

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES AND ALTARS IN HONG KONG AND MACAU

KEITH G. STEVENS*

Several works on Hong Kong Chinese temples haven been published over the past few years, notably the Hong Kong Government's publication *This is Hong Kong: Temples*¹ which surveyed in detail twelve of Hong Kong's hundreds of temples. Also, during most of 1980 and 1981, a series of short articles in Chinese have appeared on alternate days in a vernacular daily.² These turned out to be over-amplified essays contributed by readers on specific aspects of temples, their keepers, deities and furnishings but which contained numerous gross, inexcusable and even inexplicable errors. A further book as yet unseen, but referred to in at least one bibliography, is *Chinese Temples in Hong Kong Island, Hong Kong* by Chuang Shen, a University of Hong Kong monograph, dated 1978 but still in mid-1981 not yet published.

In this article I have recorded my impressions of Chinese temples³ in Hong Kong and Macau together with facts gathered during fifteen years of research into Chinese iconography. As I am neither an architect nor an interior decorator, nor yet an anthropologist, the decoration and construction of the interior and exterior of temples, and the symbolism of the items the temples contained, have been described from a lay viewpoint.

Unlike Western churches and Moslem mosques, Chinese folk religion temples are the residences of the Gods, and are not centres of conducted group worship. In Buddhist temples and monasteries group worship is a daily routine, but only for a limited number of people usually resident monks and nuns. Apart from the one day each year when the main deity's feast day is celebrated and devotees descend on the temple in their hordes, temples attract, in the main, very few devotees who wish, for their own personal reasons, to offer worship, reverence or supplication to individual images or tablets on temple altars.

* The author is well-known to readers of this Journal from previous notes and articles on the gods of China.

Place names can be found in the Hong Kong Government's official publications. *A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories*.

Temples and monasteries can be classified as follows:—

- a. By religious belief — Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian⁴ and traditional folk religion.⁵
- b. By the contents of the altars — deities, ancestral tablets or charms.
- c. By their typological features such as the size and shape of their plans (square or rectangular); by their elevation into floors; by divisions and sub-divisions; whether free-standing or not; and whether the courtyard is enclosed or in front of the main building.
- d. Whether residential or non-residential.
- e. Whether permanent or temporary.
- f. By ethnic grouping (regional traditional types).⁶

Within Hong Kong and Macau, there are about four hundred and fifty⁷ Buddhist, Daoist, and folk religion temples, Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and nunneries, and ancestral temples. A few pre-date the advent of the British and Portuguese whilst the majority, built since 1840, have been established as specialised temples with a specific deity on their altars well known for a unique function such as destroying demons, protecting seafarers, foretelling the future, protecting mothers during childbirth and children during childhood, and the like.

It is unfortunate, out of interest in such historic places, that neither Hong Kong nor Macau have the large national temple or temples at which the official state religion was worshipped. This is due to the fact that before the arrival of the British and Portuguese, neither territory contained a county town⁸ and were primitive rural areas. Nor are there in Hong Kong or Macau the large City God temples which in Imperial China were to be found in all provincial and county capitals.

Whereas the Chinese government in 1928 closed many temples throughout China during their campaign to suppress superstition,* the practices condemned by the Chinese authorities continued in Hong Kong and Macau where British and Portuguese administrators treated native susceptibilities with great caution. Hong Kong and Macau temples therefore, retained deities and practices which have probably long since disappeared on the Chinese mainland.

* described in some detail by C. B. Day in his *Chinese Peasant Cults* (Nanking Theological Seminary English Publications, 1938), pp. 190-195.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

3

They have however continued in S.E. Asia and Taiwan; and in some of the remoter areas of Malaysia there are altars in temples, preserved and much the same as they were a hundred years ago.

It is often difficult to obtain a clear answer from devotees themselves whether a particular temple belongs to Daoism, Buddhism or popular religion because, in the main, devotees simply do not understand the question. The majority of Chinese are not concerned with legendary or historical explanations and, if remotely religious, claim to be Buddhist irrespective of which temple they visit or which deity they venerate. In a few temples it is quite obvious that the deities are all of one religion, either Buddhist or Daoist, but the altars in most temples bear a mixture of Buddhist, Daoist and folk religion images side by side on altars.

Common usage by both Buddhists and Daoists of temple titles and religious terms also tends to mislead. It is therefore unwise to ascribe, automatically, specific terms to Buddhism or Daoism, though a few have a generally accepted and common meaning. The majority of Buddhist temples for example, are called "Si" and Daoist "Guan", with "Miao" a common term for either. However, Miao is also the common term for folk religion temples and for certain shrines. "Tang," a usual term for Buddhist monasteries and nunneries, is also used for Daoist or clan ancestral halls and for certain Guan Yin temples. "Dong", a cave, is a Buddhist title very frequently used for squatter temples, suggesting perhaps that the immigrant founder liked to think of himself as a hermit.*

Whereas Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries bear flowery titles, usually obscure religious phrases or names unconnected with the main deities, folk religion temples tend to be dedicated to one or a pair of specific deities, the main god or gods on the main altar, and his, her or their names or titles are cut in stone or painted over the entrance to the temple.⁹

In Hong Kong temple building tends to reflect the wealth of a community (unlike in India where it reflects the class of the devotees). There are large establishments where monks and priests live; smaller establishments with a resident or day-time only keeper; and non-residential structures, the smaller of which are usually referred to as shrines.

* The characters referred to in this paragraph are 寺, 觀, 廟, 堂, 洞。

Temples and monasteries, despite their outward appearance are not always simple, self-contained religious units. Quite frequently they contain a number of major and minor deities, each with its special shrine or altar, hall or building.¹⁰ The original major deity may, for one of several reasons, be relegated to a secondary position and a new primary deity installed on the main altar. After some years and changes in abbots or temple keepers, the identity of certain deities, including surprisingly, major gods and goddesses, have been forgotten and, so as not to lose face, their identities are guessed at by temple staff, often wildly inaccurately.

There are several groups or complexes of folk religion temples in the two territories and to identify the number of individual temples on one particular site—apart that is from where it is possible from reading the titles over the entrances—it is necessary to count the number of Earth Gods and Door Guardians in their niches inside the temple on the inside walls, usually opposite each other, facing across the various entrances. A single or pair of these deities is usually found in each individual temple within a complex of temples irrespective of how many entrances there are. The Wen Wu temple (or Man Mo in Cantonese) in Hollywood Road, Hong Kong is an example, with two temples side by side seeming to be one having only one courtyard. The Wen Wu itself, a large traditional temple, is to the east with its Door Official and Earth God sitting side by side in one shrine. In the smaller “Temple of the Buddha of Light” on the west, there is only a single image, a lone deity called the “Door Official Earth God”, a title which amalgamates the titles of the two usual deities.

Urban and rural¹¹ folk religion temples differ in that the former tend to be more sophisticated, always have a keeper and several other staff, cater for worship by individuals at any hour (between 8am and 6pm) and have a wealth of images. Rural temples, in the main also boast keepers, but these are usually absent as they are “pensioners”,¹² very elderly people who spend much of their time asleep, calling on friends or shopping. Devotees visiting a rural temple normally find no one to assist them, and presumably, as this is an accepted facet of rural life, nobody seems to mind. The urban temple keeper on the other hand has to earn his living or recoup his investment of an annual tender, and so he ensures that a member of the staff is permanently in the temple during opening hours to assist in devotions, offer for sale incense, oil, charms and

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

5

fortune slips and interpret the fortune slips.

Competition between Buddhists and Daoists for the support of devotees led to grander and bigger temples. Small village shrines and temples, not in the same league, did not need to compete. Competition for devotees also led to the present circumstances in which rural shrines and temples are comparatively small and unkempt whereas their urban equivalents, though not much larger, have had to be made more attractive, usually by offering unique deities and services in order to wean devotees to their particular altars.

In Hong Kong and Macau there are a number of temples patronised primarily by people of a particular class, sub-ethnic group or occupational calling. Devotees tend to patronise their local temple irrespective of who the deities are, though they may be attracted to a more distant temple by a particular deity famous for his specialised power and efficacy. The latter might be a god whose cult is long standing and whose characteristics are unique and pertinent to the devotee's requirements. He might however be a new star, rising suddenly amid great publicity, only to wane again but not necessarily to disappear completely.

Location of temples

Prior to the anti-superstition campaign in China in 1928, traditional temples were scattered across China in their tens of thousands. Not quite so abundant in Hong Kong, they are to be found squeezed in among high-rise buildings in the city and among houses in villages, and may be free-standing or joined to other structures. But apart from monasteries, rarely does one appear beyond the village bounds and when it does it is usually derelict or almost so. Buddhist, Daoist and popular religion temples do not usually materialize as full-blown two-court buildings with numerous images, large and small. Their development has been a natural progression from the small shrine on a hillside, probably beneath the overhang of or attached to a living rock, at the base of a large old tree, or in many cases inshore from a sandy beach of a bay with an easy landing for boat people. If the shrine is well attended, the protective construction around the small shrine will grow as years pass, until eventually it reaches the maximum size that devotees can afford to build and maintain.

