Temples and Shrines of Christmas Island

November 2016

Final
This Temples and Shrines Conservation Plan has been prepared by the National Trust of Western Australia, supported by the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development’s Indian Ocean Territories Community Development Grant (2015/16). Kyra Lomas, Conservation Project Officer was responsible for the preparation of this document with assistance from Josh Casey, Conservation Officer and Kelly Rippingale, Conservation Architect. Hélène Bartleson, Heritage Consultant was responsible for the discussion of history and significance for each place. Comments and feedback from the Christmas Island community were also received and incorporated into the final document.

The project team gratefully acknowledges the generous assistance received from the Christmas Island community, Shire of Christmas Island and Indian Ocean Territories Administration.
Contents

Summary 4

Temples Location Map 5
Policies 6

Soon Tian Kong 8
Tze Yun 10
Tai Pak Kong 12
Tham Kong Sheng Ye 14
Guan Di Temple 16
Dato Kong 18
Sheng Wong 20
Baha’i Faith 22
Tai Pak Kong 24
Si Mian Fo 26
Goddess of Mercy Temple 28
Zheng Jian Tong Xi Hui 30
Zun Sheng Ta 32
Si Mian Fo 34
Di Cang Dian 36
Earth God Altar 38
Dato Kong 40
Jeng Fo Gong Xi Hui 42
Christmas Island Buddhist Association 44
Temple of Guan Yin 46
Tai Pak Kong 48
Di Zang Pu Sa Dian 50
Guan Yin Monastery 52
Ma Chor Nui Nui 54

Lunar Calendar 56
References & Contributions 57
SUMMARY
Hélène Bartleson

Christmas Island’s Chinese temples and shrines are inextricably linked to its Chinese cemeteries. The significance of the one can only be fully understood in conjunction with the other, as together they provide a unique and very valuable record of the island’s Chinese workforce from the earliest days of mining settlement circa 1899. The number, nature and location of the temples are explained by the headstone details of those who built and used them. This may include family information, origins by province, clan and language, cultural and religious diversity, symbols of Brotherhood status/membership, as well as population size and mortality rates. Despite dwindling congregations, Christmas Island’s twenty extant temples and shrines are each regularly tended by elected temple committee members and remain central to the lunar calendar of traditional festivals and celebrations.

Taoist
These ten temples are the oldest, dating between the earliest days of mining and WWII. A number of them were upgraded during BPC’s building program in the early 1960’s and two others are known to have been dismantled. Once traditionally red, most Taoist temples on Christmas Island are now pale pink rendered brick with red trim. Across their three sizes, whether residential or workplace, the temples’ location, traditional floor plans and internal fittings strongly reflect the influence of the Hungmen Brotherhood whose oath of obligation it was to establish them. Taoist temples are seen as the tangible link between Heaven and Earth (Ancestors and Living). Their traditional “Nine Squares” floor pattern, modelled on the Chinese character for “well” is most evident in the two largest temples in Settlement and South Point. Irrespective of their feng-shuiued orientation, the portico and doorway are at ritual South in the bottom middle square. The centre square in the mid-section houses the sky well. Worshippers offer incense in a joss burner at this point, which is also used in Brotherhood rituals. The seat of heavenly power is at ritual North, the centre of the main altar against the back wall. Smaller temples whether they have front walls or open-front, follow a scaled-down version of this pattern. All ten include an external ceremonial burner to one side of the entrance. Commemorative door panels, also linked to the Hungmen Brotherhood, are traditionally either red with white characters or black with gold. Dates shown on them do not necessarily indicate the date of the temple’s original construction. A degree of improvisation in alterations to some Taoist temples has value in itself as it reflects the island’s isolation as well as continuous usage of the temples concerned. In most cases, the original temple structures have remained substantially intact and heritage value remains high.

Buddhist Temples and Shrines
These seven temples and shrines are more recent, dating from the mid 1970’s. They are traditionally yellow on Christmas Island, and although they have no sky well, the floor plan is otherwise similar to that of Taoist temples. Such commonality between Buddhism and Taoism is also reflected in temple deities even though they may be known by different names. The structure of two heritage-listed residential buildings re-purposed to house Buddhist temples remains substantially intact. However, recent external additions associated with one of them are unfortunately out of keeping with the heritage values of both the building housing the temple and the listed precinct where it is located. As well as the need for consistent development approval requirements, this also highlights the need for increased community awareness of the value of Christmas Island’s built heritage and more effective ways to use and preserve it.

