

## **Heritage Appraisal of Hung Shing Temple**

### **Nos. 129 & 131 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

Situated on Queen's Road East in Wan Chai, Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟), also known as Tai Wong Temple (大王廟), is believed to be constructed between 1847 and 1852, and is dedicated to Hung Shing, the "God of the South Sea" traditionally revered by fishermen and merchant seamen.<sup>1</sup> One of the oldest surviving temples in Wan Chai district, it has stood at the same site for nearly 180 years, bearing witness to the religious, cultural and urban development of the area. *Historical Interest*

The land occupied by Hung Shing Temple – Inland Lot 257 – was leased in 1847 at a time when the site was still part of the shoreline.<sup>2</sup> The transfer of ownership of a nearby building in 1852 was witnessed by "Lee Muy", who was identified as the "carer of the Joss House",<sup>3</sup> suggesting that Hung Shing Temple was probably constructed between 1847 and 1852 and served as a place of worship

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<sup>1</sup> Hung Shing, initially venerated as the "God of the South Sea", has been worshipped in South China since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Kaihuang (開皇) in the Sui dynasty (594), when a temple was established in his honour in Guangzhou. During the Tang dynasty, the deity was bestowed the honorific title "Kwong Li Wong" (廣利王), literally translated as "King of Kwong Li". This title was further elevated in the Song dynasty to "Nam Hoi Hung Shing Kwong Li Wong" (南海洪聖廣利王), or "King Hung Shing of Kwong Li of the South Sea". Another legend holds that Hung Shing was originally a Tang dynasty official named Hong Xi (洪熙), a skilled astronomer and geographer, who was remembered for aiding fishermen and later venerated as a protective deity. See 周樹佳：《香港諸神：起源、廟宇與崇拜（全彩修訂版）》，香港：中華書局（香港）有限公司，2021年，頁254-255.

<sup>2</sup> According to land records, Inland Lot 257 was leased on 8 September 1847 for 75 years to a comprador called "Le-fun-wei" (李寬威). The records also show that Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院) had already acquired Inland Lot 257 by no later than 1895. When the government lease expired in 1922, a new one was granted to the then Secretary for Chinese Affairs, acting as a trustee for Tung Wah Hospital. Following the establishment of the Chinese Temples Committee in 1928, Hung Shing Temple was formally entrusted to Tung Wah Hospital (which was later amalgamated with Kwong Wah Hospital (廣華醫院) and Tung Wah Eastern Hospital (東華東院) into the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs) (東華三院) in 1931) to manage; an official delegation agreement was executed in 1971 and remains in effect to this day. See HKRS193-20-4. "Land Register Volume C", 26 September 1888 – 3 January 1931, Land Registry, Memorial No. UB73191, 16 January 1920, Land Registry, Property Particulars of Inland Lot No. 257, TWGHs, email correspondence with the Antiquities and Monuments Office, 23 July 2025, and MM-0206. "Plan of Victoria from Ice House Street to the Vicinity of Present-Day Whitty Street, 1850", 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Carl T. "Notes on Chinese Temples in Hong Kong", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*. Vol. 13 (1973), p. 136.

for the Chinese settlement in the area.<sup>4</sup> The establishment of the temple reveals that the worship of Hung Shing has been practised in Wan Chai since at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Hung Shing Temple underwent a major renovation in 1860, during which the granite base of the temple hall, granite columns, “prawn beams” (蝦弓樑, prawn-shaped tie beams) and granite decorations at the entrance porch were erected. These structural elements, inscribed with dates corresponding to the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Xianfeng (咸豐) in the Qing dynasty (1860), define the temple’s present architectural form.<sup>5</sup> The renovation was made possible by generous donations from numerous individuals and Chinese companies, including Tai Un Shop (泰源石店), a stone quarry firm located in the area.<sup>6</sup> The involvement of Tai Un Shop indicates that the worship of Hung Shing extended beyond fishermen to local stonecutters, possibly because they relied on maritime transport for the delivery of stones,<sup>7</sup> and reflects the broader development of Hung Shing worship in the region.

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<sup>4</sup> According to an account written by E.J. Eitel in 1895, the origins of Hung Shing Temple predate the British occupation. However, little support for this theory can be found in historical maps or documents, but it is possible that the temple initially existed as a shrine. See Eitel, Ernest J. *Europe in China: The History of Hongkong from the Beginning to the Year 1882*. London: Luzac & Company., 1895, p. 190, and 劉潤和、王惠玲、高添強：《益善行道 — 東華三院 135 周年紀念專題文集》，香港：三聯書店（香港）有限公司，2006 年，頁 278-279.