An example of the latter is the very recently established open-air shrine on a hillside, half way up, and some 120 steps above, the tarmac road of Black's Link on Hong Kong island. It consists of a small row of three shrines in one long concrete construction. Each is no bigger than 2' by 1'6", and contains a printed and framed coloured icon, one Buddhist, and two of the folk religion. The title given to the whole is the Temple of the Three Immortals (三仙廟). The final character "Miao" (temple) normally gives the impression of roofed halls containing images and icons. However, the concept of the three altars of the Temple of the Three Immortals is no different from other temples with large altars, numerous images, high walls and a roof, which with all their other refinements in no way add to the power of the prayer of the devotee. There are, however, not many examples in Hong Kong of permanent outside shrines being referred to as a miao (temple).

Monasteries were usually built away from the main centres of population, on hillsides backing on to slopes and facing downwards, overlooking wooded landscapes or the sea; whilst Daoist folk religion temples are to be found in population centres (especially where the centres existed a hundred or so years ago) and in sheltered coves at a convenient landing point.

Fishermen's folk religion temples may seem at times to be in isolated spots, but in practice they are near safe anchorages and just far enough from the next temple to be economically viable for the temple keeper. The pattern of fisherfolk temples, dedicated predominantly to Tian Hou (天后) and Hong Sheng (洪聖), when plotted on a map, is quite distinctive, particularly in Wanchai and the centre of Victoria. The temples, now quite far inland, were originally built back a little from the original coastline and faced what then was the nearest stretch of water.

Urban popular religion temples, built in traditional style in the early days of the two settlements, are usually simple folk religion establishments dedicated to the popular cults of Guan Di, Tian Hou and Wen Chang, whilst more modern temples built since the 1880's tend to be dedicated to less well-known deities who offer specialised services such as the plague deity, Sui Jingbo.

Over the years a few temples have been closed down or moved elsewhere, from lack of patronage or because of reclamation, urban redevelopment and street widening. In one fell swoop a fisherman's

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

7

shrine and two Chaozhou squatter temples on a hillside at Wong Chuk Hang on Hong Kong Island were removed during 1979 to permit road widening and the building of new housing estates. Temples, seemingly built to last forever, also disappear. A long destroyed and unidentified Cantonese traditional temple depicted in an old photograph in a published collection of photographs of old Hong Kong, may well be the temple which used to stand in Wong Nei Chong village approximately in the area of the present day King Kwong Street.¹³

The population explosion in Hong Kong has surrounded on all sides some of the originally relatively isolated temples by high rise blocks of flats. Some recently opened temples have even been established in shop houses, in ordinary flats in the high-rise blocks, and in flats and huts in resettlement areas.¹⁴ Geomantically such accommodation may be adequate for their purpose, but for ideal conditions the exact orientation of all temple buildings should be determined by geomancy and the *feng shui* expert's calculations. Traditional temples are often on the best *feng shui* sites in the vicinity.

According to Chinese laymen, temples should, as far as possible, face south. This south-facing orientation would mean that the main god or gods on the altar would also face the "geomantic South" which approximates to due south, and thus places the auspicious Yang on the east, and Yin on the west. However, even a casual examination of the temples in both Hong Kong and Macau shew that they can and do face in all directions. The two immediately obvious criteria in the siting of traditional temples, as can be seen from any large scale map, is that either they back onto a hill (presumably having a powerful and beneficial geomantic influence), or face the sea. Many of course do both.

Temples and monasteries are open from around 8am to 8pm, the exception being for those individuals whose need is great, and they may call at a monastery at any hour.

Buddhist temples

There are some one hundred and thirty five Buddhist temples or monasteries in Hong Kong built or funded by individual monks or nuns, or by individual devotees or groups. In addition to Buddhist temples there are organizations and services in Hong Kong which

serve Buddhist devotees and which have Buddhist images on altars in their halls and offices. These include Buddhist schools, clinics, book-stores and libraries, homes for the aged and vegetarian food shops and restaurants.

Buddhist temples and monasteries are not only more airy, lighter and cleaner than the Daoist folk temples, their images are larger, gold-lacquered and usually distinctive. However, there are the exceptions, few though they be, of small, dark and, because they are old, more drab Buddhist establishments. Some images too can be multi-coloured, though very few are of any material other than wood.

Exclusively Buddhist establishments are few and far between, the majority having an altar or two containing folk religion deities. Quite a number of the Buddhist temples were first instituted in Hong Kong by a single wealthy Chinese who recommended or selected the specific deity or deities to be placed on the altars. The donation of funds to help found a monastery is not only a move to obtain merit for the donor, or for perpetual prayers to be said by the monks in the Memorial Hall of the monastery for the donor himself or for his parents or wife, but is often a gesture to display the importance of the donor (it entitles his or her name to be engraved and displayed at the entrance). Once the monastery has been built the flow of funds from devotees enables it to flourish, but when devotees disappear the monastery too withers. Once the decision to found a Buddhist temple has been made, a board of directors is established and executive decisions are then made by them. (The same is true of Daoist and folk religion temples). In Buddhist and Daoist establishments a priest is invited to become the abbot, and nuns, monks and lay men and women are gradually enrolled. Abbots and hermits choose attractive and secluded spots on remote mountain sides to escape from the tumult of life and to devote themselves to quiet meditation. Founded by either fervent monks or wealthy benefactors, they were usually built on sites which were both aesthetic and practical because, in addition to being a place of meditation, in old China travellers in remoter areas found it necessary as well as agreeable to stay overnight in monasteries. (*Plate 1*)

Three very distinctive areas in Hong Kong's New Territories were all sufficiently remote to satisfy the "hermit" in the monks.

These are the wooded valley running down from Lantau Peak through Luk Wu to Tai O, the wooded area around Lo Wai to the north of and above the new town of Tsuen Wan, and the oldest of all, the easterly wooded slopes of the hill known to foreigners as Castle Peak. (*Plate 2*)

Buddhist temples can also be established by a monk wishing to set up an establishment of his own to earn credit. The usual pattern would be first to open a small temple¹⁵ consisting of a Buddha Hall, a living room and kitchen. As others join him, if of course they do and if the temple retains its popularity, so the establishment will thrive and grow. However, should he die prematurely, his establishment usually dies with him.

Buddhist monasteries, nunneries and temples usually follow a pattern based on the origins of the monk who first founded or organized the establishment. Hence, a monk from Shandong will reflect his provincial background in the organization and iconographical features of the establishment.*

Buddhists rarely have simple temples. Whereas traditional folk religion temples consist of a single storey, monasteries tend to have an upper and lower hall. Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and temples may best be described as being a series of "boxes" which, unlike a very high proportion of traditional temples, do not need to be symmetrical. They tend to run to complexes with their numerous rooms and halls, separate buildings and shrines, each housing one or more images. In each devotional hall the main sanctuary or altar which holds the image of symbol of the deity (or in the case of the Halls of Long Life and Rebirth, the spirit tablets) serves as the focal point of devotions and rites. Some monasteries and a few temples have a separate hall dedicated to the Ten Judges of the Underworld (with Di Zang Wang¹⁶ on the main altar) or the Eighteen Luohan (the disciples of the Buddha Sakyamuni).

There are, in addition to the devotional halls, monks' and nuns' quarters, kitchens, visitors' halls, refectories, study rooms, reading and meditation halls. Many small images are to be seen in each, though they are not always Buddhist. The occasional state religion cult hero or folk religion deity may be seen usually donated by a not too discriminating devotee. Abbots rarely refuse an image, particularly if it is accompanied by a donation to the establishment.

* 必盧遮那寺 in Lo Wai.

Inside the library large cases of books cover the walls and some books, used more frequently, are individually wrapped in cloth and lie on tables and altars. The larger monasteries have rooms for the aged, and most have halls where ashes of devotees may be deposited.

In general, a visit to a Buddhist monastery would take you first past the shrine of the folk religion tutelary deity of the neighbourhood, the Earth God (土地公). (*Illustration 3*) Once through the gates and the entrance hall with its six "guardians" (Mi Luo Fu, Wei Tuo and the Four Heavenly Kings) the layout follows a fairly standard pattern. The main altar will be straight ahead in the Great Hall which houses the main Buddhas. The main altar may be occupied by a single image, a group of three, or an array of a dozen or so. On and along the secondary altars, altars down the side walls and side halls there are images of other lesser deities. These, in twelve monasteries and temples in Hong Kong and Macau, include the well-known groups of eighteen or five hundred Luohan. Frequently, immediately behind the main altar and back to back with the main deity, stands the most popular and honoured of the Bodhisattvas, Guan Yin, with her two assistants.

Mahayana¹⁷ Buddhist temples contain a large number of images of Buddhas and major Bodhisattvas, some of which are considered to be more important than the image of Sakyamuni Buddha himself, unlike the Theravada Buddhist temples of Thailand, Vietnam, Burma and Srilanka in which Sakyamuni is the most important.

There appears to be only one temple in Hong Kong in which Lamaist images are worshipped, although there is one other, above Tsuen Wan, where in a private room, some forty or so Lamaist bronze images are on display.* The temple in which the Lamaist images appear on its altars is a shoddy, fairly modern concrete and corrugated iron construction above a new estate in North Point, where an elderly and now deceased Cantonese gentleman settled after spending some years in Tibet. Most devotees appear to have little idea of the style or origins of imagery, and the rituals and ceremonies performed in the temple by the widow of the founder are identical with those in other temples in Hong Kong.

