

Historic Building Appraisal

Man Ancestral Hall

Fan Tin Tsuen, San Tin, Yuen Long

The Man Ancestral Hall (文氏宗祠) in Fan Tin Tsuen (蕃田村), San Tin (新田) is the oldest ancestral hall of the Man (文) clan in Hong Kong. It is managed by the clan's trust known as Tun Yu Tong (惇裕堂), and serves as the main venue within which clan affairs are discussed. The Mans are the descendants of Man Tin-shui (文天瑞), a brother of Man Tin-cheung (文天祥) who was a renowned patriot fighting against the Mongols to protect the Song emperors in the late Southern Song (南宋, 1127-1279) dynasty. Man Sai-gor (文世歌, 1390 – 1457) moved from Tuen Mun (屯門) to San Tin during the Ming (明) dynasty, and is regarded as the founding ancestor (開基祖) of the Man clan there. As time passed, the lineage grew in size and established three *wai* (圍, literally walled village) and six *tsuen* (村, village).¹ The Mans then suffered as a result of the Coastal Evacuation Order (遷界令, 1662 – 1669), which was implemented during the Kangxi reign (康熙, 1662 – 1722) of the Qing (清) dynasty.² They were forced to leave their villages and move to the inland areas.³ The Mans returned to San Tin and rehabilitated their houses and villages after the evacuation order was repealed in 1669. According to the Man clan's genealogy, the Man Ancestral Hall was first built in 1444. Subsequent to the Coastal Evacuation Order, the ancestral hall was probably rehabilitated and built in the early eighteenth century.⁴

**Historical
Interest**

In about the 1930s, a study hall offering subjects on Chinese classics was operated in the ancestral hall. In 1941, the study hall was transformed into a primary school named Tun Yu School (惇裕學校),⁵ which offered modern subjects including geography and mathematics. In 1951, for instance, a headmaster and seven teachers were responsible for the daily operation of the

¹ Collectively referred to as three *wai* and six *tsuen* (三圍六村), they are Yan Shau Wai (仁壽圍), Tung Chan Wai (東鎮圍), Shek Wu Wai (石湖圍), Fan Tin Tsuen (蕃田村), Wing Ping Tsuen (永平村), On Lung Tsuen (安龍村), Tsing Lung Tsuen (青龍村), San Lung Tsuen (新龍村) and Chau Tau Tsuen (洲頭村). Yan Shau Wai is the first village established by the Mans in San Tin and the only *wai* having enclosing walls.

² The Coastal Evacuation Order was a scorched earth policy that all buildings had to be torn down and farmlands abandoned.

³ The Dongguan District (東莞縣) was the major destination of the migrants. Hong Kong was in the Xin'an District (新安縣), and this district was incorporated into the Dongguan District after the implementation of the Coastal Evacuation Order.

⁴ 蕭國健,《清初遷海前後香港之社會變遷》(臺北市:臺灣商務印書館,1986),頁213及247(註58)。

⁵ A class photo taken at the Man Ancestral Hall in the thirty-seventh year of the Republican period (民國三十七年) shows the name of Tun Yu School (惇裕學校). In 1953, it was moved to the existing premises of Tun Yu School (惇裕學校). However, according to a plaque there, which marks the completion of the existing campus in 1953, the preceding school was also known as Tun Yu Public School (惇裕公立學校).

school. The cocklofts above the side bays of the front hall provided accommodation for two teachers.

In order to free up space for more students, the establishment of Tun Yu School in 1941 led to the relocation of the kitchen from the front hall to the annex block in the same year.⁶ According to the Mans, this annex block was originally used to store kitchenware, including eating utensils and large woks for the preparation of basin meals. Basin meals were prepared in the annex block by the Man clan families and later by the chefs from a restaurant, mainly for weddings, for the ritual of *dim dang* (點燈, literally meaning “lighting the lantern”) celebrating the birth of new baby boys in the previous year, and after sweeping the grave of Man Sai-gor.⁷ On school days, caretakers served the teachers with meals prepared there.⁸ This outbuilding also houses toilet facilities for the staff and students until the completion of the existing campus of Tun Yu School in 1953.

