

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Pak Shing Hau Temple, Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, H.K.

Pak Shing Hau (北城侯), literally translated as “Marquess of the Northern City”, is an honorary title bestowed upon Lo Pan (魯班),<sup>1</sup> the patron deity of the construction industry. As its name suggests, the Pak Shing Hau Temple (北城侯廟), constructed in 1867 on Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, was originally dedicated to the worship of Lo Pan, and it is likely the oldest surviving temple in Hong Kong dedicated to him. *Historical Interest*

Both the Pak Shing Hau Temple and Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟) stand side by side on the same plot of land, i.e., Inland Lot 257 (I.L. 257), which was leased in 1847.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the site comprised a “Joss House (i.e., Hung Shing Temple), dwelling house, and buildings”.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Hung Shing Temple was the sole religious structure on the premises in its early years.<sup>4</sup> During a major renovation of Hung Shing Temple in 1867,<sup>5</sup> a new two-storey

<sup>1</sup> Born in 507 B.C. in the State of Lu (魯) (now Shandong (山東) province) during the Spring and Autumn period (春秋時代) (770-476 B.C.), Lo Pan, also known as Kungshu Pan (公輸班), was described as the most talented and skillful builder, carpenter and inventor in ancient China. In honour of his achievements, he was made the patron deity of the people working in the construction industry after his death and was further revered as Pak Shing Hau during the Yongle (永樂) reign (1403-1424) in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). See 〈魯班先師簡介〉, 香港魯班廣悅堂網頁, <https://www.lopan.org.hk/%e9%ad%af%e7%8f%ad%e5%85%88%e5%b8%ab%e6%ad%b7%e5%8f%b2%e7%b0%a1%e4%bb%8b/>, accessed on 24 July 2025.

<sup>2</sup> With reference to the land records, I.L. 257 was leased on 8 September 1847 for 75 years and the lessee is called “Le-fun-wei” (李寬威), a compradore. Since 1895, I.L. 257 had been in the possession of Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院). When the Government lease expired in 1922, a new lease was granted to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs as trustee for the Tung Wah Hospital. See HKRS193-20-4. “Land Register Volume C”, 26 September 1888 – 3 January 1931, Land Registry, Memorial No. UB73191, 16 January 1920, and Land Registry, Property Particulars of Inland Lot No. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Land Registry, Memorial No. UB3432, 13 April 1865.

<sup>4</sup> Located at Nos. 129-131 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, the Hung Shing Temple, alternatively referred to as Tai Wong Temple (大王廟), worships Hung Shing, the “God of South Sea”. According to the account of E.J. Eitel in 1895, the temple's origins predate British occupation. However, due to the lack of support from historical maps or documents, it is possible that the temple initially existed as a shrine. Research by Reverend Carl T. Smith further suggests the temple was likely erected between 1847 and 1852, as evidenced by a land lease in 1847 and a witness named Li Muy, identified as the “carer of the Joss House”, during a transfer of nearby building in 1852. In 1860, the temple underwent an extensive renovation that shaped the temple's current appearance. See Eitel, Ernest J. *Europe in China: The History of Hongkong from the Beginning to the Year 1882*. London: Luzac & Company., 1895, p. 190, and Smith, Carl T. “Notes on Chinese Temples in Hong Kong”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*. Vol. 13 (1973), p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Hung Shing Temple experienced another renovation in 1867 owing to its “ruinous and unsafe condition”. See CS/I018/00178023. “TEMPLE; WANCHAI”, 1867.

building, known as Pak Shing Hau Temple, was erected immediately to its west. The granite lintel above Pak Shing Hau Temple's entrance, inscribed with a date corresponding to the winter of the sixth year of the Tongzhi (同治) reign in the Qing Dynasty (1867), indicates that its construction was made possible through the collective contributions of merchants from across Hong Kong.<sup>6</sup>

Although the backgrounds of these merchants were not recorded on the granite lintel, it is believed that many donors were individuals from the construction industry,<sup>7</sup> who traditionally worshipped Lo Pan for his protection and guidance. Notably, even during earlier renovations of the neighbouring Hung Shing Temple, there was already a strong presence of followers from the construction sector in the area. One such contributor was Tai Un Shop (泰源石店),<sup>8</sup> a stone quarry firm located at “Queen's Road East, opposite the Eastern Market (下環街市)”,<sup>9</sup> which donated the granite decorations adorning Hung Shing Temple's front elevation.<sup>10</sup>

According to a 1903 newspaper account, Pak Shing Hau Temple was described as a “side chapel” of Hung Shing Temple, featuring altars on both the ground and upper floors, though the specific deities enshrined were not mentioned.<sup>11</sup> By 1979, however, the building was no longer referred to as Pak Shing Hau Temple, but as Shui Yuet Kung (水月宮). A wooden plaque inscribed with “望海觀音” had been mounted over the original granite lintel,

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<sup>6</sup> The inscriptions on the granite lintel at the entrance of Pak Shing Hau Temple reads “同治丁卯仲冬吉旦 北城侯廟 闔港眾商鼎建 潘平湖敬書”.

