

Historic Building Appraisal
Yuk Yin Study Hall,
No. 1A Sha Kok Mei Second Lane, Sai Kung, N.T.

Yuk Yin Study Hall (育賢書室) which was completed in 1928 is located at Sha Kok Mei (沙角尾) which is a village to the north of Sai Kung market (西貢墟) on the east side of the New Territories. This village is inhabited by more than ten clans, the biggest ones are surnamed Wai (韋), Lau (劉) and Tse (謝) whose ancestors settled here 200 years ago. In 1928 the villagers established Yuk Yin Study Hall (hereafter, “Yuk Yin”) by subscription. The total cost of the study hall was \$10,000 Hong Kong dollars which were subscribed by emigrant home villagers who sent money back to Sha Kok Mei. The study hall was built on a piece of land donated by several villagers of the Wai clan. *Historical Interest*

During the pre-war times, “Yuk Yin” was a *bu bu zhai* (卜卜齋, the local term for old-style private school) relatively small in terms of scale, in which one could find an altar to Confucius (孔子壇). When the Japanese invaded and occupied Hong Kong in December 1941, a teenager whose name was given as Lau Kam-man (劉錦文) was in his home village, Sha Kok Mei, where he saw an aircraft crash into the sea of Sai Kung Hoi, but he had no idea whether the aircraft was British or Japanese. Imbued with patriotism, he became one of the local men who joined the Hong Kong and Kowloon Brigade of East River Guerrilla (東江縱隊港九大隊), along with fellow villagers such as Wai Muk-yau (韋木有) and Tse Shui-hing (謝水興), to name just two of them.

Shortly after hostilities began, the Hong Kong and Kowloon Brigade of East River Guerrilla used “Yuk Yin” as a base of operation. It was where they mobilized local people for the war effort and recruited supporters particularly among the youthful. In “Yuk Yin” the new recruits were taught the basics of guerrilla military tactics. This was also a venue for them to sing patriotic songs from the War of Resistance such as “On the Song Hua River” (松花江上), “The Eight Route Army Chorus” (八路軍進行曲) and “East River Guerrilla Chorus” (東江縱隊之歌). The following extract from the reminiscences of Lau Kam-man gives a glimpse of the activities of the East River Guerrillas:

“Our underground network enabled some internees in the prisoner-of-war camps to escape; our spies were able to pass information over enemy lines on to our headquarters in unoccupied China, and we also made limited, but successful, attacks on Japanese positions in Hong Kong. Our headquarters also worked hand in hand with the British Army Aid Group, also based in China.”

Toward the end of the war, when the Japanese soldiers at Sai Kung were short of many kinds of commodities, including not only food but also fuel, they forced many of the able-bodied local people to cut firewood for them on the hillsides of Sha Kok Mei. For a length of time, the Japanese lived in “Yuk Yin”. At the time, however, they were unaware that the guerrillas had a close watch on their activities. By the stroke of good luck there was a guerrilla agent (a local boy) living in a village house in opposite to Yuk Yin Study Hall, therefore, the boy was able to keep the guerrillas well informed of the strength and deployment of the Japanese forces in Sha Kok Mei.

At the war’s end in August 1945, a party of armed forces of East River Guerrillas including Wong Muk-fat (黃木發) and Tse Chow (謝就) from Sha Kok Mei and other villagers launched a military operation to try to disarm the Japanese. The next day the Japanese hurriedly made their way to urban Kowloon by sea at night, and the guerrillas took effective control of Sai Kung town. The arms and equipment left by the defeated Japanese forces were taken to Yuk Yin Study Hall for storage, and then sent to the Liaison Hong Kong Office of East River Guerrillas (東江縱隊駐港辦事處), the forerunner of the local branch of Xinhua News Agency (新華社).