* Guan Yin temple in Fu Yung Shan.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 11

There are a dozen or so temples in Hong Kong the titles of which *should* leave one in no doubt that they are Buddhist. To highlight the problem of classifying temples by their religious affiliation, let us examine one in Lo Wai above Tsuen Wan which has a typically Buddhist name followed by the characters for "Buddhist temple".* The staff consists of three laymen who run the vegetarian restaurant below the temple and the deities on the altar from senior to junior are Guan Di, Guan Yin, Lu Dong Bin, Dou Mu and Yao Shi Fo. Guan Yin and Yao Shi Fo are Buddhist, whilst the other three are Daoist folk religion deities. Opposite the main altar, on a secondary altar, are a Kitchen God and a Protector of the Law, both represented by framed prints; the first is a folk religion deity and the second Buddhist. And finally, on the table before the main altar is a red woden rice bucket containing a peck of uncooked rice in which stand numerous items which have without doubt Daoist and not Buddhist origins. Despite the mixture, the three laymen were surprised that there was any doubt that their temple was Buddhist.

Confucian and Daoist temples

In Hong Kong and Macau there are no Confucian temples as there were in China and still are in Taiwan. There are, however, Confucian Ha'ls such as the one in a school sponsored by the Confucian Society at Caroline Hill, Hong Kong Island. Several Chinese societies in Hong Kong are understood to have private altars dedicated solely to Confucius.

The official state religion had its own rites and deities and involved the official bureaucracy and the gentry only. The nearest thing to a State temple in our two territories is the rural school at Fanling where an image of the Yel'ow Emperor (黃帝) stands on an altar in the main hall, and the side hall of a Macau temple in which a school is held where on an altar there are full-size images of the inventors of ink and writing.

"Pure" Daoist temples are rare, there appearing to be none in Macau and some two dozen in Hong Kong of which two are branches of two of the others. These two dozen contain distinct Daoist deities, are run by Daoist bodies represented by a committee, whilst Daoist lay priests and priestesses perform Daoist ceremonies.

* Peng Lai Ge (蓬萊閣佛堂)

A typical Daoist temple is the very bare flatlet on the fourteenth floor of a high rise block in crowded Shamshuipo, established by a widow from Fujian province in about 1965. Now in her early eighties she lives alone in the flat which has a resounding Daoist temple name and has services performed once a week by a visiting lay priest. She recalled eight occasions when near death she was saved by a specific Daoist Immortal, Lou Da Zhen Jan (婁大真人) who died late in the Ming dynasty, in Fujian, but who appeared again in spirit form in the twenties of this century in Amoy successfully to persuade a Bank of China manager to stop gambling. Lou's likeness is the only icon in the temple, and before it services are held and sand table prognostications obtained.

A modern major religious complex above Lo Wai, Tsuen Wan, has on its main altar large images of Confucius, Lao Zi and Sakyamuni, representing the three religions, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Above the altar hall, which is a modern pagoda, there are several buildings dedicated entirely to memorials, and in two of these halls Daoist services for the dead are frequently performed.

Folk Religion Temples

There are some two hundred and forty-six folk religion temples in Hong Kong. When sub-divided into architectural groups, approximately two thirds of them are traditional buildings, two ninths are modern constructions, legally built with the Hong Kong Government's permission,¹⁸ and one ninth resettlement shacks, huts or other illegal constructions. These latter fall into those tolerated by the Hong Kong authorities and those not tolerated.* The latter are regularly pulled down, often to be built illegally again nearby.

Traditional temples in rural areas tend to have flourished around a catchment area of a village or two, and have been built on the outskirts of one of the villages. Frequently there is an adjacent open space, used primarily for the holding of elaborate festivities on the main deity's annual feast day.

Although most of the traditional folk religion temples built before World War II have a similar plan and general layout, no

* To be explained by the periodic amnesties given to older, but still not tolerated illegal structures. 1976 saw the last to date, the purpose being to provide a new, realistic base line for demolition of new structures (*Hon. Editor*).

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 13

two temples are alike. The interior decoration and content of temples tend to reflect their keeper's foibles, whims and beliefs, and whilst some temple keepers offer special rituals, others are thoroughly disinterested and their temples often bare and illkept and bereft of any spark of life. Rural temples are considerably barer than their urban equivalents. In some, poverty is stark and all that can be seen is a well-nigh empty hall, with an ash container for incense sticks and perhaps a paper plaque or two, with possibly an image and, if it is at all possible, electric illumination even in fairly remote areas. At the other end of the scale some of the urban temples are cluttered with objects of every kind, with the cool courtyard being used as a social gathering place. Incongruities abound such as, not uncommonly, sweaty vests drying on hangers suspended from the front edge of the altar, and the blaring gramophone record of church bells which greeted several surprised Westerners when they entered a small temple in Kowloon. Many temples have private courtyards for use by the keeper and his family.

Visitors touring the Far East frequently compare the spacious, light and clean Thai Buddhist temples with Chinese folk religion's dark and grimy temples. Many Chinese Buddhist monasteries and temples, not usually on the itinerary of tourists, are also bright and clean whereas the religious edifices in which folk religion deities dwell and which are visited by tourists in Hong Kong central and Kowloon, appear quite forbidding. traditional folk religion temples consist of a single storey building with windowless outside walls and one large dark, cavernous entrance, through which one can see oil lamps flickering in the gloom. Inside the temple the altars at the far end of the dimly lit halls may contain a single deity, a small group of deities or hosts upon hosts of them. Clouds of incense with its soft fragrance adds to the eerie dimness and in time blackens the gods. It also makes ones eyes water! One aspect obtrudes during certain seasons—open drains in the older traditional temples.

The basic urban, village and coastal traditional temple is a one-roomed "box". It can be a traditional building (*Illustration 4*) or a simple old cottage. It might even be an old two or three bed-roomed two-storey house or, if the founder has been fortunate with his sponsors, it will be a purpose-built construction.

The main doorway of the basic traditional temples at the front is normally the only entrance. It has large inward-opening doors

which are about nine feet high and consist of two vertical halves each bearing a painting of a guardian. Facing outwards, the pair of guardians can be military or civil officials. The doors usually are kept open by day, although if the temple keeper goes out for any length of time he will close and in certain areas, padlock them.

Immediately inside the main doorway, between it and the courtyard, are the spirit doors, a pair of wooden doors to prevent direct access to the temple by demon spirits.¹⁹ Instead of the pair of inner doors, some temples have a fixed, freestanding screen from floor to ceiling which performs the same demon-deflecting function (*Illustration 5*). Past the spirit doors, which are quite frequently left open or have been removed, there is the open area normally let down some 6" into the ground and frequently unroofed known as the "Incense Smoke Tower". This is the courtyard, though in smaller temples it may not appear to be particularly grandiose. It has been suggested that the open roofed forecourt dates back to an era when deities required open skies above them. In Macau it is quite widely held that the tutelary deity of the temple should have an open view of the heavens above, though this is only so in five of the temples there.

The mainhall (*zheng ting* 正廳) contains the main altar and is situated beyond the courtyard and in the rear-most building, more often than not with other halls and rooms grouped around it. The rooms on either side are usually identical in shape and size. These rooms and corridors are mainly used as store houses by the temple keeper and by local inhabitants.

Advancing beyond the open area of the courtyard into the main hall, often up one or two stone steps, we face the altar table with an ordinary table before it. The former has the five major objects — an incense bowl, two candle holders and two vases — and the latter bears any offerings. Beyond these tables, usually backing onto the wall, is the main altar, more often than not flanked by side altars.

The main hall of the majority of traditional temples is about 15 to 20 feet wide, with each of the side halls a further 9 to 15 feet wide. Their length is usually some 35 to 40 feet from entrance to rear wall. However, the main halls of the larger traditional temples in Hong Kong (in Stone Nullah Land, Hollywood Road and Temple Street, are some 30 to 40 feet wide and 50 to 60 feet in length, with proportionally higher roofs.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 15

In single-room and larger temples the major altar, which faces the entrance, may be either one large space reaching from side wall to side wall or it can be divided into three, five or more individual altars with, on occasions, a separate altar or two constructed down the side walls. (*Plate 6*).

In quite a number of traditional temples the main hall is divided longitudinally by partition walls from floor to ceiling. These stretch a short distance into the main hall from the rear wall of the temple, one on either side of the main altar. The two side altars are therefore outside the partitions, and in practice these partition walls serve to isolate the side altars.

In many traditional temples several major deities, and even a few minor deities, have a side hall dedicated entirely to themselves and their attendants. These include the God of Loyalty and Literature Guan Di; the fertility goddess Jin Hua Niang Niang; the bodhisattva Guan Yin and the wealth god Cai Bo Xing Jun. It is not necessarily a down-grading of the importance of the deity but a late recognition and addition to the temples' complement. A great many side hall altars contain a group of unconnected and unidentifiable minor images around the major and identifiable deity's image, all placed there over the years by zealous devotees.