Datuk Temples
Muslim-Malay in origin, these two small temples reflect the influx of Malay Chinese from the early 1970’s. True to their roots, they are red three-sided structures with open front and a traditional configuration of entrance joss burners aligned with the simple altar against the rear wall.

Baha’i Assembly
Since its establishment, the Christmas Island chapter of the Baha’i has had continuous occupation of a heritage-listed building in Poon Saan. The structure of these premises is not significantly linked to the congregation’s beliefs and worship rituals.
Policy 1
The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible to conserve the place and retain the cultural significance.

Policy 2
All future conservation or maintenance works to the Temples on Christmas Island should be undertaken in a manner that does not irreversibly damage the heritage values outlined in the Statement of Significance.

Policy 3
All future conservation or maintenance works to the Temples on Christmas Island that have the potential to affect the heritage values of the place including spaces, materials or elements, should be recorded in detail before works.

Policy 4
The landscape and curtilage surrounding the Temples on Christmas Island, and their relationship with the temples should be conserved.

Policy 5
Moveable heritage associated with the Temples on Christmas Island should be properly assessed, recorded, conserved and interpreted in accordance with best practice processes and cultural expectations.

Policy 6
Ongoing maintenance must be a routine part of the management of the Temples on Christmas Island.

Policy 7
A hazardous materials register should be carried out for each temple and its recommendations implemented in any conservation or maintenance works to ensure the sites are clear of hazardous materials on completion.
**Policy 8**  
A regular program of pest control should be implemented and maintained.

**Policy 9**  
Appropriate consultation which considers the views of all interested parties including should be considered in decisions regarding the future use of the Temples on Christmas Island.

**Policy 10**  
Monitor structural condition of all built elements and rectify where necessary.

**Policy 11**  
Inspect all Temples for rising damp and rectify where required.

**Policy 12**  
Rebuilding of deteriorated temples and shrines can be considered if appropriate from a cultural perspective.

**Policy 13**  
Conserve external walls including masonry, stonework and cement rendered surfaces to prevent deterioration particularly where instances of rising damp are evident at ground level.

**Policy 14**  
Repair rusted and deteriorated sections of the roofs and eaves where required. Any replacement components should match the existing profile and colour scheme where appropriate.

**Policy 15**  
Retain the original internal layout of the Temples where possible, with any potential modifications to ensure this layout can still be read.
Significance:

Soon Tian Kong temple is dedicated to Kang Tian Tai Di, a Taoist god known for his fairness and protection of the needy. The temple confirms the presence of many Chinese workers in South Point who had come from the southern areas of China where Kang Tian Tai Di was revered. It also provides substantial evidence of the Hung Men Brotherhood within their ranks, and the significant impact of its senior members on the temple heritage of South Point. As traditional custodians of Taoist ritual, the knowledge of this small group clearly guided the location of Soon Tian Kong according to the ancient principles of feng shui. The temple’s position on the high ground with an uninterrupted vista to the sea reflects a centuries-old connection between spiritual beliefs, ancestor-worship and carefully chosen auspicious landscapes that is complex, profound and enduring. Within that landscape, the temple remains intact and is itself significant for its highly symbolic floor plan and distinctive roof design which relate to traditional initiation rituals of the Brotherhood. One of Soon Tian Kong’s old door panels, now inside the temple, is dated 1936 but this is a commemoration of an upgrade rather than the date of the original town temple whose date is unknown. The later addition of a ceremonial gate entry is also traditionally appropriate. Poorly placed flat roofing of the portico area impacts negatively on the gate’s painted detailing, but it is potentially repairable.

Kang Tian Tai Di’s birthday is celebrated at Soon Tian Kong South Point on the 25th day of the tenth lunar month.

Recommendations

Recent roofing, rising damp and general repair works have been undertaken at Soon Tian Kong. Recommendations from the first draft of this document have been carried out, therefore ongoing maintenance and upkeep is recommended for this temple into the future.
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the original sky well roof and floor structure.

Policy B
Retain the uninterrupted vista to the sea.
Significance:

With Guan Yin, the universal protector and hearer of all prayers as its patron deity, the small Taoist temple known as Tze Yun (Cloud of Loving Kindness) served South Point as both a workplace and a community temple. However, its particular significance in the life of the town and the island relates to its other local title, the ‘Ladies’ Temple. From its earliest days of family settlement to the 1970’s, the rates of still births and child mortality on Christmas Island were high, so women and couples in particular came to Tze Yun, seeking help from its ‘lady gods’ to start a family or heal sick children. The tradition continues today. Although the temple’s three statues are all of Guan Yin the Merciful, bringer and protector of children, prayers are also offered to the fertility goddess Zhu Sheng often associated with her. There is no statue of Zhu Sheng, as she is often represented as Guan Yin herself.

