

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Former Fanling Magistracy,**  
**No. 302 Jockey Club Road, Fanling, N.T.**

After the lease of the New Territories in 1898 and before World War II, the District Commissioners (later, District Officers) were empowered to hold small debts courts and land courts (田土法庭). In Yuen Long and Tai Po, the District District Officers sat as police court magistrates (警察裁判官) handling minor cases, whilst cases involving charges of a serious nature were heard by the then Kowloon Magistracy. Also, inter-village disputes in the New Territories were settled by the village elders or the Chinese imperial magistrate at Nan Tou (南頭) in the old days. *Historical Interest*

In the late 1950s, it was the aim of the government to turn over to urban departments those technical and professional functions previously discharged by the District Officers. In 1961, the introduction of new legislation with the civil jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the District Court was extended to the New Territories. The District Officers' vestigial judicial functions were formally transferred to the District Courts. This former magistracy at Fanling, the first magistracy set up in the New Territories, was built in 1960 and opened in 1961.

Over time, the magistracy became grossly inadequate to meet the current operational needs of the court arising from an increase of population. To cope with increasing demand for court services, temporary structures were erected on the adjacent site in 1983 to provide for two additional courtrooms, court support offices and an office for duty lawyers. Two magistracies were built in Shatin and Tuen Mun to deal with the increased volume of business during the 1980s.

The then Fanling Magistracy lacked essential support facilities such as public witness rooms, public consultation rooms, separate facilities for the press and lawyers, facilities for physically disabled persons and central air conditioning for the public waiting areas. There were insufficient interview rooms in the custodial area for litigants to discuss their cases with their legal representatives. The magistracy ceased operation since the completion of the Fanling Law Courts Building in 2002. Later, it underwent adaptive re-use.

The site comprises six structures, namely, the main building built in 1960, the two government staff quarter buildings at southwest probably built in the same era, a store at far northwest, an annex court building at northwest and a duty lawyers' office at west probably built as later extension of the magistracy. *Architectural Merit*

The main building is one of the representative examples of civic architecture of the period. Being built in the same year when the North Kowloon Magistracy (in Shum Shui Po on Tai Po Road) was constructed, the two magistracies share similar architectural languages. The double canopied projecting bay with storeys high vertical windows dominates the front facade and gives a simplified version of “giant order” of the Neo-classical architecture that signifies the majestic nature of the building. The side facades also feature Neo-classical motif, corbel and moulded architraved doorways.

Internally, an atrium lit by a central light well houses a grand staircase with ornamental ironwork balustrades leading to upper floors courtrooms. However, this former magistracy is of much smaller scale – it only comprises two storeys and accommodates two courtrooms where more economical finishing materials of the era, such as terrazzo tiles, mosaic tiles, artificial granite tiles and stucco painting, are found. Other than the main building, the five accessory buildings within the site carry less architectural merits.

Although there are a few other buildings of similar design in Hong Kong, the magistracy can be considered as a rarity. From close inspection, only superficial alterations appear to have been made to the building so that its historical significance and architectural integrity have not been impaired.

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

This building is a visual landmark recognised by the local community. As a court building for several decades, it has been significant in witnessing the judicial development of Hong Kong, and is strongly associated with law and order in the “collective memory” of Hong Kong people. It does therefore have some social value, but as the magistracy building stands alone it cannot be said to have group value with other historic buildings.

***Social Value  
& Local  
Interest  
Group Value***