

**Heritage Appraisal of  
the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital  
36A Western Street, Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong**

Located on Western Street in Sai Ying Pun, the Old Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital (hereinafter referred to as “Old Tsan Yuk”) was established by the Chinese Public Dispensaries (“CPDC”) and opened in 1922 to provide maternity services for Chinese women in Hong Kong and train Chinese midwives using modern methods. After the hospital was relocated to the new premises on Hospital Road in Sai Ying Pun in 1955, the main building at the original site has been used as a community centre since 1961 and continues to play a significant role in public healthcare and community services to this day.

***Historical  
Interest***

Being one of the few surviving buildings related to the CPDC, the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk exemplifies the cooperation between Chinese community leaders and Western medical professionals in the early development of maternal health services in Hong Kong. CPDC had been founded by prominent Chinese community leaders and businessmen, including Fung Wa-chun (馮華川) and Lau Chu-pak (劉鑄伯), as early as 1905 to assist the Government in dealing with the practice that saw dead bodies dumped on the streets during the bubonic plague.<sup>1</sup> After the plague had subsided, the CPDC noted the high mortality rate among infants and turned its attention to providing medical care for women and children. Tso Seen-wan (曹善允) and Li Po-kwai (李葆葵), respectively the chairman and vice-chairman of the Sai Ying Pun section of the CPDC, were eager to build a maternity hospital offering Western medical services to the Chinese community and to train Chinese women to be nurses. The idea was supported by Dr Alice D. Hickling (克靈夫人), the first female doctor in Hong Kong and later the medical officer in charge of Chinese hospitals and public dispensaries, who provided professional advice and assistance in the establishment of the new maternity hospital.

In 1919, the Government granted Inland Lot no. 2275 to the

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<sup>1</sup> “Report of the Registrar General, for the Year 1905” in *Hong Kong Sessional Papers laid before the Legislative Council of Hongkong 1906*, pp. 230-231.

CPDC at an annual rent of HK\$1 to build a hospital. The construction and equipment costs totalled \$94,219 and were funded largely by donations from businessmen such as H.M.H Nemazee (納曼斯) and Mok Kon-shang (莫幹生), an endowment from Tung Wah Hospital Authorities and a monthly income of \$100 from the proceeds of the Chinese Recreation Ground. Other donors included local groups such as the Sai Ying Pun Kaifong Committee, the Fishmongers' Guild and the Fruit and Vegetable Sellers' Guild. The hospital was named Tsan Yuk (贊育), which literally means "assisting birth" in Chinese,<sup>2</sup> and was formally opened on 17 October 1922 by Mrs Hallifax, the wife of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs Mr E.R. Hallifax.

Backed by the credibility of the CPDC and earning the gradual acceptance of Western medicine by the Chinese community, the services provided at Old Tsan Yuk were eagerly sought after following its opening. It had treated 56 cases by 31 December 1922 and admissions rose to 436 in 1923. Soon after the hospital opened, the Infant Welfare Centre, the first outpatient clinic in Hong Kong specifically for infants, was set up in the building in 1923, followed by the Venereal Diseases Clinic in 1926 and the antenatal clinic in 1928.

The hospital also provided training for medical professionals. In 1923, it launched a two-year midwifery course recruiting local Chinese to train them in the latest birthing methods and maternal and infant care practices. Six students were admitted in the first year, and they graduated in 1925. From the mid-1920s onwards, Old Tsan Yuk began a collaboration with the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of The University of Hong Kong ("HKU") that saw it become the university's teaching hospital. Its midwifery work was then placed under the management and supervision of HKU in January 1927.

