

Historic Building Appraisal

Ng Chun Nunnery

Lower Keung Shan, Lantau

Ng Chun Nunnery (悟真) in Lower Keung Shan (下羌山) of Lantau is a *Historical Interest* private Buddhist nunnery founded in 1927 by a nun named Jing Che (靜徹), a student of the famous abbot of Po Lin Monastery (寶蓮禪寺), Monk Fa Ke (筏可法師). The nunnery is dedicated to Kwun Yam (觀音) and Three Treasure Buddhas (三寶佛). The Buddhist term 'Three Treasures' (三寶) is originated from Sanskrit's *Triratna* which means *Buddha* (佛, the Buddha), *Dharma* (法, the Law) and *Sangha* (僧, the Order). Three Treasures Buddha (三寶佛) refers to three Buddhist images placing in the main hall of a monastery or a nunnery. The centre one is Sakyamuni (釋迦牟尼), on his left is Bhaisajya (藥師) and on his right is Amitabha (阿彌陀).

The nun named Jing Che was a Bhiksuni (比丘尼) who had finished her second act of ordination. It is said that she saw a red light coming out from a wood in Keung Shan and she realized that it was the Buddhist light. She then bought that piece of land and built a nunnery on it. The nunnery was built with red bricks and painted red to meet with the occurrence of the red Buddhist light. It was renovated and expanded in 1949 by a Buddhist devotee called Zhang De Neng (張德能). The name Ng Chun, 悟真, literally means the awakening of Buddhist truth. The nunnery is also called Red House (紅屋) and Ng Chun Red House (悟真紅屋).

Located in a levelled terrace, the nunnery main building is a two-storey *Architectural Merit* building of Qing (清) vernacular design having a rectangular plan of three bays. It is constructed of bricks with its walls to support its flush gable pitched roof of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. It is a symmetrical building with its entrance at the middle bay. The right bay has another entrance. The ground floor hall has an altar with the statues of the deities and rows of paper Wang Sheng Pais (往生牌) for worship. The other parts of the building are for residential use. The front façade of the building is painted red whilst the rest in yellow. Above the doorway is the name of the nunnery written on a board. A couplet is on the doorframe. Wall friezes under the eave are with paintings of figures and birds and calligraphy. Two western style pediments are above the side entrances.

Together with other nunneries in Lower Keung Shan, Po Lin Shut (寶蓮室, *Rarity* erected in 1916), Chi Chuk Lam (紫竹林, erected in 1918) and Ling Yan Monastery (靈隱寺, erected in 1928), it is one of the Buddhist establishments to

remind the development of Buddhism in the area.

It has some built heritage value.

***Built Heritage
Value &***

In the 1940s the building underwent several typhoon attacks; however, the nunnery was still kept standing, allegedly protected by the might of Buddha. Renovation and expansion work was carried in 1949.

Authenticity

The nunnery was much patronized by devotees in the 1950-60s especially at the Kwun Yam Festivals (觀音誕) on the 19th of the second, sixth, ninth and eleventh lunar months respectively for her birth, ordination, deification and assumption and the Festival of Bathing Buddha (浴佛節) on the 8th of the fourth lunar month. Vegetarian banquets were served on the courtyard of the nunnery. The nunnery is with occasional devotees only.

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

Ng Chun Nunnery is a local vernacular that reflects the old building construction customs on Lantau. It is a typical part in Lantau's original culture. However, its extensive use of fine brickwork makes it outstanding from the other similar vernacular buildings that are built by locally mined granite. It blends nicely with the remote rural environment that is full of trees. A simple Art Deco style entrance gateway guards the nunnery down the slope. The Chi Chuk Lam (紫竹林) and Po Lin Shut (寶蓮室) are the other religious historic buildings neighbouring.

Group Value

It is considered that the question of adaptive re-use does not arise at the present time.

***Adaptive
Re-use***