

Historic Building Appraisal

Former building of Yuen Long Public Middle School, No. 3 Yau Shin Street, Au Tau, Yuen Long, N.T.

A milestone in Hong Kong's educational annals was marked in September 1950 when Yuen Long Public Middle School (元朗公立中學) was officially opened as the **first** government secondary school in the New Territories. Witnessing the ceremony was a gathering of VIPs, including T.R. Rowell, Director of Education, Sir Christopher Cox, Advisor on Education to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Kenneth Keen, District Commissioner, Dr Irene Cheng (何艾齡), Inspector of Vernacular Schools, Mr C.K. Chau (周湛光), Chairman of the TWGHs, and many others. The Yuen Long Public Middle School stood from 1949 to 1989 on the site now occupied by TWGHs C.Y. Ma Memorial College (東華三院馬振玉紀念中學).

**Historical
Interest**

A plan to set up a middle school in Yuen Long had emerged in 1936 but it was disrupted due to the Japanese occupation. Shortly after World War II, the village elders expressed their concern at the lack of good secondary education in the form of middle schools in their district. At that time, Government was in a short supply of funding to erect new school buildings. To show in a practical manner their great desire that their children would have better opportunities, the village elders took the lead to subscribe funds to form a school under difficult circumstances, which they did in 1946. The school during its infancy was set up in temporary premises in what is now the Pok Oi Hospital (博愛醫院).

After discussion with villagers such as Tang Pak-kau (鄧伯裘) and Chiu Lut-sau (趙聿修), the government officials were impressed with the keenness and enthusiasm for educational provision which the villagers showed, and the sincerity with which they put forward their claims for a permanent campus. In consequence, Government approved provision of a junior middle (vernacular secondary) school to be paid for on a 'dollar-to-dollar' basis. The *kaifongs* of Yuen Long subscribed \$100,000 towards the provision of the School building, whilst Government provided ground (i.e. the land of the former Au Tau Police Station with a size of 200,000 square metres) and a further \$100,000 which was almost half of the cost of HK\$210,000.

Yuen Long Public Middle School is proud to have set the precedent of the 'dollar-for-dollar' subsidy basis for erecting schools at the other villages. Recalling the many difficulties encountered before the School project was approved, Mr T.R. Rowell (Director of Education) regarded the efforts leading to the foundation of the School as an example of "co-operative spirit" between Government and the people of Yuen Long. This succeeded in stimulating other areas to follow the example set in Yuen Long, and, up to September 1950 at least five schools were being erected on a 'dollar-for-dollar' basis.

When the construction of the School was completed in late 1949, the Education Department took over the School, but in view of the plea from the community and the public support to the ‘dollar-for-dollar’ subsidy basis for erecting the permanent campus, the School was allowed to retain its original name “Public School” (公立學校) and to form a board of directors responsible for its management, which was unprecedented and unique for a government school. The board of directors was formed by community leaders who were in the forefront of the drive for funds to erect the School, who also played their part on the School Advisory Committee and on the Parent-teacher Association.

Original plans had 14 classrooms for the School, but lack of funds enabled only eight to be started. When the School was opened, it was a T-shaped building. The initial enrolment was 160 and classes were all in the Junior Middle Section. In early 1952, plan for two extensions at the north and south of the campus, with three classrooms each side, was approved by the Education Department, and their construction started in November 1952 and was completed in April 1953. The funding was half supported by the Government and half supported by donation. By October 1952 it became a fully middle school with all six levels from Junior Middle 1 to Senior Middle 3, with the number of students more than 200.

The School was proud of the fact that it has been serving the community in many other ways besides fulfilling its normal function as a school. Indeed, the School’s fortunate possession of a hall and a large playground made it a popular choice of other schools and groups to hold their activities. Its premises were always available for scouting activities and the inter-school art exhibitions (聯校藝術品展覽會). Since its inception in the 1950s, the annual Agricultural Shows (農展會) was held in the grounds of the School. A big and carnival event for the Hong Kong farmers, the Agricultural Show was officially opened by the Hong Kong Governor. To give one more example, the Police Department in conjunction with the District Office (Yuen Long) and the Social Welfare Department held a party for the under-privileged children of the New Territories at the school premises in the afternoon of 4 March 1962.

In 1989, Yuen Long Public Middle School was relocated to its new campus at Town Park Road South. The campus in Au Tau was allocated to Tin Shui Wai Government Secondary School (天水圍官立中學) from 1990 to 1993 as its temporary campus before it moved to a permanent campus at Tin Yiu Estate. In 1994 the campus was granted to T.W.G.Hs. C.Y. Ma Charity Fund Practical School (東華三院馬振玉慈善基金實用學校), renamed as T.W.G.Hs. C.Y. Ma Memorial College (東華三院馬振玉紀念中學) in 2001.

The School campus was designed by Chau & Lee Architects (周李建築師樓) and it took two years for its construction. The original plan of the school

**Architectural
Merit**

was T-shaped, but with the addition of the north and south extensions in 1953 the plan was changed to an E-shaped and more collegiate in character. The school is a series of single-story colonnaded spatial enclosures around open courtyards. The entrance frontage is in Chinese temple style flanked by colonnaded classroom wings also in Chinese style. The original School Hall now houses the library, music room, study room and social worker room. This part of the school is also in Chinese style. Chinese architectural features include vermillion coloured columns, beams, lintels, architraves, brackets, geometric patterned friezes, octagonal shaped windows, Chinese tiled roofs and open balustrade verandahs.

At the lintel of the front entrance is a marble plaque erected in autumn 1949 to commemorate the school building's completion. Engraved on the plaque are Chinese characters “百年樹人” (meaning “It takes 100 years to rear people”) written by a famous calligrapher and intellectual Shum Kwong-yuet (岑光樾) (1876-1960), who was one of those Qing officials promoted from the last Imperial Civil Examination in 1904.

The School is the first government secondary school in the New Territories. Its architectural style is quite rare for schools in Hong Kong. Inevitably, over the years, there have been alterations, e.g. the original tiled roofs have been replaced with modern profiled metal sheeting, toilets have been modernized, and windows replaced with aluminum units, but in spite of this the School retains its basic footprint and its essentially Chinese appearance.

**Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

The School fulfilled an important function in the education of girls; in the financial year 1950-51, 107 boys and 66 girls were enrolled. It has maintained a high standard of achievement, academically and otherwise. It put as much stress on teaching English although it took Chinese as the language of instruction. It records, not without pride, that in the 1960 Inter-School Story Telling Contest sponsored by the Rotary Club of H.K. Island West and Chinese YMCA, a senior middle I student from it won the Second Prize (English Section).

**Social Value
& Local
Interest**

After graduation, many students pursued post-secondary studies abroad or in Hong Kong. Exemplary alumnus of the earlier years who have filled leading positions in the community include Dr Tang Siu-tong (鄧兆棠) who needs no introduction to anybody in Hong Kong who is at all interested in public affairs.

The School campus is near to Pun Uk (潘屋) (Grade 1) at Au Tau. With a short driving distance to the west, one can arrive at the historic Yuen Long Old Market (元朗舊墟). With a short driving distance to the east, one can arrive at Kat Hing Wai (吉慶圍) (Grade 1) and many other Kam Tin heritage items.

Group Value