

Historic Building Appraisal
Front Block, Chinese Rhenish Church, Hong Kong
No. 86A Bonham Road, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

The front block of the Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong (中華基督教禮賢會香港堂) was built in 1914 by the German Rhenish Mission (禮賢差會). It is one of the very few churches in Hong Kong with German mission background. The name of the Church was originated from the location of its headquarters situated near to the River Rhine in Germany (德國萊茵河區). *Historical Interest*

The founding of the Church was connected with the activities of a German missionary Karl Friedrich August Gutzlaff (郭士立) (1803-1851). He was a Lutheran missionary, whose knowledge of several Chinese dialects made him a valued interpreter, magistrate, assistant secretary of Chinese affairs, and chief secretary to the Governor of Hong Kong. The present Gutzlaff Street (吉士笠街) in Central & Western District was named after him.

The Church was detached from the German Rhenish Mission in 1914 due to the First World War, when the Mission could hardly have resources to manage the Church in Hong Kong. It became a self-sufficient church in 1918. After the War, the Church set up a preaching group in Wing On Department Store, Sincere Department Store, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Nethersole Hospital. It was also added to the List of Place licensed for the solemnization of marriages. During the Second World War, due to its connection to Germany (one of the three major Axis powers), the Church was allowed to provide Sunday worship.

The oldest part of the Church is the front block which has a chapel on the first floor and a subsidiary hall, activity rooms and offices on the ground floor. The four-storey middle block is a plain rectangular block with plain walls featuring regular bands of windows and an extended portico of three projecting pointed arches of reinforced concrete shell construction. It was built on to the front block in 1979. The rear block is a separate building, and was rebuilt in 2004. *Architectural Merit*

The design of the front block can be described as Modern Eclectic with Gothic overtones. The front facade facing Bonham Road forms a gable end to the pitched roof of the building. The main features are a porch or portico and a bellcote at the apex. The balcony above the porch is accessible where an old bell inscribed in the year of 1903 is situated. Pointed arches are featured. The north-east and the south-west facades are most interesting compositions being divided into regular bays

of segmental arched and flat topped windows by projecting piers of columns.¹

Its unusual name, German beginnings, subsequent continuing connections with its parental body in Germany up to the present give it significance. Renovations were carried out in 1921, 1929, 1935, 1947 and 1964 respectively. From 1977 to 1979, there was a great expansion of the Church: the number of seats in the chapel was increased, while the depth of the sanctuary was extended. The authenticity of the front block has been compromised by the renovation in 2008, in which the building was renovated with modern materials, including modern mosaic tiles.

**Rarity &
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

In addition to its religious contribution, the Chinese Rhenish Church has played an important role in the educational development of Hong Kong. It has provided school and kindergarten services since its beginnings. Historical photographs, archival materials, souvenirs and relics, such as a hand-carved wall-hung wooden board of worship procedures (崇拜程序牌), are on display in the Church's showroom (教會文物展覽室). Other historic items of interest include, for instance, a commemorative board presented by a Wong (王) family and in the calligraphy of Chinese scholar Jian Qinshi (簡琴石) dated 1914, and a cup for the ritual of baptism dated 1929.

**Social Value &
Local Interest**

The Church has certain group value with other religious buildings and schools of historical value in the area, including Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Kau Yan Church (香港崇真會救恩堂) (Grade 1), King's College (英皇書院) (Declared Monument) in opposite to it, the Main Building of St. Stephen's Girls' College (聖士提反女子中學主樓) (Declared Monument), as well as other declared monuments, namely Main Building (主樓), Hung Hing Ying Building (孔慶熒樓), Tang Chi Ngong Building (鄧志昂樓), Fung Ping Shan Building (馮平山樓), May Hall (梅堂) and Eliot Hall (儀禮堂) at the adjacent University of Hong Kong complex.

Group Value

¹ Some may think that the composition of the facades was derived from a 1902 design for a factory for the wallpaper manufacturers A. Sanderson & Sons of Chiswick, London by the Arts and Crafts architect C.F.A. Voysey. The capitals to the columns were a feature Voysey copied from the architect A.H. Mackmurdo and later picked up by C.R. Mackintosh of the Glasgow School of Art. The architects of the front block, Harker & Rosser, may well have been influenced by the work of the three architects mentioned above.

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