

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Hip Tin Temple

Shan Tsui, Sha Tau Kok, N.T.

Hip Tin Temple (the “Temple”) (協天宮) situated in Shan Tsui (山咀)<sup>1</sup> of Sha Tau Kok (沙頭角)<sup>2</sup> is a temple of significant historical value to the economic development of the Sha Tau Kok area<sup>3</sup> in the late nineteenth century. The Temple was one of the few surviving main temples<sup>4</sup> associated with the Tung Wo Market (東和墟) operated by the village alliance Shap Yeuk (十約), which dominated the economy of the Sha Tau Kok area for a century from the 1830s to 1930s, when the area was a prosperous nodal point in the local road and ferry system which traded rice, fish and salt to Shenzhen (深圳) by road to the west and carried travellers to Sha Yue Chung (沙魚涌) by ferry to the east. During the 1930s, the Temple was regarded as a tourist attraction in Sha Tau Kok. The Temple and its relics are testimony to the once significant economic position of the Sha Tau Kok area.

*Historical  
Interest*

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- <sup>1</sup> According to the 1688 edition of Gazetteer of Xin’an County 《康熙新安縣誌》, the village was named “山嘴峯”. Before the Coastal Evacuation in 1662-1668, Shan Tsui was owned by the Tang clan (鄧氏) of Lung Yeuk Tau (龍躍頭). Since the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Shan Tsui was inhabited by Hakka clans: Ng (吳), Law (羅), Mo (巫), Wong (黃), Yau (丘/邱) and Tsui (徐).
- <sup>2</sup> The name Sha Tau Kok (沙頭角) first appeared in the genealogy of the Ng (吳) clan of Sha Lan Ha (沙欄吓) dated 1863. The name also appeared in the “Volonteri” Map of Sun On District (1866). According to the Ngs of Sha Lan Ha, Sha Tau Kok was originally the name of the bay. The land along the shore was originally named Tai Tan Tung (大坦洞), the name on the upper left stone plaque on the left side wall in the front hall of the Temple.
- <sup>3</sup> The Sha Tau Kok area generally referred to the northwestern quadrant of Mirs Bay, from Tolo Harbour to Mui Sha, which comprised about 60 to 65 villages in 1900s, about three-quarters of which were in the New Territories.
- <sup>4</sup> Hase, Patrick H. recounted that there had been six temples that had a relationship with the Tung Wo Market, which were the four Tin Hau Temples at Am King (暗徑), Sha Lan Ha (沙欄吓), Yim Liu Ha (鹽寮下) and Wu Shek Kok (烏石角); the Kwan Tai Temple (alias Hip Tin Temple) at Shan Tsui and the Man Mo Temple (文武廟) within the Tung Wo Market at Sha Lan Ha. The Tin Hau Temple at Am King and the Man Mo Temple within Tung Wo Market no longer exist. The Tin Hau Temples at Wu Shek Kok and Yim Liu Ha were rebuilt in the 1960s and 1990s respectively. The Tin Hau Temple at Sha Lan Ha is a site to be protected for their historical and cultural value at cities level in Shenzhen City. The Hip Tin Temple at Shan Tsui, therefore, is the only temple in Hong Kong, with its original construction largely intact, that had a relationship with the Tung Wo Market.

The Temple was rebuilt between 1894 and 1895 to replace the earlier temple also for the deity Kwan Tai (關帝).<sup>5</sup> Kwan Tai was bestowed the title “Hip Tin” (協天) in the sixth year of the Wanli (萬曆) reign (1578) of the Ming dynasty, so temples for Kwan Tai have been often named by this title. The markets established in the Hong Kong region in the Qing dynasty often contained temples for Kwan Tai which served as venues for arbitration.

Hip Tin Temple was a landmark along the main east-west road in the Xin’an County (新安縣) that ran immediately above the original shoreline in front of Shan Tsui. This main road connected the county city, Nantou (南頭), with the Deputy Magistrate’s city of Dapeng (大鵬). The Temple and its predecessor were reputedly built across the original line of the road to deflect dangerous fungshui influence.

