

Historic Building Appraisal

Man Fat Tsz - Man Fat Din

Pai Tau Hang, Sha Tin

Man Fat Tsz (萬佛寺) in Pai Tau Hang (排頭坑) in Pai Tau Hang (排頭坑) *Historical Interest* of Sha Tin was founded in 1949 by a Master Yuet Kai (月溪大師, 1879-1965). Covering over eight hectares of land, the monastery was completed in 1957 and open to the public. The site had a Kwun Yam temple (觀音殿) in the 1930s which nun was killed in the Second World War. The site was acquired by a Dr. Kan Yuk-kai (簡玉階), the owner of the South Brother Tobacconist Company (南方兄弟煙草公司). He was a devotee of Buddhism who named it as Hui Szu Yuan (晦思園) and planned to use it for Buddhist practice. He met the Buddhist master and donated the land to him for the erection of a Buddhist college. The college was not built however but a monastery instead. Master Yuet Kai became a monk after graduated from the Aurora University (震旦大學) and travelled around China preaching Buddhism. He came to Hong Kong in 1933 and stayed in the Hsi Lin Temple (西林寺), a famous Buddhist institution at that time. He returned after the War and started to construct the temple of ten thousand Buddha statues in 1951. The 8-inch statues were made of clay of different postures made by 12 craftsmen from Shanghai taking ten years to complete. The monastery has since become a popular tourist attraction. Around 12,800 of statues are in the temple which cost was from contributions of the worshippers.

The monastery is divided into two portions. The upper one includes the Kwun Yam Temple and others dedicated to both Buddhist and Taoist gods. The lower one houses the main temple, a pagoda, the Vitasoka Pavilion (韋馱亭) and other facilities. *Architectural Merit*

The Man Fat Din (萬佛殿) is at one end of the central axis of the lower portion in an open terrace. The building is a one-hall building of very high ceiling. A verandah is right in front of the entrance accessed through a flight of low staircases. The altar in the centre houses the Buddha of Medicine (藥師佛), Kwun Yam and the Kshitigarbha (地藏王). A statue of the Abbot Yuet Kai is placed in front of the statues of the three Buddhas. The small statues are displayed on the three sides of the internal walls. The building is constructed of concrete of modern style having its walls, beams and columns to support a height of three storeys. It is a flat-roof structure having two rows of four windows on its front façade with two big Chinese characters “萬佛” (Ten Thousand Buddhas) in the middle. Its front and side elevations are painted in white whilst its rear

elevation in orange. The balustrade of the verandah is decorated with 12 gilded Chinese animals.

It is the only Buddhist temple with such an amount of Buddhist statues in Hong Kong of high rarity. *Rarity*

It is of high built heritage value.

Built Heritage Value

The building was renovated in 1982, 1997 and 2005. The 2005 renovation has undermined its authenticity. *Authenticity*

It has group value with other buildings and structures in the monastery.

Group Value

The monastery became less popular after the death of Abbot Yuet Kai in 1965 and because of the disruption made by the Sha Tin development construction work of its surrounding in the 1970s. The management work of the monastery has been made by Yuet Kai's nephews. The monastery was seriously damaged by a landslide due to heavy rainfall. The Kwun Yam (觀音) and the Gods of Heaven temples in the upper portion were damaged. The buildings in the lower portion were repaired and open to the public in 1999 leaving the upper portion buildings to be repaired.

Social Value, & Local Interest