At Tze Yun temple, South Point the goddess Guan Yin has three celebrations on the 19th day of the 2nd, 6th and 9th months of the lunar calendar.

Recommendations
1. Investigate & rectify drainage from front verandah & around the perimeter of the building
Specific policies

Policy A
Interpretation of the significance of the place as the ‘Ladies’ Temple should be considered.
Significance:

Circa 1902, Christmas Island’s first temple in Settlement had been dedicated to Tai Pak Kong, according to Hungmen Brotherhood tradition. However, given the isolation of South Point, the decision to dedicate a second temple to Tai Pak Kong, a key god in their Taoist pantheon, was understandable. As provider of prosperity and protector from illness and accidents, Tai Pak Kong’s tiny workplace temple was located in a quarry where it became known as Wash Screen Plant Tai Pak Kong. Although mining operations were scaled back when South Point was demolished, secondary mining continued. Tai Pak Kong temple remained in the quarry until the company asked the workers to move it, as they planned to mine the substantial phosphate deposits from the area where the screening plant stood. The temple committee, having advised the company of the complex ritual associated with such a request, brought in a local medium to consult the god about the move. Eventually, Tai Pak Kong agreed to a local site on higher ground, with the request that his improved temple should face the east, towards the sunrise. By early 1990, the replacement temple, only marginally larger than the original, had been erected on its current site at South Point. It stands close by the other two temples and all three remain in use.

Tai Pak Kong South Point god’s birthday is celebrated on the 2nd day of the second lunar month.

Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Structural investigation, cracking to slab
3. Drainage rectification and remediation
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the original Temple orientation towards the East
Tham Kong Sheng Ye
Camp 5 LB3
Taoist

Significance:

Workers who operated Loading Bridge 3 lived in three small rows of purpose-built housing at the nearby Camp 5. In 1987, following the rail line’s final closure, much of the infrastructure from both sites was demolished. However, the workplace temple, the only one on Christmas Island dedicated to Tham Kong Sheng Ye, has survived and now provides significant evidence of the area’s industrial past and its workers’ cultural heritage.

The temple’s establishment according to Hokkien clan and language traditions and its dedication to Tham Kong Sheng Ye reflect the workers’ origins in particular coastal communities of south-east Asia where this lesser-known god was revered. As a sage, healer of the sick and a forecaster of the weather, Tham Kong Sheng Ye was called on to protect Christmas Island and its workers from the harsh conditions and weather extremes which impacted most severely on them.

Historically, workplace temples like Tham Kong Sheng Ye (Camp 5 LB3) were referred to by location as well as deity. This naming tradition now provides a vital heritage record for both temples and industrial sites against the time when they may exist only on a map. In more isolated workplace temples like this one, improvised fittings fashioned from discarded items are also a time capsule of the local work environment and daily life.

Tham Kong Sheng Ye’s birthday falls on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month.

Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Roof sheeting replacement
3. Structural investigation
4. Drainage rectification and remediation
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain improvised fittings fashioned from discarded items
Significance:

As mining operations expanded further and further afield, Chinese labourers erected small temples at each work site, so that the religious rituals which sustained them in the harsh conditions could be performed with minimal loss of work time. Originally known as Soon Tian Kong, the small temple erected at Grants Well was also used by workers from nearby Camp 4 and some from Camp 5. When the time came to abandon these three worksites and move to South Point, the Grants Well temple committee performed ritual consultations with the temple gods according to Taoist tradition. It is said that while most of the gods and goddesses agreed, Guan Di, the Soldier-Sage was unwilling to be re-located. He indicated instead that he was “happy” to remain at Grants Well. As one of Taoism’s most important deities and the god of Brotherhods, his wish was honoured.

Guan Di’s small corrugated iron temple was one of very few remnant buildings left at Grants Well until 2003 when three Chinese volunteers raised funds for its restoration. The temple, rebuilt on the same site, is only slightly larger, with walls of painted Besser brick and metal roofing. Corrution marks from the original walls are still evident in its cement floor. It is the only temple on Christmas Island dedicated to Guan Di, but he is widely represented in both Taoist and Buddhist temples. It is also the only temple with door panels that read from left to right, in the modern style. In consultation with the god, the temple’s Chinese name was also adjusted in 2003, to distinguish it from the largest of the temples at South Point, also known as Soon Tian Kong. In characters it now reads Camp 4 Grants Well Soon Tian Kong. In English, it is known as Grants Well Guan Di Temple.

