nuns moved into the temple. The site was then extensively redeveloped from the late 1910s by Chan Chun-ting (陳春亭), a successful merchant and Buddhist enthusiast who later bestowed as Master Hin Ki (顯奇法師). He purchased lots of the adjoining land starting from 1910. With his effort, the Tsing Shan Monastery (青山禪院) first constructed in the 1910-1920s became a renowned Buddhist monastery, one of the biggest in the territory attracting overseas and local worshippers and tourists.

*Historical
Interest*

The monastery at the mid-level of Castle Peak is some 160 metres above sea level. It is composed of building complexes clustered up the southern slope. The site is dominated by the main terrace including the “Heung Hoi Ming Shan” *pai-lau* (「香海名山」牌樓), the Mountain Gatehouse (山門), the Main Hall (大雄寶殿), the Hall for the Protection of the Law (護法殿), the Bodhisattva and Ksitigarbha Hall (菩提薩埵殿), the Hall of Merit (功德堂, alias Ancestral Hall, 祖堂), the Guest Hall (客堂), a dormitory (宿舍) and others. In its upper level are the Absolute Gate of the Law (「不二法門」牌樓), the Kwun Yam (Goddess of Mercy) Pavilion (觀音閣) and the Devotee’s Forest (居士林, alias Nunnery, 定厂).

*Architectural
Merit*

The nunnery is at the higher level of the monastery. Standing alone at the terrace known as the Devotee’s Forest via step access through the Absolute Gate of the Law, it is the largest quarters in the monastery. It is not known when it was built but probably before 1934. It is a masonry, brick and concrete structure with its walls, columns and piers supporting the reinforced concrete flat roof having openings for skylight. The one-storey red-brick building has two entrances whilst the main one, slightly recessed, has a name plaque with two

characters 定厂 inscribed on it above the yellow metal gate. Above the entrance is a pediment with the Buddhism symbol 卍 engraved on it. Another entrance is on the left of the building. Entering the main entrance is the reception/ living room area of the quarters with a row of three rooms on either side. A sitting Kwun Yam (觀音) statue is in the middle for worship. At the far end is another two rooms fronted by the cross-shaped reception area. To the left end of another entrance is a row of four rooms. The building is having extensive spalling in its roof slab and corroded crackings on walls probably due to a fire occurred some time ago on the premises.

The monastery has a historical link of Buddhist and Taoist development in the holy mountain for a period of over 1,500 years. It is a rare Chinese religious complex among other temples and monasteries in Hong Kong. The oldest structures of the monastery though only built in the 1910s-1920s have considerable built heritage value to recapture the long and much talk-about history of the site and area. After the monastery's completion in late 1920s, a number of repairs and reconstruction took place.

***Rarity, Built
Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The monastery has attracted thousands of visitors until the 1970s when it became comparatively less attractive. It has been serving a renowned venue for religious worship, as well as for retreat, rest and sight-seeing. Distinguished visitors include the former Governor Sir Cecil Clementi (金文泰) in 1927-1928 and Sir Robert Ho Tung (何東).

***Social Value,
& Local
Interest***

The various buildings and structures in the compound have co-related group value.

Group Value