A side hall in one temple contained the lone image of the Earth God on the only altar, although the characters above the altar read Jin Hua Niang Niang. Presumably over the years the images of this fertility Goddess and her attendants had been removed and replaced by the image of the Earth God without the title above the altar being changed.

The temple incinerator, and the temple keeper's kiosk or counter from which he sells charm papers and incense, are usually in one or other of the side halls or courts between side halls.

Side halls also contain large ritual items such as the temple bell, drum and the removable head and tail from the village dragon boat, and in one of the side halls of most Boat People's temples replicas of early junks (some 8' to 10' in length) also gather dust in the gloom. These model junks are used only on festival days when offerings are placed on the decks. The devotees thank Tian Hou for good catches over the previous year and request similar benefits for the coming year.

The roofs of traditional temples consist of interlocking tiles resting on lathes supported by strong cross beams. The latter are

often picked out in green or left in their natural state, though very quickly they are covered with incense soot.

Traditional temples in Hong Kong and Macau have two predominant styles of facade. The first has a verandah, which stretches from side to side across the front and is covered by the roof. (*Illustration 7*). The second style, the more common, consists of a regular oblong plan with the entrance door and the section of the front facade which fronts the main hall, set back about two feet into the whole facade. The facade fronting the two side halls is usually windowless, though occasionally it is decorated with long murals at roof height (*Illustration 8*).

The verandah of the first style is occasionally enclosed in a low, open balustrade. Above it the roof is supported by a stone beam from each side wall, reaching to and resting on the vertical columns which flank the entrance. Stone animals occasionally grace the beams, and more often than not the wooden support beams which stretch from the facade to the vertical pillars are heavily carved or support carvings depicting Chinese social life. In some villages, the Deng Family clan temple at Ha Tsun for example, the carvings depict everyday life, such as fishermen wading ashore from their grounded boats. In other temples, under the eaves high above the long verandah, murals of scenes in three dimensions in Shekwan pottery decorate the facade.

The majority of temples in Macau are single-hall temples (a total of 19 out of 32). The main halls of the two largest traditional temples in Macau, the Lin Feng Miao and the Guan Yin Miao are much the same basic size as those in the large Hong Kong traditional temples. However, the side halls and annexes of the two Macau temples are considerably larger. The large main hall of the Lin Feng Temple in Almirante Lacerda, facing WNW and backing onto the hill Colina de Mong Ha, has a main altar with two secondary altars on either side and, in addition, a second main altar in the front of the court, facing the main entrance. The whole Lin Feng complex has four separate major altars. There are two in the main hall, one at the front and one at the back and one each in the two side halls (with the one to the east having a further altar in a separate room). The temple's two side halls, each with its own main altar, are more than likely looked upon as separate temples as they have their own Earth Gods beside their entrances.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 17

The even larger Guan Yin temple, facing south west on the reverse of the same hill, has a similar layout, though in this complex the side halls are separated from the main hall by unroofed passageways.

A third large temple, but not of traditional architectural style, the Lin Dai Temple off the Estrada do Repouso, has two separate secondary halls to the west but only one to the east. Each of the two western secondary halls are sub-divided into two altar halls, one to the front and one to the rear, making a total of seven separate altar halls.

The nearest equivalent in Hong Kong to the two largest traditional temples in Macau, are the traditional temples in Hollywood Road in Central Victoria, Temple Street in Yaumati and Stone Nullah Lane in Wanchai. Nowadays the traditional temple in Yaumati (*Illustration 9*) is in practice four individual temples under the management of the Tung Wah Hospital Group. Originally it was a single temple consisting of a large main hall with two side halls on either side, each hall separated from the next by an uncovered passageway. For at least thirty years, however, the complex has consisted of the main major temple, with the two secondary halls to the north being divorced from it and becoming individual temples with their own keepers, controlling committees and cults. The two secondary halls to the south have again been divorced from the main hall. One is an individual temple with its own cult etc and the other is a clinic and dispensary. The main cults in the four temples from north to south are Guan Yin, the City God, Tian Hou and again Guan Yin, though in addition the major deities worshipped in the second and fourth temples are the Ten Judges of the Underworld and She Ji (社稷) the Spirit of the Harvest and Crops. The carved titles of the main deities over the four temples' entrances, are interesting. The first is Fu De (福德), the Earth God (and not Guan Yin as one would expect), the second has the title of the City God Temple above its entrance, the third has Tian Hou and the fourth has She Tan (社壇) (again not Guan Yin as one would expect). The last entrance, the clinic, has the characters for the Library over it.²⁰

The traditional temple in Stone Nullah Lane in Wanchai is comparatively larger than other similar temples in the colony and is made up of four individual halls. The main hall, roughly 40 feet wide by 55 feet long, has three side-altars on each side of the

main altar, with a further three altars down the side walls. In the centre, a long altar divides the upper part of the hall from the lower. A side hall to the west, dedicated to one goddess, is also used as a workshop for the construction of paper items to be burnt in ceremonies for the dead. Behind this side hall is a courtyard beyond which is a separate hall containing three more altars. To the east of the main hall is a secondary hall, dedicated, not altogether surprisingly even in a traditional temple, to the Buddhist Trinity. This hall contains just the one large altar and behind it are the living quarters for the staff.

Some traditional temples have had a secondary temple built alongside, as an annex or as a separate temple dedicated to a particular deity, and many traditional temples nowadays have had windows knocked into the outside walls, particularly into the rooms in which the keeper and his family reside.

In villages and hamlets there are two types of temple. The first is the small, often single-room popular folk religion temple or shrine, of the kind we have described above, in which one or two major deities are depicted on the main altar. The second, the clan ancestral hall or temple, may be a comparatively large complex of halls and rooms, the main hall of which contains, by seniority, serried rows of ancestral tablets of the most senior members of the family, the public ancestors of each generation back twenty or more generations.

Village temples, be they traditional folk religion or clan temples, are more than just religious establishments where prayers and offerings may be made. Side halls and rooms are used as the village storehouse for items like the old rice winnower, large tables and clan crockery*, as the village school, the games room and as the civic and medical centre. They also frequently are homes for one or two of the village needy.

Most walled villages in the New Territories have a very small single-hall folk religion temple called a Shen Ting (神廳), dedicated to one of the national or local heroes (such as Guan Di or Hou Wang) situated in the north wall, facing south, and located at the opposite end of the main lane which bisects the village from the main gate. In most walled villages too, the Tu Di Gong (the Earth

* Lineage or village properties that can be borrowed by families on festive occasions.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 19

God and tutelary deity of the village) sits in a niche inside the ground floor of the tower of the gateway, watching over his parishioners. In the attic of the gateway of some of these villages, out of sight and only accessible by a rickety ladder, is an image of Gui Xing, one of the Gods of Literature, placed there for students to pray to prior to taking an examination, and for parents to pray to for the blessing of a bright child.

The majority of more recent temple structures, mostly built on hillsides during the past twenty-five years, mainly by Chaozhou immigrants and a few by Min An immigrants, have been extended room by room over a period of years and may be any shape and size, according to the possibilities of the site, and may have a dozen or so rooms for one use or other.

Quite a few of the temples constructed by ethnic minorities contain very local cults brought to Hong Kong from the area in China from which the emigrants came, and the temples themselves are a focus for the ethnic or sub-ethnic groups concerned. Thus, in Hong Kong over the years, separate shrines, halls, and finally complete buildings have been built by Chaozhou, Min An and Hoklo immigrants. There are even a few built by refugees from Shanghai and the north.

A unique structure in concrete, shaped and moulded to look like rock, was demolished in 1979 in Tsuen Wan to make way for a major new housing estate. The building, a squatter temple built by immigrants from Swatow covered a large area and had three major and four minor altars. The inside of the temple was shaped to resemble a large rocky cavern with the altars shaped like small caves, fronted with glass and illuminated with neon lights. The outside walls were painted smooth concrete. The roof however, was a phantasmagoria of small concrete figures from Chinese legend amidst miniature buildings, more caves and grottoes, all painted in vivid colours. The whole was over-shadowed by a large vividly crimson concrete structure which can only be described as a massive red pepper standing vertically on a greeny-blue base, and punctured by small holes to act as windows. Although the building looked a ghastly monstrosity to foreigners, it had a unique character and was very popular amongst the Chaozhou immigrants of Tsuen Wan and Kowloon.*

* It has been resited, and is in course of redevelopment, but alas not in such a picturesque form! *Hon. Ed.*

Although clan or ancestral halls and temples are usually handsome buildings located near the centre of a village, many now old and rarely used have been permitted to fall into disrepair and are derelict. These memorial halls contain only the ancestral tablets of the senior member of each generation of the clan whose surname appears over the main entrance of the hall or complex. Some villages have two and even three such temples, dedicated to each of the clans dwelling within their bounds. (*Plates 10 and 11*).

The memorial and ancestral tablets of the man-in-the-street (personal ancestral tablets) are placed on either the private household altar of the family or the shelves of the memorial halls of Buddhist or Daoist monasteries and temples. Personal ancestral tablets are rarely retained for more than three generations, whereas the tablets of the public ancestors of the clan are retained as far back as the first ancestor who moved to the area in which they are presently situated.