Guan Di’s birthday is celebrated on the 24th day of the 6th Lunar month.

Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Drainage- rectify rising damp
Specific policies

Policy A
The current temple setting should be retained.
Dato Kong Shrine

*Old LB4*

**Significance:**

For those who worked at LB4, the numerous serious accidents in the area became a major concern. However, the formation of the Union of Christmas Island Workers (UCIW) in 1975 was still several years away and making an issue of workplace safety was unthinkable as the likely outcome would have been the loss of jobs.

Eventually, their fears were such that they used their own money to erect a temple to their god Dato Kong as a means of protecting both the land and themselves from danger. According to tradition, they chose a roadside clearing as a location for this modest red-painted temple with its simple altar. Above the small bearded statue of their deified soldier-warrior, they hung a wall banner in the deep green of Islam with his name, Muhaji Muhammad, in Chinese and Malay. Behind the temple, they placed a small shrine at the base of a large Tahitian chestnut tree to call on its datuk (guardian spirit) for further protection.

Although essentially Dato, the shrine reflects some Taoist traditions, including an improvised joss altar made from a 1 metre high end-section of cement pipe and a ceremonial burner made from half an oil drum. As one of two temples on Christmas Island dedicated to Dato Kong, this workplace version includes features which are different from the residential neighbourhood temple behind Building 501 in Poon Saan.

**Recommendations**

1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Wall sheeting replacement
3. White Ant damaged timber replacement
4. Drainage- rectify rising damp
Timber Post Damage

Asbestos Sheetings

Leaf litter from overhanging trees

Old burner

Severe rising damp to wall (approx 500mm AGL)

Rusted sheeting edging

Slight cracking & breakage to bottom sheeting

Asbestos sheeting

Severe rising damp to slab

Damp to fascia beam

Floor plan 1:50 @A3

North elevation

Not to scale

South elevation

East elevation

West elevation
Sheng Wong
Drumsite
Taoist

Significance:

Sheng Wong temple stands on Sung Mlaw Loh, not far from the original workshops which now service mine vehicles and machinery. The temple was originally adjacent to the old labour houses but is now separated from the last of them by recently built blocks of two storey government town houses. BPC is known to have worked on the temple in the early 1960's but it is unclear if it repaired the one already on this site or re-located it from elsewhere. One of Sheng Wong’s traditional wooden panels is dated 1962 but this is not necessarily the original construction date. These panels reflect the temple’s association with the Hungmen Brotherhood who often donated them during other (and sometimes much later) significant celebrations, to offer thanks for prayers answered or past help given by fellow brothers.

The temple deity Sheng Wong has a dual role. As City Magistrate, he protects the island and its community and as the Chief Magistrate of Hell, he receives their prayers and offerings for the comfort of their ancestors. Most importantly, the celebration to mark the start of Hungry Ghost month is always held at this temple, since it is Sheng Wong who opens the gates of hell to allow the souls of those with no families to care for them in the afterlife to wander free for a month. This has added significance for the Chinese community due to the large number of workers’ graves on Christmas Island without family connections.

Sheng Wong’s birthday is celebrated on the 11th day of the fifth lunar calendar month and Hungry Ghost is in the seventh lunar month.

Recommendations
1. Replace rusting and deteriorated roof fixings
2. Drainage rectification and remediation
Significance:

Although the Baha’i Faith, like other local religious groups, has remained small since its establishment in mid 1982, its numbers have been boosted from time to time by worshippers of various cultural backgrounds who have come to Christmas Island as visitors or contracted staff.

Throughout this period, it has also become known for its use of regular local newsletter articles and radio broadcasts to maintain a significant connective role in the spiritual life of the island. The Baha’i uses aspects of its own faith, which is drawn from a range of centuries-old religious teachings, to highlight what all faiths have in common, as well as what makes them unique.

One of the more vivid illustrations of this on Christmas Island is the collective contribution of the Chinese, Islamic, Christian, Baha’i and other calendars, to an extraordinarily rich integrated cycle of multi-faith rituals and celebrations on an island of 134 square kilometres.

The traditional annual celebration of peace and goodwill for the Baha’i is known as Ayameha. It takes place at the end of their calendar year which is divided into 19 months of 19 days each and centres on the sharing of food with family and friends.