The scope of work performed at Old Tsan Yuk gradually

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<sup>2</sup> The hospital's name is believed to originate from a phrase in *The Doctrine of the Mean* (《中庸》), one of the key books of Confucianism, that says once all things are revealed, one can take part in assisting the birth of lives on earth and under heaven (《中庸·盡性章》:「能盡物之性，則可以贊天地之化育。」).

outgrew the resources that the CPDC could afford. On 1 January 1934, Old Tsan Yuk was handed over as a gift to the Government, which ran it under the responsibility of the Medical Department.<sup>3</sup> To cope with the demand for the hospital's services,<sup>4</sup> one storey was added to each of the end wings of the building in 1939 as quarters for the matrons and midwives in training.

Old Tsan Yuk continued to operate during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), albeit with meagre supplies. In December 1944, Old Tsan Yuk was merged into the Nethersole Hospital and its doctors and nurses were only able to work in a makeshift maternity ward on the third floor there. The hospital was swiftly reopened in September 1945 after Japan surrendered at the end of the Second World War.

Demand for maternity services increased rapidly after the war. When the neighbouring West Point Dispensary closed down in August 1949, Old Tsan Yuk acquired the two-storey building as an annex and was thus able to increase its number of beds to 85. This was still far from enough to meet the demand for its services during the baby boom in the post war period, however, and, with the help of a donation from the Hong Kong Jockey Club, a new hospital building was built on Hospital Road and opened on 13 June 1955.

After the hospital relocated to the new premises, the original Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk continued its significant role in providing medical and social welfare services for the local community. It was initially taken over by the Social Welfare Office to house its offices. Part of the building was also used by the temporary Sai Ying Pun Outpatient Department between 1958 and 1960 while the new polyclinic was under construction.

In January 1961, the building was renovated and reopened

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<sup>3</sup> "Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Colony of Hong Kong for the Year 1934" in *Administrative Reports for the Year 1934*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> By 1941, the number of admissions to Old Tsan Yuk had reached nearly 4,000, with the hospital accounting for 10% of births in Hong Kong that year.

as a community centre called Tsan Yuk Social Centre, which aimed “to bring people together in harmony and to help them become, not only good neighbours, but good citizens”.<sup>5</sup> At the start, the centre housed offices of the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) and its various units. Other social service organisations accommodated there included the Hong Kong Society for the Blind and the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society and the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association. A training centre for mentally handicapped children was also set up there in December 1961.

The services provided at the Tsan Yuk Social Centre gradually grew and from 1961 to 1971 its registered members increased from 252 to 7,345. In May 1973, it was renamed the Western District Community Centre, offering a diverse range of services and activities.<sup>6</sup> As part of the reform of Hong Kong’s district administration, the management of the Western District Community Centre was transferred on 1 June 1985 from the SWD to the City and New Territories Administration, which is now the Home Affairs Department.

Designed and constructed by Messrs Little, Adams and Wood (李杜露建築師樓), the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk is constructed on a sloping terrain and is four stories high with a basement at its northern end. It features exemplary neoclassical architecture combined with Chinese elements. A plinth composed of coursed rubble masonry pointed with double-struck joint finishes is used to level the height difference of the site and also forms the exterior of the basement and ground floor. Above the plinth are the load-bearing red brick walls, which form the exterior from the first to the

*Architectural  
Merit*

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<sup>5</sup> Press release entitled “Tsan Yuk Social Centre to hold Open Week to celebrate sixth anniversary” from 6 May 1967. “Community and Social Centres – Western District Community Centre”, Public Records Office, HKRS70-2-272.

<sup>6</sup> These services and activities included drug prevention forums, sex education seminars, family cooking competitions and career and personal development programmes for form five students and matriculation graduates. It also served as a venue for the roving team of the Red Cross to collect blood donations, for the public to pick up residential telephone books and for owners’ management committees to hold meetings. During cold winters, it was one of the community centres that opened to provide overnight shelter for street sleepers.

third floor. The bricks are laid in English bond with quoins to accentuate the wall corners and give the building its visual character. The hip and valley roof has a timber truss system that supports the double-layered pan-and-roll tiles.