Like the small temples, the clan halls are usually cluttered with agricultural equipment used only when the season comes around. None of the clan halls is spotless, and often the plaques, panels, mirrors and other decorations are so covered in accumulated filth that they are hard to decipher. The excuse given is that the lineage is too poor to employ a temple keeper and by implication there is no one else who should keep it clean, so the halls remain decrepit and forlorn.

Family and clan temples very rarely contain images, particularly as Cantonese do not carve images of their ancestors as did the people of Hunan and Fujian provinces. When family and clan temples do contain deities, these are represented by either a framed print usually of the bodhisattva Guan Yin or a small image of a popular deity placed there by a devotee who either had no place for it at home or had a misguided notion to donate such an image to the clan (*Plate 12*). This happened in a small clan temple near Sheung Shui where the tolerant members of the clan have ignored the deity and have left it there to avoid hurting the donor's feelings.

Shrines

Shrines almost certainly pre-date temples and in their basic form have remained essentially unchanged for hundreds, if not, thousands of years. A considerable percentage of Chinese ritual is performed

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 21

before them in both rural and urban areas. In round terms, they are miniature unmanned temples or open air altars often called in Chinese "small temples" (小廟). They fall into two categories. The first is the roofed, open-fronted, doorless structures which protect a public deity or deities. The second is an unroofed area surrounding a natural rock, tree, stone or marker which is considered a spirit and is offered incense and other minor offerings. (*Illustration 13*).

The first can be as large as a single room the size of a small garage (but with a low roof), as small as a dog kennel or even smaller, a miniature temple some 1'6" high, 1' wide and some 2" to 3" deep. All shrines house a deity and an incense pot. A wooden plaque, a framed print or an uncut or undressed rock or stone may represent the deity. In the case of shrines dedicated to the Earth God, probably the undressed rock is the most common representation. Very occasionally the Earth God is joined by his consort, and quite frequently by one or two unidentified and usually unconnected images placed there by devotees.

Large street shrines (*Illustrations 14 and 15*) of a more temporary nature are now few and far between in Hong Kong²¹ and are referred to officially, as we have already seen, as "illegal temples". They generally consist of a large altar with numerous often unconnected folk religion and Buddhist images and several dozen framed prints of various gods. The jumble is arranged in an open-fronted shed, or in an open-fronted lean-to in a side alley and is cared for by one or two very elderly, often infirm men or women. In Macau none have been found however, though there are some two to three dozen in Hong Kong.

Small shrines are to be seen at the side of streets, footpaths, at crossroads or outside temples and monasteries, inside temples and monasteries in ones or groups of two or more, in homes and also in shops and factories.

Household or family shrines, very common in Hong Kong, particularly in peasant and urban working class homes, are probably not always quite what foreigners expect. They often consist of a tiny shelf or alcove, painted vermilion, bearing or containing an incense pot (often the ubiquitous red-painted cigarette tin), before a representation of one or two deities.

The more elaborate household shrines have miniature doors,

columns, boards, boards bearing auspicious phrases, balustrades, roofs and lattice windows exactly like full size temples (*Illustration 16*). Several wooden miniature shrines seen on lower decks of large sea-going junks were heavily ornamented and the carving exquisitely detailed. At the other end of the scale, soap boxes, painted red and upended, serve as the simple shrine of the less affluent household.

Actual images of gods in homes are few, and their worship is very limited. Usually there is just a framed print, and routine offerings consist of a daily incense stick burnt before the print with, in addition, a small offering of tea or rice on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month. The majority of Chinese who have a household shrine display on their main altar the bodhisattva Guan Yin who is, without a doubt, the most popular deity of Chinese everywhere. Most homes also have a second "altar", the Kitchen or Stove God whose title on a red board is hung up, or when written on a red paper is pasted up near the family cooking range.

Shop or factory shrines usually stand or hang on walls at shoulder height, constructed of wood and painted vermilion. The majority of shop shrines contain plaques or prints of Guan Di as patron deity of merchants and Tu Di Gong, the Earth God. Those in fire stations and police stations bear prints of Guan Di in his role as the patron deity of loyalty.

On days marked Chu (除)²² in the Almanac (通勝), old lady devotees offer prayers in the street before unpainted wooden boxes used as shrines. They are propitiating the demons who cause disasters, and are also attempting to change their luck for the better. They use one of their shoes to strike the "small men" (小人) banging small figures of humans cut out of black paper and at the same time calling out in high pitched voices for the demons to flee. The voice is pitched particularly high when calling back the roaming soul of a sick child (the absence of the soul being the cause of the sickness).

Apart from modern concrete decorative structures in places like the Tiger Balm Gardens and on the foreshore of Repulse Bay, there is only one pagoda in Hong Kong or Macau. This is at Ping Shan, in the New Territories, and was built of stone blocks some three hundred years ago. Like other Chinese pagodas it has little use other than to enshrine some sacred object, in this case several images

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 23

of deities. It is now only three storeys high though originally it had, according to differing legends, four or seven storeys.²³

Internal Decoration

Popular religion temples vary from the traditional old, often magnificent buildings with carved and gilded panels and beams, furnished with rich embroideries, bronze and pewter vessels and numerous personally-donated items all of which enhance local pride in the temple, to the new gerrybuilt squatter constructions with ramshackle altar tables littered with tins, boxes and bottles, with one or two litho reproductions only to enliven the walls. Some of the rural traditional temples are bereft of much decoration due, in all probability, to the poverty of devotees.

The range of stylistic variations that emerged as temples evolved in Hong Kong and Macau, shows an essentially conservative character, although the inner decoration of traditional temples does vary from area to area. Some temples have a frieze of panels carved or sculpted in relief above or in front of the altar tables depicting birds and animals, court scenes with generals flanked by soldiers and scholars, and scenes and characters from Chinese myths and legends. Some temples have long red (occasionally black) boards inscribed with auspicious phrases in black or gilded characters, concealing the pillars of the main hall, and some have richly decorated lintels. Most however are relatively bare. Inside, the structure of beams, brackets and roof tiles are more often than not blackened with soot from incense smoke.

Apart from the strikingly rich crimsons on and around the altars, there is little colour in Daoist folk religion temples and the murk and dust tends to overshadow what little colour there is. Courtyards, paved with stone, are usually calm, shaded areas of green and blue, with little decoration apart from the murals which may have been preserved, painted over doorways.

Temple and monastery murals and decorative wall carvings, particularly in Daoist and folk religion temples, are so complicated in detail and pattern, and contain such a wealth of allegory and legend that non-Chinese visitors are either completely bewildered or overwhelmed by detail that usually they see little of the mural. Paintings and sketches of scenes involving numerous Immortals and deities defy identification, even though the main character may

perhaps be recognisable. In one monastery near Tuen Mun very large murals depicting individual, fearsome soldiers were copies from sketches made in Peking many years ago but are only known as the "Fierce Generals".

The images of the deities on altars are frequently brightened with a red scarf or a large red rosette which covers the top of the head or hat of the images, with a ribbon hanging down on either side of the image to approximately waist height. Other decorations pinned into the hats of gods on the altars include long pairs of red and silver metal foil triangular rosettes. Cloth vestments are also commonly to be seen, made by elderly lady devotees as an act of piety and draped around the images of major deities.

There is a remarkable air of unkemptness about traditional temples. Things are stored flagrantly beside or under the altar without any regard for aesthetics. The clutter can range from bedding to broken furniture, plastic bowls to drying clothes, from spare tins of oil for the lamps to piles of old newspapers. Umbrellas hang on the wall, vests and underpants dry on the altar table edge, and everywhere there is a thick layer of dust.

External decoration

Outside decoration, usually very simple, consists of murals over the entrance, the flattish gable roof of dull, glazed tiles which on traditional temples more often than not leads up to an ornamented ridge piece. Exterior walls usually are of brick, granite or a combination of both which in some places have been whitewashed or have a cement finish.

Many articles have already described traditional temple roof ridge external decoration, which is mainly of Shekwan pottery, with turquoise and golden yellow the two predominant colours. The decoration may only cover the horizontal ridge, though in quite a number of traditional temples it also covers the curved roof ridges joining the main ridge to the flank walls. The decoration on these ridges usually has a centrepiece consisting of a red ball (pearl) with dragons, fishes, cockerels and mythical creatures, interspersed with three-dimensional scenes from Chinese legend and myth. The roofs of smaller traditional unmanned, single room, coastal temples usually are without decoration, or if any attempt has been made it is stylized and very basic.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 25

Several temples have large stone lions outside the entrance or just inside the main doors to guard the temple from demons.

Boat Peoples' land temples used to have a pair of masts more than twice as high as the temple with a small red wooden crow's nest on each, some six feet from the top²⁴. These are said to be the repository of the spirit of the dragon of the nearby hill or island peak which protects the local inhabitants from the depredations of evil spirits. Nowadays, only one temple seems to have them, the Hong Sheng temple at the old landing stage on Aplichau.

Large triangular and colourful flags flown outside temples tend to identify the temple as a Chaozhou community temple. These flags bear the title of the main deity, the name of the temple and if a spirit medium operates there, another flag in grey and black is flown, bearing an Eight Trigram diagram together with magical signs and symbols.

