

Historic Building Appraisal
Nga Tsin Wai Village, Entrance Gate,
Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon

The Nga Tsin Wai Entrance Gate was built in **1724**. Nga Tsin Wai (衙前圍) *Historical Interest* literally means “a walled village in front of a yamen [office of a local bureaucrat]”. This place name suggests that the village must have been in the vicinity of a yamen. Indeed, the Kowloon area has other place names referring to a yamen, for example, Nga Tsin Long (衙前壟, literally, “fields in front of a yamen”) immediately south of Kowloon City, and Nga Yau Tau (衙右頭, literally, “The right-hand side of a yamen”) in the upper end of Ma Tau Wai. Both of the places are very close to Nga Tsin Wai.

There is a saying that the village of Nga Tsin Wai was founded by three men who came to the area with the exiled Song Dynasty boy emperor Bing (宋帝昺) (1271-1279). One, Ng Shing-tat (吳成達) was a civil official, another, Chan Chiu-in (陳朝賢) was a military official, and the third, Li Shing-kwai (李成規) was also attached to the Song court in some capacity. When the boy emperor fell in 1279, the three men jointly established the village. The village was rebuilt in 1724 after the Coastal Evacuation in early Qing Dynasty.

Originally, the inhabitants lived scattered through the area, but, in 1724, a group of them built a walled village and came together to live inside the walls to defend themselves against bandits and pirate attack, whilst some preferred to settle elsewhere in the surrounding area. Later on, branches of the clans moved out of the area to Siu Lek Yuen in Sha Tin (沙田小瀝源), Tseung Kwan O (將軍澳) and Lamma Island (南丫島). Over time, most of the members of the Chan and Li clans moved out, and the village becomes almost entirely resided in by the Ngs.

Nga Tsin Wai was the head village of an inter-village alliance known as the Alliance of Seven in Kowloon (九龍七約) which was formed with the villages nearby for mutual defence against outside attack. This alliance in fact comprised nine villages, not seven. The reason for this is that originally the alliance was not of seven villages, but of seven *baojia* (保甲, a system of collective neighbourhood defence). Several of the villages included in the alliance are very tiny, and would certainly have been combined for *baojia* purposes with other, larger villages nearby. Nowadays, all the alliance member villages except Nga Tsin Wai had been cleared.

The construction of Nga Tsin Wai follows the traditional Chinese walled village layout. It consisted of a rectangular, almost square, walled enclosure with two-storied watchtowers at the four corners and an entrance facing the east. The walls, which stood about 12 feet high, were of bricks with stone foundations. The Entrance Gate and the Tin Hau Temple are located at the western and eastern end of the central axis of the village. Nga Tsin Wai was bordered by a wide moat (between 30 and 35 feet wide) spanned by a bridge leading to the single gate, but the Kai Tak Nullah (啟德明渠) built in 1942 came so close to the village that the moat had to go – it was filled in with the debris from the construction of the new nullah.

**Architectural
Merit**

The Entrance Gate is a one-hall two-storey structure with brick walls supporting its flat roofs of reinforced concrete. The doorway of the entrance is rectangular whilst its internal one is arched. The gate on top is embedded with a stone tablet with characters in Chinese “慶有餘” (Hing Yau Yu, literally, “celebration of over-abundance”). There is a niche housing the Earth God (土地) within the Entrance Gate. The original gun-chamber above the gate has been turned into the office of Nga Tsin Wai Rural Committee (衙前圍鄉事委員會).

The Entrance Gate is an item of built heritage value. There are other entrance gates in Hong Kong in this architectural style, but this one is unique in its history related to Nga Tsin Wai, which is the only remaining walled village in Hong Kong’s urban area. The original gun-chamber on the upper part of the Gate has undergone alterations.

**Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

Presently, the original village layout of Nga Tsin Wai including the lane pattern is retained. However, the watchtowers were demolished and the moats were filled up. Most of the original village houses are gone and the remaining ones are dilapidated.

The Entrance Gate is of social value to the village dwellers. It was the only access to the village in the past and it provided protection to the village at times of crisis. The villagers closed and barred their gates against the attacks in 1854 and 1967 respectively, in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion and the leftist inspired riots.

**Social Value
& Local
Interest**

The Entrance Gate has group value with other old buildings in its environs, such as the Tin Hau Temple of the village and the Ng Ancestral Hall.

Group Value