Hip Tin Temple is owned by the village of Shan Tsui, which was a wealthy member of a village alliance called “Sam Heung” (三鄉), literally means “Alliance of Three Villages”.<sup>6</sup> This alliance occupied the original shoreline of Sha Tau Kok before the reclamation in 1800s, which was invested by five wealthy villages<sup>7</sup> there to extend arable land for the growing population of the Sha Tau Kok area.<sup>8</sup> Around the 1830s, the leaders of the wealthy villages formed an alliance, i.e. Shap Yeuk, literally means “Alliance of Ten”, from the then existing ten or eleven Hakka village alliances to establish a new market at the newly reclaimed Sha Lan Ha (沙欄吓) to serve

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<sup>5</sup> Kwan Tai was a renowned warrior in the Three Kingdoms period, who was posthumously worshipped as a deity of bravery, loyalty and righteousness. Worshippers have expected the deity to give protection and solve problems such as disputes, injustice and crimes.

<sup>6</sup> The other two villages in the alliance were Tong To (塘肚) and Tam Shui Hang (担水坑).

<sup>7</sup> Shan Tsui (山咀), Tam Shui Hang (担水坑), Wo Hang (禾坑), Nam Chung (南涌) and Luk Keng (鹿頸).

<sup>8</sup> The population was estimated to have increased from about 7,000 to 12,000 between 1825 and 1875. See Hase, Patrick H. ‘The Alliance of Ten: Settlement and Politics in the Sha Tau Kok Area’, in Faure, David and Siu, Helen F. eds., *Down to the Earth: The Territories Bond in South China*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.125.

the Sha Tau Kok area, enabling the trades to be free from the external interference by Punti (本地)clans that had dominated the older market in Shenzhen.

The new market was later named Tung Wo Market (東和墟), which was managed through the Council of Shap Yeuk called Tung Wo Kuk (東和局). The market was described as substantial and bustling with business. By 1848 there were about fifty shops, which expanded to about a hundred shops in the 1920s. Tung Wo Market remained within the Chinese territory after the leasing of the New Territories to Britain in 1898. Tung Wo Market's prosperity gradually declined owing to political and military turmoils in the Chinese territory in the early twentieth century. Most shops in the market moved across the border to San Lau Street (新樓街) in the British territory during the 1930s, with the last few shops in Tung Wo Market destroyed in a typhoon in 1937 that ended its operation.

Although Hip Tin Temple was owned by Shan Tsui, it was a main temple of Shap Yeuk. The Temple was a venue where full meetings and communal annual worship by elders of Shap Yeuk were held. Funds for rebuilding the Temple in the 1890s were raised from villagers not only from Shan Tsui but also from villagers of the Sha Tau Kok area and those living abroad. The emigration was due to the young adult men of the Sha Tau Kok area travelling abroad to make their fortunes in the late nineteenth century. The approximately one thousand donors named on the stone plaques in the Temple amounted to about a third of the male population of the area then.<sup>9</sup>

The Temple's rebuilding project was initiated in 1891 by Wong Wing-cheung (黃永彰) of Shan Tsui, a wealthy and prominent merchant in the nineteenth century who amassed fortunes in Australia, or the so-called "New Gold Mountain" (新金山). When he returned, he purchased land in Shan Tsui and become a great landholder. He also accumulated his wealth by running business on Hong Kong Island. Living in Hong Kong himself, he operated an

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<sup>9</sup> Hase, Patrick H. 'The Alliance of Ten: Settlement and Politics in the Sha Tau Kok Area', in Faure, David and Siu, Helen F. eds., *Down to the Earth: The Territories Bond in South China*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.126.