Dating of temples

About the only way that temples can be dated with any reasonable accuracy is from the plaque near the entrance listing the subscribers to the initial construction, from the temple bell inscription²⁵ or from the dates on the ancestral tablets of the founders of the temple on the temple altar.

From a very general examination of bells and chimes, several dozen bear dates between 1700 and 1840, that is post-Ming dynasty but pre-British occupation. One or two bells date back to the period immediately post-Ming and a further couple are dated within this century. The older traditional temples were probably rededicated post-Ming, or were built and dedicated post-Ming, mainly in the period following the rescinding by the Kang Xi Emperor of the order enforcing the removal of all who lived within 50 *li* (18½ miles) from the coast during the period of intense pirate and anti-government activity along the China coast in the 1660s.²⁶

Probably the earliest recorded date for the construction of a temple is the stone carving dated AD 1274 behind the Tian Hou temple in Joss House Bay. In AD 1012 Lin Daoyi, a trader from Fujian province, wrecked during a storm, was washed up on Tung Lung Island and built a temple dedicated to Tian Fei (as Tian Hou was then called) in thanksgiving. The temple was destroyed by a

typhoon and rebuilt some two centuries later on the site of the present Tian Hou temple in Joss House Bay.²⁷

There have been several apparent brief bursts of temple building in Hong Kong since the arrival of the British. One was in the early days of Hong Kong in the 1840's; another spurt during the period of growing prosperity in the 1870/1880's; another during the era of the plague (the 1890's); and another in the 1950's during the massive influx of refugees. Many temples were renovated during the latter days of the Qing dynasty, and by the Hong Kong government's Chinese Temples Committee since the second world war.²⁸

Temples are expensive buildings and are built mainly in times of economic affluence. Although many temples are receiving less and less attention from keepers and grass grows high in temple yards, others are expanding and have been refurbished at great cost.

One should not be misled into believing a temple to be old by its condition, as the climate ages buildings very rapidly on the coast of China. The dilapidated state of some dozen or so traditional temples gives the impression of centuries of neglect, whereas most were working temples up to a decade or two ago. Other looking almost new are, in reality, traditional temples which have been rebuilt or refurbished with the assistance of large government subsidies. However, many modern renovations have changed the original character both of the altars and of the temples themselves.

The Hong Kong Government has been meticulous in providing assistance whenever it has needed to encroach upon temple property. One site in Lo Fu Hang between Castle Peak and Yuen Long where a government department authorised a quarry to be opened and in the process ordered the removal of three ramshackle huts termed "temples", one large and two small concrete and tile edifices were built nearby to rehouse the gods.

Chaozhou immigrants who settled in Hong Kong during the fifties and sixties quickly discovered that their shanty dwellings on hillsides, considered illegal by the Hong Kong Government, were torn down by officials. They also quickly discovered that British officials, fearing to tread on religious susceptibilities, were more lenient towards religious structures. The Chaozhou immigrants therefore built for themselves small, rough temples of corrugated iron and wood and, as an annex, a small living area, and more often

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 27

than not they were allowed to remain unscathed by the demolition gangs. This was how the apparent plethora of Chaozhou temples was explained by a Chaozhou policeman.

Temple Management and Staffing, and Hong Kong Government Controls

Until the gazetting of the Hong Kong Government Chinese Temples Ordinance of the 27th April, 1928,* required all temples to be registered,²⁹ temples were managed by individuals, by groups or organizations and quite often devotees were exploited. A section of the Home Affairs Department of the Hong Kong Government keeps records of property, listed under temples and shrines, private institutions, houses converted into special temples and guild properties.

In some temples in Hong Kong which come directly under Hong Kong Government control the keeper's post was tendered out periodically, with the highest bidder having the right to sell joss sticks, candles and paper offerings, and to perform rites and ceremonies for devotees for a fee.† This was discontinued in 1967 when the Government began employing its own temple managers. Such managers are now employed at seventeen temples throughout Hong Kong.

Many temples are under public control, managed by neighbourhood community committees, by religious groups or by a larger group such as the Tung Wah Hospital Group, with detailed regulations to control the duties of the temple keeper (Si Ju 司祝). The Tung Wah Group runs seven temples and receives a considerable charitable income from, amongst others, the Wongtaisin Temple in North Kowloon. Some temples are managed by private individuals, and a few of the monasteries and temples are private, run for the religious benefit of the small number of occupants. These latter do not encourage visitors though the residents will courteously welcome the occasional one or two. A few of the private Buddhist

* ("To suppress and prevent abuse in the management of Chinese Temples"). Although enacted in 1928 it has been revised periodically.

† This practice followed that long adopted by many bodies or communities owning temples, especially in towns. *Hon. Editor.*

temples are willed from generation to generation to adopted sons-in-religion, whilst private folk religion temples are bequeathed to sons, nephews and even daughters. Buddhist temples, willed from generation to generation, are all only very small ones with a minimal monkhood.

At least several thousand people in Hong Kong alone, earn a living in some way connected with folk religion practices, many in or connected with temples though by no means all. A small number of these earn a comparatively reasonable income due to their expertise, energy and intuitive business acumen. Although few would admit it their competition for business from devotees, though not fierce, exists. One keeper, washing his temple floor, said that he knows that the devotees who use his temple appreciate its cleanliness; another met two elderly ladies at the entrance, escorted them in and presided over the rites they required performed. He made it clear that these ladies came regularly and that the service he performed for them was well rewarded. This explained, he said why he had gone beyond the norm in going to the entrance to welcome them.

In the fifties, according to one temple's records, the pay for the temple keeper was made up of subscriptions of one sheng of rice from each family annually and HK\$30 monthly from the village public fund.

Certain temples are centres for societies formed by devotees around one particular deity. These societies, registered with the Hong Kong Government, have rules and subscriptions and have been established for the welfare and advancement of the devotees. An example is the Society centred around the Living Buddha Zhi Gong in a hillside squatter temple constructed illegally above Shamshuipo. The Society comprises some 450 members, mostly Chaozhou immigrants from Swatow, who have settled and set up small shops and businesses in Shamshuipo. Their subscriptions help keep the temple clean and well run by the staff employed by the Society. The staff consists of a keeper, sometimes known as the secretary as he controls the sale of incense and oil and takes fees for his professional assistance; an odd-job man who tends the garden and sweeps up; and the apprentice who does the chores and runs messages. The Society meets on festival days connected with

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 29

Zhi Gong and over Lunar New Year, and has a "red-pig" fund³⁰ for the feast at each occasion.

Certain lands in rural areas in Hong Kong are designated as 'temple property', (廟田) and the income from them is devoted to the upkeep of the temple and its deity as well as providing financial support for the temple keeper. In many cases the deed of ownership is made out in the name of the principle deity, whilst selected elders of the village act as trustees.

A foreign missionary once described how funds were raised in China for religious purposes.³¹ An old Buddhist temple to the north of Tak Hing, west of Guangzhou which had been allowed to fall into ruin, was to be rebuilt in 1903 because a geomancer discovered that the floods and crop failures of 1902 were due to the neglect of the deity who formerly had occupied the temple. The deity had come back, according to the geomancer, and had been seen in the form of a woman. Villages and cities even as far distant as forty miles sent processions to help subscribe towards the rebuilding. The missionary described the local collections as "frequently barefaced extortion". He explained that "women went round to collect the money and asked every man for a sum based on what they knew him to be worth. If their demand was not complied with, they would refuse to take anything at all and threatened to post the family name all over the city walls as niggards who refused to help towards the public weal". Perhaps too, in Hong Kong this may still go on to some extent.

Statistics — Temples in Hong Kong and Macau

Household altars and unmanned sea-side and streetside shrines have not been included in the statistics, except in the case of the streetside shrines which are roofed buildings large enough to entertain several humans standing up. These have been included under temples. The unmanned smaller public shrines run to about several hundred in Hong Kong with a further eighty in Macau.

There are about three hundred and ninety-six temples and monasteries in Hong Kong. Of these as many as ninety-eight are (or were before reclamation projects were completed) coastal temples dedicated to gods or goddesses of the seas; one hundred and thirty-five are Buddhist monasteries or nunneries; two hundred and forty-six are folk religion temples and two dozen are Daoist temples

or halls.³² Nearly 70% of all nunneries are on Lantau island whereas only 10% of the monasteries are; and three hundred and fifty three temples and monasteries have resident staff.

There are thirty-two temples in Macau, of which two are well-nigh derelict. Of the thirty-two temples, six are coastal, twenty-four are urban and two rural. The majority of temples contain a mixture of Buddhist and folk religion images (no temples contain only Buddhist images) and the remainder contain only folk religion deities.

