

Historic Building Appraisal
Sung Ming School
Tan Ka Wan, Tai Po, N.T.

Sung Ming School (崇明學校) is located at the centre of Tan Ka Wan (蛋家灣) in the northern part of Sai Kung Peninsula and is affiliated with St. Peter's Chapel which is situated on a small hill about a hundred metres away from the school.

*Historical
Interest*

As early as the 1860s, Catholicism had taken root in Tan Ka Wan. In 1865, when Rev. Simone VOLONTERI (和神父, 1831–1904) and Rev. Gaetano ORIGO (柯神父, 1835–1868) first went to the villages of Sai Kung to preach, they passed through Tan Ka Wan. The Map of San On County (新安縣全圖), drawn by Rev. VOLONTERI in 1866, shows the name and location of Tan Ka Wan, an evidence that missionaries had visited there.

In 1872, Bishop Raimondi TIMOLEONE (高主教, 1827–1894) visited and set up a missionary station in Tan Ka Wan, where there were already 16 Catholics. The first chapel, St. Peter's Chapel, was built in Tan Ka Wan in 1873, but was seriously damaged by typhoon in 1874. In 1908, the Catholic Diocese signed a land agreement with the Hong Kong government to exchange the land on DD 271 Lot 6, where the first St. Peter's Chapel was located, for another piece of land on Lot 366. In the same year a new chapel was built on the hill of this new land lot, which is the current location of the existing chapel.

The missionaries also established a school in Tan Ka Wan for providing education to children, while at the same time preaching the Catholic faith. It is uncertain when the school building was built, but a government record from the year 1957 reveals that the school had been in existence for about 60 years, thus implying that the old Sung Ming School was established in the 1890s. In 1959, because the old Sung Ming School building was in danger of collapse, a new school was built in its present location with subsidies from the government.

In the 1960s, due to the decline of farming and fishing, the population of Tan Ka Wan decreased. Most of the villagers moved to the urban areas or migrated abroad. A government record shows that only four families were still residing at Tan Ka Wan in 1966 and only three children were attending Sung Ming School. St. Peter's Chapel gradually fell into disrepair in the 1960s, while Sung Ming School was discontinued in 1967.

During the late 1970s to the 1990s, Rev. Paul Yee Tseng WAN (溫以政神父) held masses at the vacant Sung Ming School, as St. Peter's Chapel was so dilapidated that it was no longer suitable to serve as a place of worship. In the early 1980s, Rev. Paul WAN was assigned by the then Bishop John Cheng Chung WU (胡振中主教, 1925–2002) to convert the abandoned chapels and schools in Sai Kung to Catholic camps. Sung Ming School was one of these and was renovated as a clubhouse named “天主教會所” (Catholic Church Clubhouse) for

the use of Catholic believers, but it subsequently ceased operation in the late 1990s.

In 1984, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (基督教信義會芬蘭差會) established a gospel rehabilitation centre at Tan Ka Wan to assist drug addicts. St. Peter's Chapel was rebuilt and leased to the Mission in 1997 as a place of worship and rehabilitation centre, named Ling Oi Centre (靈愛戒毒中心). In 2019, a Diocesan Working Committee named "Following Thy Way" (教區「古道行」工作小組)¹ took over the chapel, and renovations to both the chapel and its affiliated school were completed in 2021.

The existing Sung Ming School building was completed in 1959 by the Public Works Department. According to the 1957 building plans, it adopted a one-classroom school layout. A latrine is located at the rear of the school with four cubicles and a low wall in front, which is now disused.

*Architectural
Merit*

The school building has a simple rectangular form with a pitched roof. The roof is extended at the front to form a verandah area. Above the entrance is a painted sign giving the name of the school in Chinese "崇明學校" (Sung Ming School) reading from right to left, while above the middle window is a wooden plaque with the Chinese characters "天主教會所" (Catholic Church Clubhouse), and above this is a crucifix. The school design is rather functional.

According to available records, the existing Sung Ming School was built with stone walls with a concrete foundation. The roof was originally covered with corrugated asbestos roofing, laid on hardwood roof structures including two king post trusses. The whole roof has been replaced by modern roofing materials, such as metal and insulation sheets, during a recent renovation. Hardwood fascia boards are installed along the roof eaves. The metal windows and hardwood entrance door, which were originally installed, were replaced by glass louvres and an aluminium door in the recent renovation. The metal security bars on the exterior are believed to be from earlier days. In the interior, mosaic flooring tiles are laid out in a plaid pattern.

Sung Ming School retains little authenticity in terms of the building structure, namely the structural walls, but with different interventions to the building fabric over time. It first underwent renovation in the 1980s when it was converted into a clubhouse. At this time, a kitchen and a toilet were added to the interior of the building.

*Rarity,
Built
Heritage
Value,
Authenticity*

In the recent renovation carried out by the Diocesan Working Committee, "Following Thy Way", in 2021, the original asbestos roof was replaced with metal and insulation sheets and the wooden entrance door was replaced with an aluminium door. All the deteriorated interior windows were replaced. The interior was further renovated with air conditioners and new lighting installed.

¹ The Diocesan Working Committee, "Following Thy Way", was established on 1 January 2018 under the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. It is mainly responsible for the restoration, conservation and management of the historic chapels of the Diocese on the Sai Kung Peninsula.

The plaque with the name “天主教會所” (Catholic Church Clubhouse), depicting its most recent previous function, is still visible on the façade of the building, and it is believed to be the only Catholic building in Hong Kong named “clubhouse”.

Sung Ming School is tangible testimony to the work of Catholic evangelisation in Sai Kung in the late nineteenth century. It shows the Catholic missions in providing education to the children in rural Hakka villages as a means of preaching the Gospel. In addition to following the regular school curriculum, the students also engaged in scouting activities, as evidenced by a group photo of the 1930s, featuring Bishop Enrico VALTORTA, (恩理覺主教, 1883–1951) and the Sung Ming School Band dressed in scout uniform, taken in front of an unknown chapel.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

According to the oral account of a villager, who studied in Sung Ming School in the late 1940s, students learnt Chinese and English there and nuns would come to Tan Ka Wan once or twice a year to guide the villagers to read and understand the Bible. When the missionaries visited the village, the villagers were delighted and were in the habit of preparing meals for them, thus demonstrating the close relationship between the missionaries and the local villagers.

Although Sung Ming school has not performed its original role as a school since as long ago as the late 1960s, the building has served as a place of worship for Tan Ka Wan villagers since the 1970s. Subsequently, during the 1980s up to the late 1990s, it continued and even enhanced its usefulness by serving as a clubhouse for broader Catholic communities.

Together with the other surviving Catholic chapels in Sai Kung, Sung Ming School, an affiliated school of St. Peter’s Chapel, bears witness to the development of Catholic missions among the Hakka communities in Sai Kung. These chapels include St. Joseph’s Chapel (聖若瑟堂) at Yim Tin Tsai (鹽田仔) (Grade 2), Rosary Mission Centre (玫瑰小堂) at Wong Mo Ying (黃毛應) (Grade 2), Holy Family Chapel (聖家小堂) at Chek Keng (赤徑) (Grade 2), Immaculate Conception Chapel (聖母無原罪小堂) at Tai Long (大浪) (Grade 3), Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel (聖母無玷之心小堂) at Pak Sha O (白沙澳) (Grade 3), Nativity of Our Lady Chapel (聖母聖誕小堂) at Long Ke (浪茄) (Grade 3) and Chapel of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows (聖母七苦小堂) at Pak Tam Chung (北潭涌) (Grade 3).

Group Value

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