The stone plaque above the main entrance is engraved with the name of the ancestral hall. The building is of a Qing vernacular design on a plan of two halls and three bays, with an open courtyard between the two halls in the middle bay, and a side chamber on either side of the courtyard. At the main entrance, the two raised platforms on either side, the columns supporting the roof, the doorframes of the main entrance and screen door, and the paving outside are all made of granite. The grey brickwork of the facade sits on a foundation of granite blocks. The main ridge of the pitched roof is decorated with a pair of glazed ceramic dragon fish known as *aoyus* (鰲魚), together with plaster mouldings of a dragon, a unicorn, and a set of geometric patterned elements. The wood carvings of the fascia boards and wall murals feature traditional motifs, such as auspicious flowers and plants. In the interior of the building, granite columns, steps and paving are retained. Rows of the Man ancestors’ soul tablets are enshrined on the altar in the middle bay of the main

**Architectural
Merit**

⁶ The school continued to operate during the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945). Man Ping-hei, the manager of the Man Ancestral Hall, was admitted to the school sometime between 1941 and 1942. He recalled that there were altogether about 80 students from Primary 1 to 6, with about 13 students for each level. Moreover, lessons were conducted from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with a one-hour lunch break from 1:00 p.m. He finished his six years of primary education there.

⁷ In order to celebrate the birth of new baby boys in the previous year, lanterns, each representing a baby boy, will be hung in this ancestral hall for eleven days from the ninth to the nineteenth days of first lunar month (lantern is pronounced as *dang* (燈) in Cantonese, which is similar to *ding* (丁), meaning “male descendant”), during which the respective families of the baby boys will also organise basin meal banquets locally known as “*ding* banquets” (丁酒) there on different days. Besides, every year the Mans worship at the grave of Man Sai-gor in Tuen Mun on the sixteenth day of the ninth lunar month. A basin meal banquet will be organised in the ancestral hall after grave sweeping.

⁸ The teachers and students would respectively have lunch at the ancestral hall and at home. The caretakers would prepare dishes at the annex block.

hall. The traces of a former stove are identifiable on the grey-brick wall in the side chamber on the right-hand side of the open courtyard.

The Man Ancestral Hall is connected to the annex block by an alley. There were three gateways in the alley in order to restrict access to the kitchen. Today, some surviving elements of two gateways can be identified, including stone thresholds and headers with square and circular slots. The gable walls of the annex block are built of grey bricks identical to those used at the ancestral hall in size. Those walls lend support to the roof structure comprising a tile roof and timber rafters and purlins, demonstrating the original form of the building. This annex block was partitioned into a kitchen and a toilet, and the former contains a set of historic stove and smoke flue built of grey brickwork.

The major function of the ancestral hall has been for ancestral worship, especially during Chinese New Year and the Spring and Autumn Sacrificial Rites (春秋二祭). The ritual of *dim dang* is still held in the hall, which involves the lighting of lanterns for new baby boys born in the previous year. Basin meal banquets are organised at the ancestral hall mainly for weddings, for the ritual of *dim dang*, and after sweeping the grave of Man Sai-gor, for instance.⁹ The annex block used for preparing basin meal banquets in the past also constituted an essential component of the ancestral hall in terms of the social function it performed.

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

The Man Ancestral Hall has group value with other historical ancestral halls in Fan Tin Tsuen, namely Man Lun Fung Ancestral Hall (麟峯文公祠, Declared Monument), Man Sun Ye Ancestral Hall (莘野文公祠) and Ming Yuen Tong (明遠堂) (both Grade 2).¹⁰

Group Value

The Man Ancestral Hall in San Tin has very high built heritage value. Over the years, the Mans in San Tin grew to be one of the most prominent clans in Hong Kong. They have established three *wai* and six *tsuen*, and built five ancestral halls comprising this main hall for the whole clan and four family halls for different branches of descendants. Although parts of its roof structure have been renovated using concrete, it is still a rare piece of built heritage. As the oldest and the most significant ancestral hall of the Man clan

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

⁹ According to the oral history interviews with the Mans by the Antiquities and Monuments Office on 22 May 2020, some one hundred tables of basin meal are served at the ancestral hall, and the forecourt and car park in front of the hall on the night after Man Sai-gor's grave is swept.

¹⁰ Ming Tak Tong (明德堂) was rebuilt in 1972 – 1973.

in Hong Kong, it has borne witness to the historical development of San Tin and the settlement of the Mans there. Moreover, as the main ancestral hall of the clan, it is still the most important focal point for traditional rites and customs, both for the Mans staying in Hong Kong and those living overseas. Besides, the building exhibits a variety of decorative features, such as wood carvings, wall murals and plaster mouldings that display delicate craftsmanship. No major alteration has been carried out to the annex block, which thus retains a high degree of authenticity in terms of building form and materials.

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