

Historic Building Appraisal
Entrance Gate of Sai Lam Temple,
No. 198 Sheung Wo Che, Sha Tin, N.T.

Set up in 1936, the Sai Lam Temple (西林寺) which is located in Sheung *Historical*
 Wo Che, Sha Tin (沙田上禾輦) was once a famous venue for Buddhist practice *Interest*
 from the 1930s. The Temple is geographically close to a railway station and it
 commands a scenic hillside environment. As it was also built with a restaurant
 serving vegetarian food as well as living quarters for the devotees of Buddhism,
 it was a famous place of the New Territories where people went for pilgrimage
 or for picnic. Most of the original structures of the Temple have been rebuilt or
 architecturally altered, but the existing Entrance Gate, which was built at the
 time of the construction of the Temple, still keeps its original outlook.

The Temple stands on Lots 63 & 296 in D.D. 185 and a certain amount of
 government land (including where the subject Entrance Gate stands). It was set
 up by a Buddhist monk bearing the title of Woon Ching (浣青和尚). The monk
 was a native of the district of Nanhai in Guangdong (廣東南海). His original
 name was Leung Ki (梁基) otherwise also known as Leung Chi-hang (梁志恆
alias 梁指行 *alias* 梁子衡). Before he chose to settle down at Sheung Wo
 Che, he had already been running two vegetarian restaurants, both bearing the
 Chinese name of “西鄉園素食館” which were located at No. 150 Portland
 Street in Mong Kok and a site near the Kai Tak Airport in Kowloon City.

In 1931 Leung Ki spent \$3,500 to buy up Lot 63 in D.D. 185 which he
 thought was a suitable site for setting up a Buddhist temple. Two years later, in
 1933, he bought the adjacent Lot 296 in D.D. 185 which, when combined with
 the previous Lot, allowed the construction of a temple of a larger size. The
 construction of Sai Lam Temple commenced in 1933 and was completed in
 September 1936. The story goes that Leung Ki, in capacity as the owner of Sai
 Lam Temple, was well known for providing assistance to monks who came in
 from all over China, welcoming them with open arms and treating them with
 respect and honor.

After the Second World War, the Temple continued to be a well-known
 Buddhist institution as well as a place of leisure with landscape features such as
 water ponds planted with a variety of water lilies, bridges and pavilions which
 have been built in traditional Chinese architectural style. There were Buddhists
 who stayed there as a place of retreat. Following the change of the Temple's
 ownership in the late 1970s and the death of the monk Woon Ching in 1980, the
 Temple was left dilapidated subsequently. Years ago, it has been substantially
 renovated and run as a columbarium. The Entrance Gate remains as a local
 landmark, however.

The entrance gate, which shows traces of recent renovation, is of plain design consisting of a lintel supported by side columns. The columns have plain skirtings at the base and the jambs are splayed and moulded. The columns and lintel are painted white with calligraphy. On the lintel there is the name of the temple “西林” (Sai Lam) which is shown in Chinese calligraphy in protruding characters. On the columns there is a Chinese couplet with 14 characters “西樓灑苑宜脩灑 林集禪門要學禪”, which praises the Temple as a good place to study Buddhism. On the left-hand-side column is also the date when the entrance gate was erected, “中華民國第一丙子陽月” (October 1936). On the right-hand-side column is another ten characters “遍照金剛方” and “尤皇覺撰書”, probably the calligrapher’s name. All these characters are in relief format and painted in black.

*Architectural
Merit*

A pair of modern iron gate in so-called “cracked-ice” design is hung in the opening. The gateway is topped with a Chinese tiled hipped roof of glazed grey pan-and-roll tiles with Tang dynasty style geometric pattern ridge ends and upturned “cow’s horn” curly corners to the hips. The roof has two oversailing bands or courses at eaves level. The back of the Entrance Gate is plain without any decoration.

The gateway is not really a rare piece of architecture but it is known to be at least 60 years old, therefore, it is a reminder of the historical past of the site. Behind the temple is a range of hills full of lush that make an authentic historic setting, while in front is a large piece of land.

*Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity*

Photographic records dating from the 1950s indicate that the Entrance Gate’s appearance has been retained so that it is still fairly authentic. The more notable architectural alterations that have taken place include: the replacement of the green tiled roof with black tiles, and that the original steps in front of the Entrance Gate have now disappeared into the ground because of re-paving of the footpath leading to the Temple. Despite the recent repainting, the pair of vertical couplets remains unchanged.

As the entrance to the Sai Lam Temple, the gateway has social value and local interest, especially to those who had visited the Temple for picnic or for pilgrimage before it turned into a commercially-run columbarium.

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

The Entrance Gate is within a walking distance with a number of historic buildings, such as Nos. 5A, 5B, 5C and 6 Pai Tau (排頭 5A, 5B, 5C 和 6 號) (Grade 2), Lam Ancestral Hall (藍氏家祠) at Pai Tau Village (Grade 3) and Nos. 7-10 Sheung Wo Che (上禾輦 7-10 號) (Grade 3).

Group Value