Recommendations
1. Roof drainage- gutter & downpipe repair/ replacement
2. Drainage- rectify rising damp
3. Structural Investigation
4. General internal repairs
DOOR MISSING
FLY-SCREEN DOOR NOT OPERABLE
ROOM 1
ROOM 2
ROOM 3
ROOM 4
ROOM 5
ROOM 6
ROOM 7
ROOM 8

CEILING DAMAGE

RISING DAMP ALONG BUILDING EDGE

PLANT GROWTH AROUND DOWNPIPE.
FALLING DAMP & WALL DAMAGE AROUND DOWNPIPE LOCATION

WATER DAMAGE TO DOWNPIPE AND DRAINAGE ISSUES AT GROUND LEVEL

FLOOR PLAN NOT TO SCALE

NORTH ELEVATION NOT TO SCALE

SOUTH ELEVATION

EAST ELEVATION

WEST ELEVATION
Tai Pak Kong
*Old Dryers, Drumsite Taoist*

**Significance:**

Old Dryers as it is known, is one of Christmas Island’s three temples to Tai Pak Kong. Its dedication to this particular Taoist deity, Drumsite workplace location and commemorative panels all reflect a long and significant association with the Hungmen Brotherhood. The temple is certainly old but available evidence leaves its initial construction date uncertain. Its commemorative Chinese name panel simply says “Dryers” referring to the dryers and storage bins built immediately in front of it in 1959, following the Incline’s closure. One of the door panels, however, is dated 1965 which is within the period of building and upgrades in Drumsite undertaken by BPC. The panels are traditionally gifted on a commemorative occasion but in this instance the wording could refer equally to an upgraded or re-located temple as much as a ‘first.’

While Hungry Ghost month traditionally begins nearby at Sheng Wong temple, Old Dryers also marks it with a major community celebration, reinforcing the temple’s long-term association with the island’s workforce. It further indicates the presence of the Hungmen Brotherhood whose role included ritual honouring of the many workers who had died on the island.

Tai Pak Kong Drumsite god’s birthday is celebrated on the 16th day of the twelfth lunar month. Offerings are also made there during the Hungry Ghost festival in the seventh lunar month.

**Recommendations**

1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Main roof sheeting replacement
3. Roof drainage- box gutter, roof fixings replacement
4. Drainage- rectify rising damp
Si Mian Fo
Taman Sweetland
Buddhist

Significance:

Well before the development of Taman Sweetland, local Chinese were aware of the large banyan in the forest fringe near their homes. With its great spiritual significance for Buddhists, it was customary for them to offer prayers at the tree, leaving joss and offerings at its base.

Once the housing construction was completed in Taman Sweetland, a local Buddhist group cleared the area around the preserved banyan, so that it became a feature at the top of the sealed road loop. Eventually, an octagonal covered shrine, housing a statue of Si Mian Fo (Four Faces Buddha) was erected close by and a glossy red altar placed in a niche under the tree. These have recently been refurbished and the area further landscaped with symbolic plantings including willow and desert rose.

While there are now two shrines to Si Mian Fo in Poon Saan, this is the only one associated with a banyan. The other, further along Murray Road on the western side, is linked to a Buddhist temple.

As well as adding significantly to the amenity of the residential area, the Taman Sweetland banyan and its nearby shrine draws people from a wide range of nationalities who recognise its blend of cultural uniqueness and quiet inclusivity.

Recommendations
1. Drainage - rectify rising damp
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the banyan tree and associated landscape setting
Goddess of Mercy Temple
Lower Poon Saan Road
Buddhist

Significance:

One of the temples which has undergone size, location and name changes is dedicated to Guan Yin, Goddess of Mercy. It has been re-located twice since its original establishment. Initially, when it occupied an alcove upstairs in Block 560, the old single men’s quarters on lower Poon Saan Road, it was known as Tien Pau Lau. However, in the early 1990’s, a decision by the Commonwealth to make the building available to the Christmas Island Resort and Casino as staff accommodation, forced the temple’s relocation.

Negotiations between the temple’s committee and the Commonwealth eventually sourced funding for the establishment of a new temple on a suitable piece of land further along Poon Saan Road near the open-air cinema. In the meantime, the temple was relocated to the nearby cinema kiosk. The new considerably larger, free-standing traditionally designed temple was finally opened in 1996. The temple represents the determined endurance of small congregations in a diverse Chinese community and the commonality of particular gods to both Taoism and Buddhism. While this temple is dedicated to Guan Yin, it also honours Lord Buddha, and includes a number of other Taoist Gods in its pantheon. It also follows traditionally vegetarian practices and marks its celebrations accordingly.