<sup>7</sup> The construction industry in Hong Kong is also referred to as *Sam Hong* (三行), which literally means “three trades” that encompasses carpentry, masonry and bricklaying. Today, the term *sam hong* is generally associated with the trades involved in the construction and renovation of buildings. See 〈魯班先師簡介〉, 香港魯班廣悅堂網頁, <https://www.lopan.org.hk/%e9%ad%af%e7%8f%ad%e5%85%88%e5%b8%ab%e6%ad%b7%e5%8f%b2%e7%b0%a1%e4%bb%8b/>, accessed on 24 July 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Owned by Tsang I (曾二), a stonecutter from Changle (長樂) county, Tai Un Shop was one of the active stone quarry firms in the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stone quarry farms in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon were let to the Tai Un Shop in 1880-1881 and in 1882 respectively. See “Notification No. 2.” *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 7 January 1880, and “Notification No. 6.” *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 7 January 1882.

<sup>9</sup> Established in 1858, the Eastern Market was situated near what is now Arsenal Street. Ibid and see 徐頌雯:《香港街市 — 日常建築裏的城市脈絡 (1842-1981)》, 香港: 香港中文大學出版社, 2022年, 頁27.

<sup>10</sup> The inscriptions on the prawn beams (蝦弓樑) at the front of Hung Shing Temple reads “咸豐拾年季夏吉立 泰源石店敬奉看樑獅子拱手掙角朝皆人物全副”.

<sup>11</sup> “A QUEEN'S ROAD JOSS-HOUSE”, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 9 December 1903.

signifying that Kwun Yam (觀音)<sup>12</sup> had become the principal deity. Meanwhile, the shrine dedicated to Lo Pan was relocated to the eastern side of the Hung Shing Temple.<sup>13</sup> This shift suggests that by the 1970s, or possibly earlier, Pak Shing Hau Temple had transitioned to the worship of Kwun Yam. The change was likely influenced by the evolution of local religious practices and the opening of Lo Pan Temple (魯班先師廟)<sup>14</sup> in Kennedy Town, which has hosted ceremonies honouring Lo Pan since its founding in 1888. That temple was established through donations from over a thousand builders and construction firms, reinforcing its role as the spiritual centre for the Industry. Over time, the original association of Pak Shing Hau Temple with Lo Pan gradually faded from public memory.

Following a maintenance project for Pak Shing Hau Temple in 2018, the granite lintel inscribed with “北城侯廟” was once again revealed, with the wooden plaque bearing “望海觀音” mounted above it.<sup>15</sup> Since then, the statue of Lo Pan has been reinstated within Pak Shing Hau Temple, positioned in front of the Kwun Yam statue.

As probably the first temple in Hong Kong dedicated to Lo Pan, Pak Shing Hau Temple not only reflects the early development of Lo Pan worship in

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<sup>12</sup> Originally a sacred horse in ancient Indian Brahmanism (婆羅門教), Kwun Yam, or Kwun Sai Yam (觀世音), was adopted by Buddhism as Kwun Sai Yam with a horse's head and later being depicted as a male figure. Upon Kwun Yum's introduction to China, the deity transformed into a female entity with 33 forms, listening to the pleas of the afflicted and rescuing them. See 周樹佳：《香港諸神：起源、廟宇與崇拜（全彩修訂版）》，香港：中華書局（香港）有限公司，2021年，頁102-103。

<sup>13</sup> Other deities observed in Pak Shing Hau Temple include Shing Wong (城隍) and Cheung Wong Ye (張王爺). See 〈香港灣仔之洪聖古廟〉，《華僑日報》，1979年2月1日。

<sup>14</sup> Located at No. 15 Ching Lin Terrace, Kennedy Town, Lo Pan Temple's construction was first commenced in 1884, completed in 1888 and rebuilt at the same site in 1928 with the support by builders and contractors in the region. The local construction sector has been following the tradition of celebrating Lo Pan's birthday on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the sixth lunar month every year at the temple. Its historical significance, along with its distinctive stepped gable walls as well as intricate murals, plaster mouldings, wood carvings and pottery decorations, have made it a well-recognised historic temple in Hong Kong dedicated to Lo Pan. Lo Pan Temple was declared a monument in 2024. See 〈兩座歷史建築列為法定古蹟（附圖）〉，香港特別行政區新聞公報網頁，2024年10月10日，<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202410/10/P2024101000190.htm?fontSize=1>，accessed on 13 August 2025.

<sup>15</sup> 〈書寫下環：灣仔的文化記憶〉，東華三院檔案及歷史文化辦公室網頁，2023年，<https://rho.tungwah.org.hk/content/files/feature-articles/%E6%9B%B8%E5%AF%AB%E4%B8%8B%E7%92%B0%E2%80%94%A3%E4%BB%94%E7%9A%84%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E8%A8%98%E6%86%B6%20lv10.pdf>，accessed on 18 July 2025.

the city but also serves as a testament to the evolving religious landscape of the Wan Chai district.