<sup>5</sup> The inscriptions on the granite base of the temple hall, granite columns, “prawn beams” at the entrance porch reads “咸豐庚申重修沐恩樂邑信士賴四曾慶三合勝店敬奉左右側石”，“咸豐庚申季春穀旦重修 沐恩信士樂邑李貞記、香邑楊貽玖敬奉石柱貳對；古廟維新海晏河清歌聖德 下環杼杼民康物阜被王恩”，and “咸豐拾年季夏吉立 泰源石店敬奉看樑獅子拱手掙角朝皆人物全副”，respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Owned by Tsang I (曾二), a stonecutter from Changle (長樂) county, Tai Un Shop, located at “Queen’s Road East, opposite the Eastern Market (下環街市)”, was one of the active stone quarry firms in the city during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stone quarry on Hong Kong Island was let to Tai Un Shop in 1880-1881, while the Kowloon quarry was let in 1882. See “Notification No. 2.” *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 7 January 1880, and “Notification No. 6.” *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 7 January 1882.

<sup>7</sup> 〈書寫下環：灣仔的文化記憶〉，東華三院檔案及歷史文化辦公室網頁，2023 年，<https://rho.tungwah.org.hk/content/files/feature-articles/書寫下環—灣仔的文化記憶%20lv10.pdf>，accessed on 8 March 2026.

The temple was renovated again in 1867 due to its “ruinous and unsafe condition”.<sup>8</sup> The inscriptions on the granite lintel above the entrance of the temple hall, dated to the sixth year of the reign of Tongzhi (同治) (1867), record that this renovation was carried out with the support of “the whole body of Hong Kong believers” (闔港眾善信).<sup>9</sup> This underscores the fact that Hung Shing Temple had already become a prominent religious site in Hong Kong by 1867. Moreover, the collective contributions of the Chinese community to both renovations demonstrate not only their devotion, but also the strong social cohesion in preserving their communal beliefs.

In addition to Hung Shing, the temple also houses other deities, including Wah To (華陀), Lady Kam Fa (金花夫人), Lady Fa Fan (花粉夫人), Tai Sui (太歲), Pau Kung (包公), Man Cheong (文昌) and Wah Kong (華光), all of whom were introduced over the years, signifying the diversification of local religious belief and the social development of the district.<sup>10</sup>

Today, the Hung Shing Temple continues to mark the old shoreline of Hong Kong Island, illustrating both the area’s early religious landscape and its subsequent development.

Constructed on elevated rocky terrain, the Hung Shing Temple is a Chinese vernacular single-hall, three-bay building fronted by a raised entrance porch. Built with grey bricks, the temple is topped by a flush gable roof supported by a timber framework and covered with Chinese pan-and-roll tiles. Its eastern and rear elevations integrate seamlessly with the natural rock formations,

*Architectural Merit*

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<sup>8</sup> CS/I018/00178023. “TEMPLE; WANCHAI”, 1867.

<sup>9</sup> The inscriptions on the granite lintel above the entrance of Hung Shing Temple reads “咸豐十年孟春重修 同治六年闔港眾善信重修吉立 洪聖古廟 李光廷敬書 樂邑鄧有元敬奉”.

<sup>10</sup> Wah To and Lady Kam Fa have been worshipped at Hung Shing Temple since at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number of deities venerated there expanded around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by a historic photo between the 1950s and 1960s showing an increase in the wooden plaques, each engraved with the name of a deity, outside the temple. See 鄭寶鴻：《香港歷史考察之旅：港島區》，香港：商務印書館（香港）有限公司，2019 年，頁 172, and Hung Shing Temple, Wan Chai 灣仔洪聖古廟, <https://digitalrepository.lib.hku.hk/catalog/pr76f50444#c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-233%2C-37%2C1465%2C736>, accessed on 8 March 2026.

lending the temple a distinctive character while attesting to the area's topography.

The temple's richly decorated entrance porch defines its imposing front elevation. Resting on a granite platform with a rare side-access configuration, it is flanked by two pairs of square granite columns, each with elaborately carved plinths and figures on the sides of their tops. The columns are separated by granite balustrades, with the central one intricately carved with a motif of double dragons and a pearl (雙龍戲珠). Each pair of columns, connected by "prawn beams" featuring finely carved granite *gejia* (隔架), supports a hip roof embellished with an exquisite historic Shiwan (石灣) ceramic ridge. Designed by Li Wanyu (李萬玉) and produced by Xu Zhiwen (徐志穩) and Xu Ronghui (徐榮輝) in the first year of the reign of Xuantong (宣統) (1909), which depicts the fictional heroine Fan Lihua (樊梨花).<sup>11</sup> These elements, together with a pair of ceramic figurines of the God of the Sun (日神) and the Goddess of the Moon (月神), the *bogu* (博古) motifs, and the polychrome plaster mouldings of floral and plant designs on the temple hall, combine to enhance both the grandeur and uniqueness of the temple's façade. Demonstrating superb craftsmanship, they are also outstanding examples of the distinctive traditional Lingnan (嶺南) architectural language.

