

Historic Building Appraisal
The Holy Spirit Seminary – Old Block & Chapel
No. 6 Welfare Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong

Completed in 1931, the present premises of the Holy Spirit Seminary (聖神修院) was built by the former South China Regional Seminary (華南總修會), which served as a missionary centre for seminarians from Zhaozhou (詔州), Wuzhou (梧州), Guangzhou (廣州), Jiangmen (江門), Jiaying (嘉應), Shangtou (汕頭), Tingzhou (汀州), Amoy (廈門), Fuzhou (福州), Jianning (建寧), Funing (福寧), Beihai (北海), Qiongzhou (瓊州) and Hong Kong. The Seminary was meant to spread Christianity to the public and furnish professional training for Chinese clergies. The termination of the Regional Seminary resulted in the handover of the site to the Hong Kong Catholic Diocesan (香港天主教區) in August 1964. *Historical Interest*

On the completion of the Seminary in 1931, Rev. Thomas Cooney, S.J. (古端敏司鐸) was appointed as the first superior of the mission of the Seminary. The other professors included G. Kennedy (簡力達神父), P. Joy (曹魄神父), D. Finn (范達理神父), R. Gallagher (嘉文翰神父), Rev. O'Erien (白理安神父) and G. Casey (祈祖堯神父). D. Finn, professor of this religious institution, was keen on collecting archaeological finds in Southern China. Apart from religious teaching, he encouraged seminarians to acquire antiquities and conduct researches on the custom of the boatpeople in Aberdeen.

The premises of the Seminary served as a British Army base and staff quarter for the defence in the Battle for Hong Kong in December 1941. A Chinese Catholic War Relief Organization was formed to provide civilian services during the period. After the fall of Hong Kong, the seminarians left the Aberdeen site and joined the Macao Seminary for the rest of the war because of the lack of financial support from Rome and Ireland. The Seminary was reopened in August 1945 and Fr. J.B. Wood remained in office until the closure of the Regional Seminary in 1964.

Religiously, there have been more than 250 priests ordained since the opening of Seminary in 1931. As well as the spiritual education to the priests, the staff of the Regional Seminary also arranged several public primary schools for the education of poor people and participated in social welfare activities as exemplified in the publishing of *Vox Almae Matris* (院聲) to fellow priests. The Seminary has nurtured many prominent religious leaders, including **Cardinal John B. Wu Cheng-chung** (胡振中樞機), Bishop of Hong Kong.

The Holy Spirit Seminary Old Block is an outstanding example of **Chinese Renaissance** architecture with both Chinese and Western architectural influences in a sophisticated blend. The comprehensive Chinese architectural style and the *Architectural Merit*

extensive grey brickwork and the masonry walls to the ground floor storey in **Italian Florentine** style are the major significant features. The architectural style was meant to dissolve the racial, cultural and religious barriers between the Western and Chinese communities at the time it was built, and reflects the cultural interaction in the pre-war colonial period.

The Chapel is an interesting architectural composition possibly best described as **Modern Chinese Eclectic**. Traditional Chinese architectural features such as the green glazed tiled roof, red columns, grey walls, granite plinth and complex ornamental patterns are put together in a modern way. Internally the Chapel is airy and spacious featuring traditional Chinese geometric designs on the roof trusses, windows and altar canopy. ***Built Heritage Value***

The interesting construction methods and the brick and masonry bond patterns made the building quite a rarity in Hong Kong and an obvious piece of valuable built heritage. The Chapel was built in 1956, and later in 1967 a new block was built at the north-east end but not in the same architectural style. ***Rarity***

Alterations are not much in evidence and it is considered that the Old Block and the Chapel retain much of their authenticity. ***Authenticity***

As well as spiritual instruction to priests and seminarians, the Seminary also arranged with several public primary schools for the education of poor people and participated in social welfare activities. The area around the Seminary is mainly industrial and public housing that have no obvious integrity with its culture and context. The Seminary is set in the quiet seclusion of its own grounds with noise and sights from the neighbourhood screened out. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

It is unlikely that the Seminary will cease its activities and move out of the premises, so that the question of adaptive re-use does not really arise. ***Adaptive Re-use***