

Historic Building Appraisal

Tin Hau Temple

Sai Wan, Cheung Chau

Tin Hau Temple (天后宮) in Sai Wan (西灣) of Cheung Chau was erected in the 39th year of the Qianlong (乾隆, 1774) reign of the Qing (清) dynasty as an iron bell of the temple has the dating inscribed on it. The temple is on a slope on the seashore a short distance from the sea facing north. A spacious forecourt is in front of the temple. The temple is established by the fishermen of the Wan and managed by a body of their own called Ma Shing Tong (媽勝堂). Tin Hau is the most popular deity of the fishermen who have long been settled on the island. Many of them came from Haifeng (海豐) and Lufeng (陸豐) of Guangdong (廣東) province further north of Hong Kong.

**Historical
Interest**

The temple is a rectangular Qing vernacular building of a one-hall plan. The temple had probably a two-hall-one-courtyard plan with an open courtyard between the two halls. The courtyard was covered in the later stage. The building is constructed of green bricks with its walls to support its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. Its external walls and gables have been plastered and painted in grey and red colours. Three sets of gables are with the temple. The front pair is an axe-head shape 'wood' style of the Five Elements (五行之木形). The pair in the middle is a cat-crawling one whilst the rear pair is a simple pointed one. The altar of the temple is at the far end of the building housing the Tin Hau statue for worship with two offering tables in its front. The front ridge is decorated with a set of Shiwan (石灣) ceramic figurines of opera scene topped with two *aoyus* (鰲魚) and a firing pearl in the middle. The figurines were made in 1929 selected by Jinlongsheng (晉隆生) Shop of Shiwan. At the front gable ends is a pair of Shiwan statues of the Sun (日神) and Moon Gods (月神) in the form of an old man and a young lady each carrying a round mirror in their hands. Above the doorway is the name board of the temple flanked by a pair of couplets. On the front façade are wall paintings of two unicorns. A fascia board under the eave is with carving of flowers and birds.

**Architectural
Merit**

It is one of the four Tin Hau temples on Cheung Chau island to witness the settlement of the fishermen.

Rarity

The temple with unique Shiwan ceramics is of high built heritage value.

**Built Heritage
Value**

The temple was renovated in 1913, 1926, 1975 and 1997 among many unknown ones. Recent renovations have not been sympathetic to the building very much diminished its authenticity.

Authenticity

Tin Hau Festival (天后誕) on the 23rd of the third lunar month would be highly celebrated by fishermen and boat people of the island as well as the villagers. It has Shen Gong opera (神功戲) performances in the forecourt of the temple. It is the only Tin Hau temple among the other three on the island which has opera performance. It is also the only temple which hold Fa Pow (花炮) activities on the island. During the Tai Ping Ching Chiu (太平清醮) on the island, the Tin Hau deity would be invited among others to attend the activities. The temple Tong also organizes a number of social and welfare functions for the elderly on the island.

*Social Value,
& Local
Interest*