Lau Kam-man (aforesaid) stood as the secretary-general of the guerrillas in Sai Kung (游擊隊西貢支部書記) in 1945. After the end of the war, it was on the Chinese Communist Party’s advice that Lau stayed on with Yuk Yin Study Hall which resumed operation in 1947, where he was a teacher of Chinese and Geography. The learning materials in use in “Yuk Yin” were the textbooks that were used by the majority of pupils in local schools. Lau abandoned the teaching job in late 1949 when he found his way into China and placed his services at the disposal of the new government. Lau went back to the village of his birth in 1979, when he retired in China as the head of the Public Security Bureau in Huizhou (惠州公安局局長).

In the immediate post-war period, “Yuk Yin” was aided by small subsidies from the Hong Kong government and was formally named as Yuk Yin Primary School (育賢小學) until 1966 when the school campus was relocated to a new building elsewhere in Sai Kung. Later on, Yuk Yin Primary School combined with four other village schools to become Sai Kung Central Lee Siu Yam Memorial School (西貢中心李少欽紀念學校). The Study Hall was converted into the Sai Kung branch of Chung Yip Middle School (中業中學西貢分校) in 1971-1976, to provide education at junior secondary level. During 1980s and 1990s the building was leased to three families for residential use. The building was recently renovated to become an activity centre for villagers.

Yuk Yin Study Hall is located at the northwest corner of the village, facing east to southeast with a forecourt and a backyard. It is a two-storey Chinese Eclectic building with western construction features. It is in rectangular plan, constructed of green bricks with its walls and columns to support its roof, which was originally a pitched one but was replaced by a reinforced concrete flat one several years ago. Externally it was plastered and painted in light brown. *Architectural Merit*

The front façade of the Study Hall is divided into three bays, with a recess door at the centre and two windows on either side, while at the 1/F there is a balcony supported by western-style round columns and arches, and parapet decorated with vase-shaped balustrades. Above the balcony is a parapet of a four-column and semicircle design having a pediment at the middle moulded with the year of construction “1928”.

The entrance at the G/F has a granite door casing, on its lintel engraved with Chinese “育賢書室” (Yuk Yin Study Hall) and “民國十七年建” (built in the 17th year of the Chinese Republic, that is, the year of 1928), and on both sides engraved with a Chinese couplet. Internally walls are plastered and painted in white. There is no partition at the G/F, but two Ionic Order columns at the centre support the beams and the ceiling, which was originally made of timbers and wood blocks but were replaced by reinforced concrete ones several years ago. The floor is paved with polished white tiles. Windows are installed at all sides, and an aluminium backdoor is at the back of the building.

Two staircases lead to the 1/F, both at the exterior of the building, one at the northwest corner and another at the south façade. The internal wall at the 1/F are also plastered and painted in white, with windows installed at all sides. There are three doors leading to the balcony. There is a restroom and a window at the centre of the ceiling.

The presence of both Chinese and western architectural elements of the study hall is a testimony of the western influence from villagers who went overseas to earn a living in the early 20th century. Although the Study hall’s historic interiors were largely dismantled, its exterior authenticity is retained to a large extent. *Rarity. Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

Except those years between 1980s and 1990s when the building was for residential use, it has been used for public purpose, mostly as school and currently as a centre for villagers’ activities such as meetings and musical shows, for example, a show known as “育賢妙韻聚鄉情” (June 2011). Many villagers shared the memory of this building when they were children and therefore this building has important social value and local interest for them. Besides, its role at the anti-Japanese activities makes it have social value on the Hong Kong war *Social Value & Local Interest*

history.

Yuk Yin Study Hall is one of several historic buildings in Sai Kung where communist guerrillas and couriers had operated during the Japanese occupation. related to the activities of the East River Guerrilla, such as Rosary Mission Centre in Wong Mo Ying (Grade 2), Immaculate Conception Chapel in Tai Long (Grade 2), Tin Hau Temple Hip Tin Temple at Po Tung Road (Grade 2) as well as Lau Ancestral Hall and Shing Study Hall, both in Mang Kung Uk (Grade 3). *Group Value*