import-export business (Kam Shan Chong, 金山莊)<sup>10</sup> between Hong Kong and Australia as well as New Zealand in Wing Lok Street, Sheung Wan, which has been the conglomerated area of import-export business (Nam Pak Hong, 南北行). The business also acted as the agent for collecting remittances from the overseas villagers. The overseas donations to rebuilding the Temple recorded on the three plaques in the front hall were therefore most likely made through Wong's company, whose contributions were also recorded on the upper plaque on the right side wall.<sup>11</sup>

The Temple was used as the premises of a village school named Fuk Tak Study Hall (福德私塾) in the early twentieth century to provide education for the children of Shan Tsui. According to the village elders, the curriculum was basically the bobozhai (卜卜齋) which taught the old-style Chinese texts and character learning. They also recalled that during the Japanese Occupation, the Temple was used by the Japanese soldiers for interrogating suspected guerillas. The Temple has been used as a school again since 1959 as the newly established Shan Tsui Public School (山咀公立學校) used part of the Temple as the school office and classrooms. In 2015, the school reverted to the name of its pre-war predecessor at the Temple and was renamed Fuk Tak Education Society Primary School (福德學社小學). Since the school has rebuilt its older campus and expanded its campus at Kong Ha (崗下), the Temple is no longer used for teaching purposes but remains part of the school campus.

The Temple consists of a main building and an annex. The main building is a Qing vernacular two-hall-three-bay structure with a courtyard between the two halls. The flush gable roofs of both halls, supported by rectangular wooden purlins, are covered with Chinese pan-and-roll tiles. The main ridge of the front hall is decorated with mouldings of geometric designs. The front hall has

*Architectural  
Merit*

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<sup>10</sup> According to village elders, Wong owned the company called Wong Cheung Kee (黃彰記). This company donated money to build the Kwong Fuk bridge (廣福橋) across Kwun Yam River (觀音河) to connect the Tai Po New Market (大埔新墟) in 1896.

<sup>11</sup> The contributions by Wong's company were listed under “香港黃彰記” on the plaque.

a recessed facade with a recessed entrance in the middle. On the two sides of the facade is a pair of octagonal windows which resemble the Bagua (八卦) design that has been traditionally intended for driving away evil spirits. The facade wall is built of smooth grey bricks with fine joints. This outstanding architectural detail is obscured by paint layers but still visible at the gable friezes (墀頭). The cornerstones and entrance door frame are made of granite. The characters “協天宮” inscribed on the plaque above the entrance were written, according to the inscription, in the twentieth year of the Guangxu reign (1894) by Liang Zhi-rong (梁芝榮), who was a native of Nan Hai (南海) having obtained the degree of *jinshi* (進士) in the sixteenth year of the Guangxu reign (1890).

The facade eaves is supported by two corbels plastered in the shape of dragonfish. The structural parts of the corbels are probably granite, like the corbels supporting interior eaves. The facade eaves is decorated with a wooden fascia board exquisitely carved in high relief. This fascia board is divided into eleven panels intersected with pictorial and calligraphical carvings. Most of the the pictorial carvings depicted auspicious flowers and animals, except the centre panel which was carved with an almanac titled *Luo Yuan Qing Tong Shu* (羅元清通書) on which was marked the twentieth year of the Guangxu reign (1894), the year when the Temple was rebuilt. The carvings on the four calligraphical panels are running script of the excerpts from *Jiu cheng gong Liquan ming* (九成宮醴泉銘), a calligraphy masterpiece written by Ouyang Xun (歐陽詢) in the sixth year of the Zhenguan (貞觀) reign (632) during the Tang dynasty. Fascia boards facing the internal courtyard are decorated with similar pictorial carvings in superb craftsmanship.