Degrees of popularity of the major deities in temples and shrines

The total number of temples dedicated to a specific deity throughout the two areas reflect the importance of that deity to devotees. In Hong Kong and Macau forty-four different gods each have at least one temple dedicated to him (or her), whilst only seven gods have more than five temples to him (or her). The seven in order of precedence (based simply on them being the main deity, of a temple or monastery) are Tian Hou (seventy-eight) (*), Sakya-muni Buddha (thirty-nine), Guan Yin (thirty-eight), Guan Di (twenty-one), Hong Sheng (twenty), Bei Di, who is better known as the Northern Emperor, (ten), and Lu Zu or Lu Dongbin (seven). Although this gives only a very rough guide, the number of images of Guan Yin throughout Hong Kong and Macau vastly outnumber those of Tian Hou. However, when the criterion is the number of temples in Hong Kong and Macau in which a particular deity is to be found (on any altar and not necessarily as the main deity), then the first five are Guan Yin whose image appears in at least seventy-five temples, Tian Hou (114), Guan Di (88), Qi Tian Da Sheng (Monkey) (61), and Di Zang Wang (59).

The Kitchen God, most frequently depicted by a reddish orange paper pasted on the chimney above the stove, is the most common deity to be seen on the household altar, followed closely by Guan Yin whose image as we have noted is also to be seen in 70% of all temples. The most common deities out of the home are Tu Di Gong, the Earth God (the local tutelary deity) in both urban and

* The totals are not the number of images seen but the number of temples in which the deity is the main image in both Hong Kong and Macau.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 31

rural areas, and the very ancient agrarian cult, the God of the Harvest, Soil and Grain, She Ji (社稷) whose shrines are found usually at the edge of villages and, like those of the Earth God, are too numerous to count.

The only general conclusion to be drawn from all this suggests that the vitality of the cults of deities has in general declined, whereas a limited number, in squatter resettlement areas, continue to thrive by acting as a focus for the minority Chaozhou, Hakka and Min An immigrants.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *This is Hong Kong: Temples*. By Joyce Savidge, Hong Kong Government Printer, 1977.

² *Dong Fong Ri Bao*.

³ In this article the English word "temple" is used to include uniquely Buddhist and uniquely Daoist temples and monasteries; popular or folk religion temples (which may or may not contain Buddhist and Daoist deities); community temples (both private and public, and ancestral or clan temples). A shrine is an *open-fronted* room or boxlike construction, either at the wayside, under a tree, outside a temple or monastery or hanging on a wall. Outside permanent shrines are referred to in Hong Kong as "Exposed temples" (露天小廟). They are by definition unmanned.

A "community temple" is one built by funds raised within a limited community and administered by a committee, either of a city, village or suburb, or of an ethnic group of expatriates. Private temples are built by private bodies such as:—

- (a) A family or clan.
- (b) An individual monk or nun who raises funds by subscription and who leaves the temple to an acolyte at his or her death.
- (c) A trade or profession.

Private temples, despite being private and closed to outsiders, are also usually controlled by a committee. A few private temples continue to remain so but gradually most become public, particularly as the number of devotees and images of deities within the temple increase. Some Buddhist temples, privately owned with the affairs and finances in the hands of the owners, are usually also the home of the owners and the ancestral tablets of the owner's family appear on the altars with or beside the deities. Privately owned is not the same as being open or closed to the public. Some indeed may be closed, but the majority are open to the public.

Only very occasionally are icons or images of deities to be found in clan temples, whereas ancestral tablets are frequently to be seen in community temples. Advantage is taken in the latter of the duties performed by the temple keeper (which clan temples do not have) which

include the burning of incense every day. This amongst other things saves the individual having to perform the rite before his ancestral tablets daily.

⁴ There are no Confucian temples in either Hong Kong or Macau.

⁵ Although there are obvious and major differences between Daoism, Buddhism and Folk religion, their beliefs and practices are so interwoven and syncretized beyond description, that in practice there is almost a single religious scheme of things. A handful of folk religion temples, mostly in Chaozhou and Min An community resettlement areas, are also centres for spirit medium activity. Chaozhou and Min An people customarily communicate with the major gods through minor gods and spirit mediums. Folk religion is very occasionally referred to as "Spirit worship" (神教) Shen jiao, albeit more by foreigners than by Chinese.

Chaozhou and Min An spirit mediums are usually males who speak with the more junior gods, whilst Cantonese spirit mediums are normally female and speak with the spirits of the dead.

⁶ The natives in both Hong Kong and Macau are Cantonese. Immigrants over the centuries who brought their own cultural heritage with them are the Hakka, Min An, Hoklo, and Chaozhou. The Chaozhou are speakers of the Chaozhou (sometimes called Swatow) whose native area is eastern Guangdong province. In folk religion the Chaozhou have more in common with their immediate neighbours to the north, the Min An and other Fukienese rather than with their Cantonese neighbours.

⁷ The total of 450 temples reflects the number found and visited by the author. The total given by the Hong Kong Government Temples Committee of the Home Affairs Department of over 500 private temples registered in Hong Kong is misleading in that their total includes to the author's knowledge quite a number of small temples which have been destroyed, removed or closed down. The author's number of 450 is also inaccurate as there are bound to be a number of very small temples hidden away in residential blocks of flats which would defy discovery without a visit to every floor of every apartment building.

⁸ County towns were the centres for official, commercial and religious activities. Villages within present day Hong Kong before the arrival of the British came under the jurisdiction of the mandarin at the county town of Hsin An (present day Pao An), north of the Sino-Hong Kong border.

⁹ However, an engraved title can easily be superseded when a more popular deity has been promoted to the main altar, without the title over the entrance being changed.

¹⁰ Images on, beside, before and under altars can be categorised into the deities themselves, and their disciples, guardians and attendants. There are also two other categories of figures, seen only on separate altars in some Buddhist temples. These are the likenesses of the founding Abbot and of major donors and their wives.

¹¹ Urban and rural are terms used for the areas where the temples were established, and many a rural temple is now lost in the centre of a vast modern housing estate. Urban temples do not include village temples, they do however include the temples of the market towns such as Taipo and Yuen Long.

¹² These "pensioners" are normally the most needy and worthy elderly males or females of the community, voted or appointed into the post and supported there by subscription.

¹³ See *Hong Kong 100 Years Ago* (Hong Kong City Hall, 1970) on the sixth page of photographs, though under another titling.

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

33

¹⁴ Because of the exorbitant rents for such accommodation, temples in shop houses and flats in Hong Kong are few and far between. In Singapore and Malaysia, temples in shop houses are very common indeed, though they are becoming less so as the years pass and rents in urban areas rapidly rise.

¹⁵ Occasionally such a temple may be a converted private house, as in the many examples in Lo Wai village, Tsuen Wan, but more often it is a purpose built but inexpensive hut.

¹⁶ Temples containing images of the Buddhist deities Di Zeng Wang, Milofu, and Guan Yin are not necessarily specifically Buddhist, as all three of these deities nowadays are also extremely popular deities in folk religion temples.

¹⁷ Mahayana is Northern Buddhism and Therevada or Hinayana is Southern Buddhism.

¹⁸ "Illegal" is a Hong Kong term for buildings which have been built on Crown Land often by squatters without Government land control or planning permission, but which have been permitted to remain standing under sufferance. In practice they are temporary structures put up without permission, occasionally ramshackle though more often they are well-built timber, weather-board and corrugated iron buildings, clean and well-proportioned. (*Illustration 17*). Some have stood for such a length of time as to have been gradually converted to concrete and brick. All are labelled on the side in rough daubs of paint with the bureaucratic abbreviations and digits prefixed by "TEM" (= temporary) affixed by squatter control staff of the Housing Department.

¹⁹ Demons are well known to Chinese to be unable to go around corners and must travel in straight lines, hence these inner doors to prevent the demons from entering the temple. The inner doors originally were opened exclusively for influential people.

²⁰ See also James Hayes' information at JHKBRAS 6 (1966): 129-130.

²¹ In overseas Chinese areas this kind of large street shrine is still very common and, in Singapore alone, some four to five hundred exist in all kinds of nooks and crannies. For a Hong Kong example see JHKBRAS 14, (1974): 203.

²² Chu is one of the 28 Constellations (二十八宿).

²³ See pp. 111-113 of the Hong Kong Government's publication *Rural Architecture in Hong Kong* (1979) for this pagoda.

²⁴ In Imperial times such masts were always to be seen outside the local magistrate's yamen.

²⁵ Chinese bells have no internal tongue clapper, being tolled by an external blow with a wooden mallet.

²⁶ For the Evacuation of the Coast see Lo Hsiang-lin and others, *Hong Kong and its External Communications before 1842* (Hong Kong, 1963) Chapter VI.

²⁷ For background see Jen Yu-wen's article "The Southern Sung stone-engraving at North Fu-t'ang" in JHKBRAS, 5 (1965): 65-68.

²⁸ Government action is through the Chinese Temples Committee, serviced by the Trust Funds Section of the Home Affairs Department.

²⁹ Temples according to this Ordinance include Miao (廟), Si (寺), Buddhist and Daoist monasteries, Guan and Dao Yuan (觀及道院) and nunneries An (庵).

