

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**Nga Tsin Wai Village, Tin Hau Temple,**  
**Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon**

The Nga Tsin Wai Tin Hau Temple was built **before 1732**. Nga Tsin Wai (衙前圍) 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. *Historical Interest*

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 Gatehouse 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.

The Tin Hau Temple was built before 1732 when a once-in-ten-year ritual called Dajiao (打醮) was held in Nga Tsin Wai. In 1948, the villagers undertook a full-scale renovation of this temple in thanksgiving for the favours shown them by the goddess during the years of wartime hardship. The temple is a small traditional Chinese style vernacular building of a one-hall plan. Its pitched roof is covered with yellow ceramic glazed tiles. The front wall façade is with yellow ceramic tiles and newly installed ceramic tile paintings of legendary story of the Eight Immortals (八仙). The main ridge is with vertical geometric mouldings topped with two aoyus (鰲魚) and a pearl in the middle. Above the doorway of the recessed entrance is the name board of the temple.

There are other Tin Hau temples 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. Plastering, false brick patterns and concrete columns added have affected the authenticity of the historic building.

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 Tin Hau Temple was owned by all three of the Nga Tsin Wai clans, and the temple manager, chosen by the elders of the three clans, is the village headman. The inhabitants of the Alliance of Seven in Kowloon (九龍七約) did worship the Nga Tsin Wai Tin Hau on her birthday each year: it is likely that this was the ritual focus of the Alliance. The Temple therefore performed the function of consolidating the three clans living in Ngai Tsin Wai and the nearby villages.

**Architectural  
Merit**

**Rarity ,  
Built Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity**

**Social Value  
& Local  
Interest**

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