Behind the entrance is a pair of screen doors (屏門) whose columns are sitting on finely carved melon-shaped (瓜菱) granite bases. The courtyard behind the screen doors is flanked by two side chambers with pitched roofs. Doorways to the side chambers of the front hall and rear hall are trefoil arches on granite jambs. The trefoil arches exemplified western influence in the Temple's design and construction techniques. While all these chambers were converted to school offices and classrooms, the middle bay of the rear

hall still enshrines the deity of Kwan Tai on the altar with a three-layer surround (*Fa Chal*, 花罩) in polychrome colour, which remains vibrant. The surround is intricately carved with floral and animal motifs, as well as auspicious objects. The wooden altar is of joinery construction, that carved panels were fittedly assembled. The centre shrine with inscribed couplet revering Kwan Tai houses the large clay statue of the deity, and a wooden statuette which would have been transported to festive occasions outside the Temple. By the sides of the statuette are Kwan Tai's assistants Kwan Ping (關平) and Chau Chong (周倉). The left shrine of the altar houses the Wealth God (財神) while the right shrine houses the Earth God (土地).

There is an annex on the left side of the main building. It is a single storey one hall building with a pitched roof. Since this annex was originally built as a kitchen, the projection on the internal side of the rear wall is mostly likely the remnant of chimney. In between the annex and the main building is a doorway with a pitched and tiled roof.

In 1960 a renovation of the Temple was conducted, such that the roof tiles and purlins were replaced owing to termite infestation. However, the replacement was considerate that it retained the original lantern beam inscribed with the year of rebuilding the Temple.<sup>12</sup> Although there have been changes such as addition of partition walls to fit for the school usage, the superbly crafted original altar and fascia boards, the trefoil doorways of the front and rear halls, as well as the fine brick facade with granite door frame and plaster dragonfish corbels all remain intact. ***Authenticity***

The Temple's rebuilding project was documented in minute details on the upper left stone plaque on the left side wall in the front hall. It was rare to have such original documentation that recorded the rebuilding works of a temple down to the hours, which is worthy of mentioning. According to the inscription, the earlier Kwan Tai ***Rarity***

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<sup>12</sup> Reference is made to the inscription “光緒三十年歲次甲午季冬月吉旦重修” on the lantern beam of the rear hall, which dates back to the 20th year of the Guangxu reign, i.e. 1894.

temple built during the Daoguang reign (1821-1850) that oriented to the south (子山午向) had become dilapidated. Wong Wing-cheung initiated rebuilding the temple and started to raise funds in the seventh lunar month of the seventeenth year of the Guangxu reign (光緒十七年壬辰歲七月, 5<sup>th</sup> August to 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1891). After consulting a *fung shui* master, the new temple should face northeast by east (庚山甲向), which is the current orientation. The construction started between 07:00 and 09:00 on the second day of the ninth lunar month of the twentieth year of the Guangxu reign (光緒二十年甲午歲九月初二日辰時, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1894). The ridge beam was raised between 15:00 and 17:00 on the fifth day of the tenth lunar month (十月初五日申時, or 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1894). The opening ceremony of the Temple was held between 23:00 and 01:00 on the twenty-second day of the twelfth lunar month (十二月二十二日子時, 23:00 of 16<sup>th</sup> to 01:00 of 17<sup>th</sup> January 1895). The inscription also described the surrounding landscape that “the Temple’s right hand side is Yuen Shan (員山, the present day Yuen Tuen Shan 元墩山) which was regarded as the treasury and the symbol of good fortune, while the overlapping ridges of Wutong Mountain (梧桐嶺) act as a shelter at its left-hand side. The ridge of Qiliangshan (七娘山), Dapeng (大鵬) can be seen from the main door of the temple.”<sup>13</sup> The plaque was set in the twelfth lunar month of the twenty-second year of Guangxu reign (光緒二十二年歲次丙申季冬月, or 3<sup>rd</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 1897).

The rebuilding project of the Temple in 1890s reflected the social network of the overseas Chinese community with Sha Tau Kok area, as the names of fifty-four foreign cities were engraved onto three large stone plaques in the Temple recording the donations for rebuilding. These three plaques in the front hall recorded the donations, in foreign currencies, from over a thousand units or individuals from Australia, New Zealand, California, Hawaii, etc. Among the 1,554 units or individuals recorded, 1,222 were from overseas.