The Goddess Guan Yin’s birthday is celebrated on the 19th day of the 2nd Lunar month.
Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing & removal
Significance:

After several years of depopulation, the deserted Building 549 was re-purposed in the early 1990's. A small Buddhist congregation then known as Rei Tzang Tze established a modest temple in one room of the building and adapted its amenities for use during celebrations on the building’s forecourt. The temple of the Christmas Island Buddhist Association which had had to be re-located from Building 548, was moved into two spaces in Building 549, adjacent to the Rei Tzang Tze temple.

An octagonal covered shrine to Si Mian Fo was also added in the open area at the end of the building. While the two congregations shared some common celebrations, they remained small and separate. One of the island’s most significant cultural ceremonies is held uniquely by the Rei Tzang Tze congregation at the entrance to the cave below Hughs Dale Falls, which they believe houses the 5th dragon, one of the island’s great protectors. Following a change in its religious affiliation in 2013, Rei Tzang Tze changed its name to Zheng Jian Tong Xiu Hui. In the same year with subsequent injections of private funds, it changed the interior of its temple and covered the forecourt to accommodate ceremonies like Bardo Deliverance and Purification, undertaken by visiting grand masters from Taiwan.

In 2015, a three-tiered metal pagoda on a substantial tri-level concrete base was installed on Commonwealth land above the rear of Building 549. The Si Mian Fo shrine was then demolished and its statue placed in the Christmas Island Buddhist Association’s temple. The shrine was replaced by a pagoda-topped gold and white version with large elephants in protective stance at each corner, and connected to the upper pagoda level by a stairway. While the long term care of all the island’s temples is under consideration, no decision has been made about the location of the Christmas Island Buddhist Association temples.
Recommendations
1. Termite/pest inspection & treatment
Zun Sheng Ta
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist

Significance:
See Zheng Jian Tong Xiu Hui

Recommendations

1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
Si Mian Fo
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist

Significance:
See Zheng Jian Tong Xiu Hui

Recommendations
1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
ELEPHANT STATUE
FOUR FACES
BUDDHA STATUE
ELEPHANT STATUE
ELEPHANT STATUE

ELEVATION
1:20 @A3
Di Cang Dian
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist

Significance:
See p.30 Zheng Jian Tong Xiu Hui

Recommendations
1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
Earth God Altar
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist, Taoist

Significance:
See pg.30 Zheng Jian Tong Xiu Hui

Recommendations
1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
Significance:

Poon Saan’s smallest neighbourhood temple, at the rear of Building 501, is dedicated to Dato Kong, a god who, although brought to Christmas Island by Chinese from the Malay Peninsula, is not part of the traditional Chinese pantheon. He is rather, as his name and temple rituals suggest, a blend of early Malay ancestor worship and traditional Chinese beliefs. The original Dato (or Datuk) were earth gods and guardian spirits that disappeared from Malay culture with the advent of conservative Islam. However, generations of Chinese immigrants continued to worship a local deified warrior to whose respectful Malay name they eventually added the Chinese honorific of ‘Kong.’

The Dato Kong temple behind Building 501 has a number of significant features that set it apart other Chinese temples. It is small and set outdoors, with a simple layout that includes a single low altar. Seated here alone and cross-legged is a small statue of a bearded man in a Malay sarong and high-sided Muslim cap. On the rare occasion that Dato Kong is represented in a Chinese temple, it is usually by himself on a small altar outside the main building.

Offerings placed on Dato Kong’s altar traditionally include a pair of white candles and three joss sticks, as well as fruit, flowers, and his favourite betel nut and dark Javanese tobacco. Special celebrations are scheduled according to the lunar calendar.
Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Roof replacement
3. Drainage investigation - resolve rising damp

NORTH ELEVATION
NOT TO SCALE

SOUTH ELEVATION

EAST ELEVATION

WEST ELEVATION

FLOOR PLAN
1:50 @ A3

PLANTS GROWING AGAINST WALL

RISING DAMP
Significance:

Jeng Fo Gong Xiu Hui reflects the diversity within Christmas Island's five Buddhist congregations, four of which are in Poon Saan. Its beginnings are also typical of the way in which each group, although small, has endured and consolidated its individual presence since the 1970's. When Jeng Fo Gong Xiu Hui's first location in the end section of Block 549 adjacent to Block 548 was closed, it was moved down to a slightly larger space in Block 559 on Poon Saan Road. It remained there until the Commonwealth decided in the early 1990's to make Block 559 and the adjacent Block 560 available to the Christmas Island Resort and Casino as staff accommodation. This meant further re-location for both Jeng Fo Gong Xiu Hui and Tian Pau Lau temple in Block 560 (later Goddess of Mercy Temple, Poon Saan).