Facing Western Street, the front elevation of the building is symmetrical in design with a granite portico at the centre surmounted by an open pediment over the main entrance, which is flanked by two pairs of Tuscan columns. The granite lintel bears the inscription “贊育醫院” (Tsan Yuk Hospital) in regular script (楷書) originally written by Chan Pak-tao (陳伯陶),<sup>7</sup> a Qing official and scholar. The granite panels flanking the Tuscan columns are inscribed with the Chinese couplet “好生之謂德 保赤以為懷” (literally means “life-cherishing defines virtue; infant-guarding shapes compassion”), in regular script by Lai Tsi-hsi (賴際熙),<sup>8</sup> another Qing official and scholar. The lintel and the couplet at the entrance signify the close association that the hospital shared with the Chinese community and its dedication to the care of local residents.

Horizontal moulding bands painted in white extend across the full length of the building from one end to the other. The wall right above the portico is recessed with a rectangular decorative relief pattern between the windows on the first and second floors. Over the centre section of the second floor is a projecting canopy with a dentil cornice and alternate square and circle-shaped motifs on the soffit. This section is flanked by two blocks, each featuring blind arches, blind oculi and a plain canopy over the top of the third floor. The other elevations of the building feature a simple design. At the centre of the rear elevation is a curved bay extending out from the main wall.

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<sup>7</sup> Chan Pak-tao (1855-1930) was a Qing official who originated from Dongguan (東莞) in Guangdong Province. He attained the third ranking (“探花”) at the imperial examination in 1892, and was once the Director of Education of Nanking. After the 1911 Revolution, he moved to Hong Kong and resided in Kowloon City district until he passed away in 1930. His study of the patron god of Hau Wong Temple, Kowloon City was inscribed on a tablet therein, which still stands at the Temple.

<sup>8</sup> Lai Tsi-hsi (1865-1937) was a Qing official who originated from Zengcheng (增城) in Guangdong Province. He attained *hanlin* (翰林) title after the imperial examination in 1903. After the 1911 Revolution, he moved to Hong Kong and had taught Chinese classics at HKU from 1910s. He founded the Hok Hoi Library (學海書樓) in 1923 to preserve and promote Chinese traditional culture.

A doorway on the second floor of the staircase gives access to the bridge connecting the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk with the adjacent Annex Block. The fenestration is well organised and symmetrical.

The interior layout of the building follows a symmetrical plan and is minimally decorated throughout. The most imposing feature is the spiral main staircase that surrounds a central well and forms the projecting bay at the rear elevation. The concrete balustrade with geometrical patterns is topped with a metal handrail. Other features remaining in situ include the granite niches behind the main entrance, some transom windows and the concave coving, among others.

The appearance of the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk has remained generally the same since 1939 when one storey was added to each of the two end wings of the building as quarters for the matrons and midwives in training. However, by using red bricks for the exterior of these extensions and continuing the pattern of quoins at the wall corners, these additions harmoniously matched with the original fabric and are considered integral parts of the building that reflect its development as a maternity training hospital and thus enhance its value.

***Authenticity***

Some additions and alterations, including two concrete fire escapes at the rear elevation, interior refurbishments and modifications or additions to the internal partitions, were necessarily carried out to adapt the building to the changes in its use and fulfil the statutory requirements in force at the time. Many of its original significant architectural elements, including its red brick and coursed rubble façades and the main entrance with the granite portico, lintel and couplets, have been retained, while the spiral main staircase and its solid concrete balustrade and metal handrail also remain intact. All of these features are still preserved in good condition and confirm the high level of the building's authenticity.

Initially housing one of the first institutions providing

***Rarity***

modern maternity services and midwife training for the Chinese community, the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk is a rare and significant witness to the development of the maternity profession in Hong Kong's history.<sup>9</sup> It is also one of the few surviving buildings related to the CPDC,<sup>10</sup> which was established with support from prominent members of the Chinese community and played a vital role in advocating and promoting Western medicine to Hong Kong's local populace. The building stands as testimony to the contribution that the CPDC made to improving medical standards and hygiene awareness to the enormous benefit of the whole of Hong Kong.

The Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk is of exceptional social value. Despite the changes it has undergone over the years, it has always played a significant role in serving the local community by contributing to public healthcare and well-being from the time it was built to the present day. The maternity hospital and its associated clinics provided medical care and health information for pregnant women and new mothers, while later, when it was turned into a community centre, it housed various social service organisations and offered a diverse range of services benefiting Hong Kong citizens.<sup>11</sup> Today, it is home to several non-governmental organisations, including a Chinese medicine clinic, a childcare centre, a women's centre, a scout association and a kaifong welfare association, and thus continues to provide social and healthcare services to the community.

***Social Value &  
Local Interest***

This building is also a symbol of empowerment for those it has served over the decades. The midwifery course offered by Tsan Yuk “*opened the door of the nursing profession to candidates who started with no knowledge of English*”.<sup>12</sup> By training as nurses,

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<sup>9</sup> Another surviving hospital building providing similar services is the Maternity Block of Old Victoria Hospital, which was erected in 1921 in the neoclassical style.

<sup>10</sup> Other examples include the Annex Block of Old Tsan Yuk (previously known as West Point Dispensary) and the Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Hong Kong Society for the Blind, Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association, etc. were once housed in the building. There were also a hostel and vocational training centre for visually impaired people, a library and activity centre for youth, and organisations offering family assistance services to help them improve their livelihood.

<sup>12</sup> Speech by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs E.R. Hallifax during the opening ceremony

Chinese women had the opportunity to embark on a professional career and enhance their social status. When it became a community centre, it hosted a variety of programmes that encouraged members of the local community to launch their own activities, raising their awareness that they were not only “takers” but could also be “givers” and helping them gradually develop their leadership skills, self-confidence and a belief in making a contribution to society.<sup>13</sup>

Western District is one of several areas in Hong Kong that feature a dense concentration of historic buildings. More than 20 historic buildings are located in the vicinity of the Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk, including the Annex Block of Old Tsan Yuk (Grade 2) and the Second Street Public Bathhouse (Grade 2). These buildings also share significant group value with the Old Pathological Institute (currently the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, Declared Monument), the façade of the Old Mental Hospital (Declared Monument), the Main Block of Tung Wah Hospital (Grade 1) and the Main Building and Staff Quarters of the Old Lunatic Asylum Chinese Block (both Grade 2), as they collectively bear witness to the emergence of a cluster of important medical facilities in the district from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Moreover, the Western Magistracy (Grade 2), Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Kau Yan Church (Grade 1), King’s College (Declared Monument) and the front block of the Chinese Rhenish Church (Grade 3) can also be found further along Western Street. All of these buildings reflect the development of the district as a whole.

### ***Group Value***

The Main Building of Old Tsan Yuk also shares a group

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of Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital on 17 October 1922. *The Hongkong Daily Press*, 18 October 1922.

<sup>13</sup> A good example of this can be seen in the response of the youth members of Tsan Yuk Social Centre to the disaster that hit Hong Kong on 18 June 1972. When torrential rain triggered landslides that claimed over a hundred lives and destroyed squatter huts and residential buildings alike, these youngsters organised a charity ball to raise money and collected clothes from members to donate to the victims. The centre’s efforts to develop youth leadership skills also paid off in 1970, when two members represented Hong Kong at the International Youth Work Camp and the Expo ’70 World Youth Camp respectively. A volunteer instructor also represented Hong Kong at the seminar on “The Role of Youths in National Development” sponsored by the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East of the United Nations.



value with other surviving historic buildings that were designed or constructed by Messrs Little, Adams and Wood, such as the Former French Mission Building (Declared Monument), Hung Hing Ying Building of HKU (the exterior of which is a Declared Monument), the School building of 1927 of St. Paul's Co-educational College (Grade 2) and Maryknoll Convent School (Declared Monument).