***Social Value  
& Local Interest***

<sup>13</sup> 「依爰請堪輿先生裁取庚山甲向，兼申四線。」「局面則田平萬頃，對門則峰聳七娘。左有梧桐為屏，喜層巒之壯麗；右有員山如庫，欣吉宿之來臨。」Qiliangshan (七娘山) is the main mountain in Dapeng Peninsula (大鵬半島).

The contributions from fifty-one shops or keepers of Tung Wo Market and twenty-seven shops of Yantian Market (鹽田墟) were recorded on the upper right stone plaque on the left side wall in the front hall. Yantian Market was founded before the Tung Wo Market but later became the latter's sub-ordinate. One of the three presidents of the rebuilding project was from the Hos of Yantian, which was one of the wealthiest families in the Sha Tau Kok area since the early nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The contributions and involvement from these two markets in the rebuilding project substantiated that the Temple was not just a local temple for Shan Tsui but a temple significant for the whole Sha Tau Kok area.

Villagers of Shan Tsui still commemorate the birthday of Kwan Tai on the thirteenth day of the fifth lunar month. In the past string puppetry would be performed in the Temple's foreground during the day. Besides, the Temple was the place of social gathering for the Shan Tsui villagers through the *she* festival (做社) during winter in which they gave thanks and offerings to the deities in the Temple. The small annex left next to the main building was a kitchen for such festive celebration. The Temple was a place for teaching before the World War II and after the war since 1959 until the late 2010s. In smaller villages in the New Territories, temples traditionally were used for teaching purpose.

In general, the Temple serves as an important historic landmark of the early development of Sha Tau Kok and as a place to deliver religious, communal and educational functions for the local community in the last century.

Graded historic buildings located within walking distance of the Temple include Wong Tak Ching Ancestral Hall in Shan Tsui (Grade 3) and No. 1 to No. 22 San Lau Street (all Grade 2). There are declared monuments and graded historic buildings in the following villages of Shap Yeuk, whose villagers would have contributed to the rebuilding of the Temple in the 1890s. These

**Group Value**

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<sup>14</sup> The president was called Ho Siu-wai (何肇槐) who also autographed plaques in the Hip Tin Temple of Lai Chi Wo (荔枝窩) in 1889.



buildings collectively reflect the historical and social development of the Sha Tau Kok area.

Lin Ma Hang (蓮麻坑)

Residence of Ip Ting-sz (葉定仕故居) (Declared Monument), Old Bridge (Grade 3), Ip Ancestral Hall (Grade 3), Koon Ancestral Hall (Grade 3) and Village house at No. 34 Lin Ma Hang (Grade 3).

Tam Shui Hang

Chung Ancestral Hall in Ha Tam Shui Hang (Grade 3) and Kwan Ah School (群雅學校) (formerly Pan Lam Study Hall (泮林書室)) in Sheung Tam Shui Hang (Grade 3).

Wo Hang

Kang Yung Study Hall (鏡蓉書屋) in Sheung Wo Hang (Declared Monument) and Fat Tat Tong (發達堂) in Ha Wo Hang (Declared Monument).

Man Uk Pin (萬屋邊)

Tong Ancestral Hall at No. 18 Man Uk Pin (Grade 3).

Nam Chung

Tsing Kun Study Hall (靜觀家塾) at No. 22 Lei Uk Tsuen (李屋村)(Grade 2).

Luk Keng

Wong Chun Yu Ancestral Hall (春儒黃公祠) (Grade 3) and Chan Nam Tak Ancestral Hall (男德陳公祠)(Grade 3) at Luk Keng Wong Uk (鹿頸黃屋), Kai Choi School and Hip Tin Temple (啟才學校及協天宮)(Grade 3) at Kuk Po (谷埔), Yeung Ancestral Hall (Grade 3) and Li Ancestral Hall (Grade 3) at Kuk Po Lo Wai (谷埔老圍).

Lai Chi Wo

Hip Tin Temple and Hok Shan Monastery (協天宮及鶴山寺) (Grade 3).

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