The Commonwealth eventually funded new pre-fabricated temples of similar traditional design for both. Jeng Fo Gong Xiu Hui is now located on a site adjacent to Block 566, further along the same terrace where it had originally been established.

Along with Lord Buddha, and Di Zang Pusa, Jeng Fo Gong Xiu Hui also honours the goddess Guan Yin, reflecting the commonality of particular gods to both Taoism and Buddhism.

Recommendations:
1. Asbestos testing & removal
2. Drainage investigation - resolve rising damp & water pooling to concrete paving
3. Structural investigation & repairs to burner
Christmas Island Buddhist Association
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist

Significance:

The Christmas Island Buddhist Association is one of Poon Saan’s enduring congregations. Like others whose temples and membership were significantly impacted by the island’s years of depopulation, it was forced to re-locate and re-group. By the early 1990’s, having moved from Building 548, it found space in the adjacent re-purposed Building 549, which it shared with another Buddhist group then known as Rei Tzang Tze. The Christmas Island Buddhist Association’s story is encapsulated here in the two small temples to Lord Buddha and Guan Yin, which occupy the mid-section of the building. In one half of a connected, open-fronted, double-arched space, a multi-tiered altar honours the bodhisattva Guan Yin alongside Lord Buddha. The other half now contains the Association’s original Building 548 sign, along with a re-located statue of Si Mian Fo (Four Faces Buddha) from the recently demolished octagonal shrine near the building’s Murray Road entrance. In an adjacent room, the temple dedicated to Guan Yin also honours Lord Buddha and Di Zang Pu Sa. There is also a significant reflection here of the connections between the Buddhist and Taoist pantheon on Christmas Island, with Guan Di, Tham Kong Sheng Ye, Tu Di Gong and Mazu, also honoured.

The Christmas Island Buddhist Association’s temples remain in active use, even as its tiny congregation and others like it now consider the long-term care of all the Chinese temples, given that Christmas Island’s population is once more shrinking as well as ageing.
Recommendations

1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
Temple of Guan Yin
Murray Rd, Poon Saan
Buddhist

Significance:
See pg.44 Buddhist Association significance.

Recommendations
1. Ongoing inspection & maintenance
Tai Pak Kong
Temple Court, Gaze Rd, Settlement
Taoist

Significance:

Tai Pak Kong temple reflects the continuing presence of a significant Chinese population since the earliest days of Christmas Island’s settlement. Additionally, it provides substantial evidence of the Hung Men Brotherhood within their ranks, and the significant impact of its senior members on the island’s cultural heritage. As traditional custodians of Taoist ritual and ancestor worship, the knowledge of this small group clearly guided the establishment of the temple. Their oath not only included an obligation to build the temple in a set timeframe for the spiritual and social benefit of fellow members, but also to establish its location using the ancient principles of feng shui. The temple’s position on the high ground of today’s Temple Court with the protection of the escarpment at its back and an uninterrupted vista to the sea is not a coincidence. It reflects a centuries-old connection between spiritual beliefs, ancestor-worship and carefully chosen auspicious landscapes, that is complex, profound and enduring. Within that landscape, the temple itself is equally significant for its highly symbolic floor plan and distinctive roof design which relate to traditional initiation rituals of the Brotherhood.

Tai Pak Kong’s birthday is celebrated on the 24th day of the 8th Lunar month, and his temple is one of several that mark the Hungry Ghost festival in the 7th Lunar month.
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the uninterrupted vista to the sea and high ground position

Policy B
Retain the original floor layout and reinstate the sky well roof and floor structure.

Recommendations
1. Drainage investigation – resolve rising damp
2. Repointing to stonework wall and brick foundation
3. Structural investigation and repairs to external burner
Significance:

While Taoism has been firmly established on Christmas Island since the earliest Chinese arrivals in 1899, the presence of Buddhist temples and shrines is more recent, dating from the 1970’s.

For almost 25 years, Settlement’s Mahayana congregation and the visiting monks and nuns of Christmas Island’s only monastery have played a significant role in the cultural and spiritual life of the community. In 1993, a visiting monk, the Venerable Shi You Zhen conducted traditional rites to de-commission the adjacent pre-WWII Carpenters and Boilermakers temple, before re-dedicating it to Di Zang Pusa or Kitigarbha, one of the four principal bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism. The commemorative panels installed at that time to honour the carpenters and boilermakers, remain on the temple altar today.