The granite-framed doorway leads directly into the temple hall, which is paved with Canton floor tiles and granite slabs. The main altar dedicated to Hung Shing is flanked by other deities, including Tai Sui, Pau Kung, Lady Kam Fa and Lady Fa Fan.

Hung Shing Temple has retained a high degree of *Authenticity* in terms of its layout and intricate decorative details, which encompass stone carvings, granite figures and plaster mouldings that adorn its exterior. The temple has not undergone any major alterations since its layout was established in 1860, apart from the replacement of the Shiwan ceramic ridge on the entrance porch in 1909. This feature, nearly 120 years old, has become an integral part

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<sup>11</sup> Chinese inscriptions engraved on the Shiwan ceramic ridge reads “徐志穩 徐榮輝造 李萬玉作 宣統元年”. See 馬素梅:《屋脊上的戲台—香港的石灣瓦脊》, 香港: 作者自印, 2016 年, 頁 181-183.

of the temple's identity.

As one of the few surviving 19<sup>th</sup>-century temples that reflect the early religious landscape and urban development of the Wan Chai district, Hung Shing Temple stands as a rare architectural gem distinguished both by an architectural design harmonised with the natural rock formation and by its incorporation of side accesses, a configuration seldom found in traditional temples in Hong Kong. **Rarity**

Hung Shing Temple is deeply treasured by the local community, as evidenced by the strong support garnered for the previous renovations and by the historical relics, including the stone altar, old bell and umpan (雲板) presented by worshippers, which attest to the wide recognition it enjoys. Its significance is further reflected in the two streets opposite it, Tai Wong Street East (大王東街) and Tai Wong Street West (大王西街), which are both named after the temple's popular name "Tai Wong" (大王).<sup>12</sup> **Social Value & Local Interest**

Hung Shing Temple has not only served generation after generation as a venue for religious ceremonies and ritual practices, but it also historically provided space for soul tablets, ensuring that the forebears of worshippers could receive proper veneration.<sup>13</sup> This again highlights the strong ties between Hung Shing Temple and the local community.

A traditional building surrounded by high-rise buildings, Hung Shing Temple stands as a highly recognisable religious landmark, serving both as an embodiment of the communal faith that continues to bind the community today and as a reminder of the early history of Wan Chai district.

Other religious buildings in Wan Chai district, including Pak Shing Hau Temple (Grade 2) located immediately to its west, Yuk Hui **Group Value**

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<sup>12</sup> Laid out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tai Wong Street West was originally called Tai Wong Street, while Tai Wong Street East was known as Tai Wong Lane. They were renamed in 1915. See "Notification No. 258." *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 5 November 1915.

<sup>13</sup> According to the information provided by TWGHs, Hung Shing Temple and the nearby Pak Shing Hau Temple currently house around 285 soul tablets; there is no record of when the practice of receiving soul tablets began, however. TWGHs, email correspondence with the Antiquities and Monuments Office, 23 July 2025.

Temple, Tin Hau Temple in Causeway Bay, Lin Fa Temple and Tung Lin Kok Yuen (all Declared Monuments), the buildings at Nos. 72, 72A, 74 and 74A Stone Nullah Lane (a portion of No. 72 Stone Nullah Lane was the former site of Wah To Temple), St. Paul's Convent Church, St. Margaret's Church, Hong Kong Cemetery Chapel, S.K.H. St. Mary's Church, the Hong Kong Red Swastika Society Building and Confucius Hall (all Grade 1), St. Michael's Catholic Cemetery Chapel, the Parsee Cemetery Service Hall, Shing Kwong Church of The Church of Christ in China and the Hindu Temple (all Grade 2), the Jewish Cemetery Chapel (Grade 3), share significant group value with Hung Shing Temple, as they collectively represent the religious landscape of Wan Chai district and have had a profound influence on shaping the diverse and unique culture that characterises the area.

Moreover, Hung Shing, as one of the most venerated deities in Hong Kong, is worshipped at a large number of temples throughout the city, which offer a concrete and vivid representation of the historical development of Hung Shing worship in Hong Kong. Some of the most notable examples include Hung Shing Temple in Ap Lei Chau and Hung Shing Temple in Kau Sai Chau (both Declared Monuments), Hung Shing Temple at Chung Hing Street in Cheung Chau and Hung Shing Temple in Hang Mei Tsuen in Ping Shan (both Grade 2), Chung Shing Temple in Wing Lung Wai in Kam Tin, Hung Shing Temple and Pai Fung Temple in Ho Sheung Heung, Hung Shing Temple at Fuk Tsun Street, and Hung Shing Temple in Po Toi O (all Grade 3).