33a CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

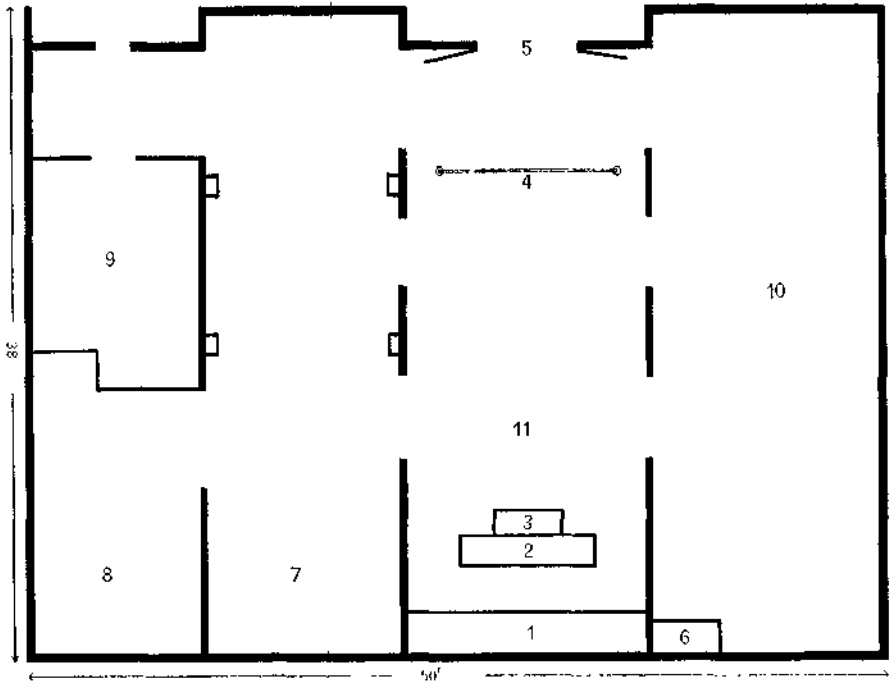


Fig. 1

(Not to scale)

**PLAN OF TYPICAL SINGLE-HALL RURAL
TRADITIONAL TEMPLE—HONG KONG**

(with only one altar)

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Main altar | 7. Temple keeper's kiosk |
| 2. Altar table | 8. Office |
| 3. Table for offerings | 9. Village storeroom |
| 4. Spirit doors | 10. Side hall (偏殿) |
| 5. Main entrance | 11. Main hall (正殿) |
| 6. Under altar (下壇) | |

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS 33b

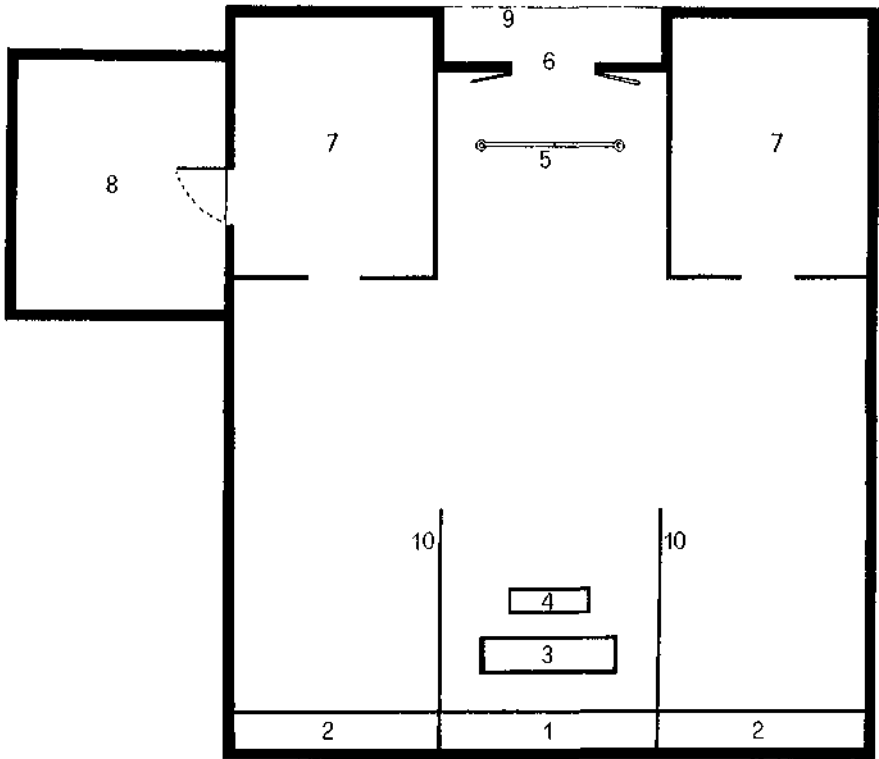


Fig. 2

(Not to scale)

**PLAN OF TYPICAL SMALLER SINGLE-HALL URBAN AND
RURAL TRADITIONAL TEMPLE — HONG KONG**

(with a main and two secondary altars)

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Main altar | 6. Main entrance |
| 2. Secondary altars | 7. Storerooms |
| 3. Altar table | 8. Keeper's accommodation |
| 4. Table for offerings | 9. Covered porchway |
| 5. Spirit doors | 10. Short partition walls dividing the
main hall into three |

33c CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

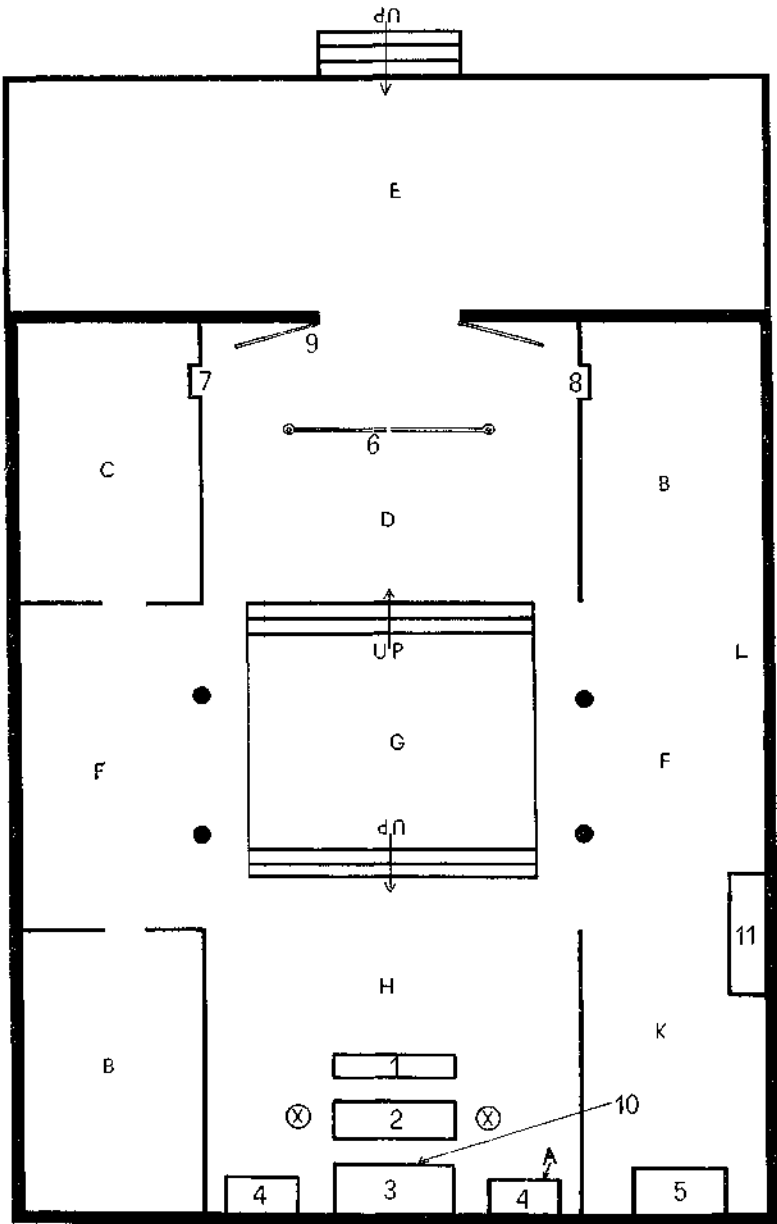


Fig. 3
(Not to scale)

CHINESE MONASTERIES, TEMPLES, SHRINES, ALTARS

33d

**PLAN OF A TYPICAL MEDIUM-SIZED
TRADITIONAL FOLK RELIGION TEMPLE — HONG KONG**

(with main hall and secondary halls)

Fig. 3

1. Table for offerings
 2. Altar table
 3. Main altar in main hall
 4. Secondary altars in main hall
 5. Main altar in secondary hall
 6. Spirit doors
 7. Shrine — Doorway
Official (門官)
 8. Shrine — The Earth God
(土地公)
 9. Main doors with guardians
painted on them
 10. The tutelary deity of the
building — a tablet under
the main altar
 11. Side altar
-
- A. Under altar (下壇) (beneath a
secondary altar)
 - B. Side room (耳房) (storage areas)
 - C. Side room (temple keeper's
accommodation)
 - D. Entrance hall (門廳)
 - E. Forecourt (前院)
 - F. Passageway (廊)
 - G. Courtyard (unroofed) (院)
 - H. The main hall (正廳) otherwise
known as the Zheng Dian (正殿)
or Gong (palace) (宮)
 - K. Secondary hall
 - L. Incinerator
 - X. Life size images of aides to the
main deity