The traditional door panels from the original Taoist temple are now preserved in the nearby Chinese History and Heritage Museum. With their couplets in classical Chinese, they provide unique insights into the role and heritage of the Hungmen Brotherhood on Christmas Island.
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain re-purposed fittings

Recommendations
1. Drainage investigation – resolve rising damp and drainage issues to retaining wall
2. Inspect & repair roof sheeting damage
Guan Yin Monastery
Lot 325, Goze Rd, Settlement
Buddhist

Significance:

While Taoism has been firmly established on Christmas Island since the earliest Chinese arrivals in 1899, the presence of Buddhist temples and shrines is more recent, dating from the 1970’s.

For more than 25 years, Christmas Island’s only monastery has made a significant contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of the community. From its early years, it hosted small groups of monks or nuns from south-east Asia whose stays allowed them to participate in the life of the Mahayana congregation. Working together, they and the Christmas Island Mahayana Buddhist Society developed a blended program of education, traditional ceremonies and celebrations designed to sustain the congregation and at the same time attract wider community participation.

Today, the facility is primarily an education centre, although it still provides some accommodation. Visits by monks and nuns from south-east Asia and mainland Australia continue and are planned around specific celebrations in the temple dedicated to Guan Yin Pusa. Both she and Qie Lan Pusa (Guan Di) who are worshipped in both Buddhism and Taoism, have their allocated places on the tiered altar, with Lord Buddha at its apex. Major celebrations include Guan Yin Enlightenment, Filial Piety Dharma Assembly and a much anticipated vegetarian food fair as an annual fund-raiser. Lord Buddha’s birthday is on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month. Vesak Day, which includes the Bathing of the Baby Buddha, is celebrated on the full moon of the 4th month of the lunar calendar. It commemorates three significant events in Lord Buddha’s life – namely his birthday, his enlightenment and parinirvana (his passing away or nirvana after death).
Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the panoramic ocean views

Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing and removal
2. Roof structural investigation, sheet repair, replacement and roof fixings replacement
3. Roof investigation-resolve animal ingress issues

Specific policies

Policy A
Retain the panoramic ocean views

Recommendations
1. Asbestos testing and removal
2. Roof structural investigation, sheet repair, replacement and roof fixings replacement
3. Roof investigation-resolve animal ingress issues
Significance:

Christmas Island’s predominantly Taoist Chinese workforce dedicated an early temple to Ma Chor Nui Nui, one of their most revered deities. Although the structure was modest, they chose a site with panoramic ocean views to venerate her as Goddess of the Sea and thank her for both their safe passage from China and her continued protection of the island.

In the 1980’s, the temple’s committee used traditional rituals to consult the Goddess on the offer of a new, relocated temple to make way for the Resort development. Despite her repeated refusals the Chinese community eventually agreed and the original temple was demolished.

To atone for what they saw as their failure to protect the temple, the committee negotiated an auspiciously sited alternative at Waterfall, but critical location details were altered without consultation. This cumulative disrespect for the Goddess required a response of utmost seriousness in Taoist terms. Consequently, the Chinese built an unusually large Earth God altar on the new site, to invoke his protective powers over it and the island at the highest level. At the same time, in an act of divine retribution, it is said that Ma Chor Nui Nui destined any new structure on her original temple site to fail repeatedly until it is ultimately reclaimed by the sea.

Mazu’s birthday is celebrated on the 23rd day of the third lunar month.
Recommendations
1. Inspect and replace roof fixings
2. Drainage- resolve rising damp
3. Burner structural investigation and repairs
4. Brick works, including investigation, repointing and render/paint removal.
Lunar Calendar

Taoist and Chinese cultural observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temple</th>
<th>Lunar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Dryers Temple (Tai Pak Gong)</td>
<td>12 moon, 16th day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goddess of Sea (Ma Chor Nui Nui)</td>
<td>3rd Moon, 23rd Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drumsite (Sheng Wong) Temple</td>
<td>5th moon, 11th day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement (Tai Pak Gong)</td>
<td>8th moon, 24th day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Point</td>
<td>10th moon, 25th day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festivals</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese New Year</td>
<td>1st moon, 1st day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Autumn Mooncake Festival</td>
<td>8th moon, 15th day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungry Ghost Festival</td>
<td>7th moon, 1st day-29th day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qing Ming (All Souls Day)</td>
<td>15th Day after the Spring Equinox. Usually April 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chap Goh Meh</td>
<td>14th Day after the first day of Chinese New Year, signifies end of CNY period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References & Contributions

“Red Doors – An Introduction to the Chinese Temples of Christmas Island” Hélène Bartleson,
BooBook Editions 2016