Architecturally, Pak Shing Hau Temple is a two-storey traditional vernacular building, backed by a single-storey warehouse and fronted by a flat-roofed projected verandah, an addition built in 1923.<sup>16</sup> Constructed with grey bricks, the main temple structure features a flush gable roof, while the warehouse is topped with a shed roof. Both roofs are supported by timber rafters and purlins, clad in traditional Chinese pan-and-roll tiles. As with many Chinese temples, the gable ridges of the main structure are adorned with *bogu* (博古) ends. Additionally, the east-facing gable wall frieze is decorated with plastered mouldings in a swirling pattern, and the rear elevation features two ventilation openings embellished with fruit motifs.

***Architectural  
Merit***

In contrast to the traditional Chinese architectural style of the main building structure, the projected verandah, built of reinforced concrete and supported by two square columns with moulded capitals, reflects early Art Deco influences from the 1920s. This is evident in the use of rectangular poles as balustrades for both the verandah and flat roof, an arched opening facing east, and geometric motifs flanking the roof balustrade. The juxtaposition of architectural elements from different eras vividly illustrates the evolution of architectural style and construction technologies in Hong Kong.

Entering through the granite-framed main entrance beneath the projected verandah leads to the ground floor main hall, where altars dedicated to Lo Pan, Kwun Yam, and other deities are enshrined. The hall is paved with Canton floor tiles, and to its right, a flight of granite steps ascends to a corridor that connects Pak Shing Hau Temple to Hung Shing Temple. This corridor, sheltered by a roof clad in Chinese pan-and-roll tiles, ends with a timber staircase that leads to the upper floor.

The upper floor, also laid with Canton floor tiles, houses a central altar dedicated to the Three Buddhas (三寶佛), facing the later-built verandah. An arched opening with French doors separates the main structure from the verandah, where Western architectural elements such as crafted ceiling

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<sup>16</sup> As revealed by the verandah undertaking signed on 18 January 1923, a projected verandah was erected before Pak Shing Hau Temple in replacing the original entrance porch that had a pitched cover laid with traditional Chinese pan-and-roll tiles and supported by two Tuscan columns as seen from the historic photo dated 1910s. See Land Registry, Memorial No. UB82589, 18 January 1923, and 鄭寶鴻：《香港歷史考察之旅：港島區》，香港：商務印書館（香港）有限公司，2019年，頁172.

mouldings, coloured cement floor tiles, and French doors behind the verandah balustrade are prominently featured. These features are not commonly found in Chinese temple settings, underscoring the distinctive architectural transformation of Pak Shing Hau Temple.

Since its completion in 1867, Pak Shing Hau Temple has undergone several design changes to its entrance porch. Among these, the addition of the verandah in 1923 led to the removal of the *bogu* ends at the front gable ridges and the decorative feature on the main ridge. Between the 1930s and 1950s, the verandah was enclosed, and the ball-shaped finials originally positioned at both ends of the roof balustrade disappeared between 1960 and 1975. Despite these alterations, the temple's eclectic blend of Chinese and Western architectural elements from different periods makes it a rare and distinguished structure in the area. Its historical role in the early development of Lo Pan worship further enhances its cultural significance.

***Authenticity & Rarity***

Beyond its architectural merit, Pak Shing Hau Temple has served as a vital religious site in the Wan Chai district for over 150 years, adapting to the evolving beliefs of the local community. Before 1997, the temple's upper floor provided space for residents to place soul tablets, ensuring their ancestors received proper offerings and fostering a strong community bond.<sup>17</sup> Since around 1931, soothsaying service was introduced, initially led by “玄真子” and “玄機子”, and later continued by “樂秋鳴” from 1995 onwards, serving the public to this day.<sup>18</sup>

***Social Value & Local Interest***

Together with the adjacent Hung Shing Temple (Grade 1), Yuk Hui Temple, Wan Chai (灣仔玉虛宮) (Declared Monument) and Nos. 72, 72A, 74, and 74A Stone Nullah Lane (石水渠街 72、72A、74 及 74A 號) (all Grade 1) (a portion of No.72 Stone Nullah Lane was the former site of Wah To Temple (華陀廟)), Pak Shing Hau Temple constitutes a significant group value that showcases the early development of Chinese religious traditions in the area and bears witness to the historical development of Wan Chai.

***Group Value***

Furthermore, Pak Shing Hau Temple also shares group value with Kwong Fook Tsz (廣福祠) (Grade 1), Tin Hau Temple and the adjoining buildings in Yau Ma Tei (油麻地天后古廟及其鄰接建築物) (Declared

<sup>17</sup> According to the information provided by Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs), there are currently around 285 soul tablets housed in Pak Shing Hau Temple and the nearby Hung Shing Temple; however, there is no record of when the practice of receiving soul tablets began. TWGHs, email correspondence with the Antiquities and Monuments Office, 23 July 2025.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Monument), Shui Yuet Temple, No. 90 Shan Tung Street (山東街 90 號水月宮) (Grade 3) and Hung Shing Temple, Fuk Tsun Street (福全街洪聖殿) (Grade 3) as they historically provided space for placing soul tablets of the deceased, fulfilling the traditional need for descendants to honour their ancestors and compatriots.

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