

Redesign the Shing Mun War Relics Trail from the Perspective of Cultural Landscape

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Abstract. As an important historical witness in Hongkong, Shing Mun Redoubt lacks of proper conservation and interpretation. As it is a popular hiking trail, this paper presents a comprehensive evaluation of its heritage value and offers targeted conservation advice.

Keywords: Cultural landscape, Cultural relic trails, Conservation management, heritage interpretation

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Shing Mun Redoubt

As demonstrated in Figure 1 before the outbreak of World War II, the British military authorities constructed many defenses works in Hong Kong [1]. The Gin Drinkers Line was a series of bunkers constructed in the New Territories in the mid-1930s, mainly consisting of pillboxes and trenches. Shing Mun Redoubt was a critical part of the Gin Drinkers Line[2], which was a 12-acre citadel located under the ground in the northern part of Smuggler’s Ridge, located south on Shing Mun Reservoir.

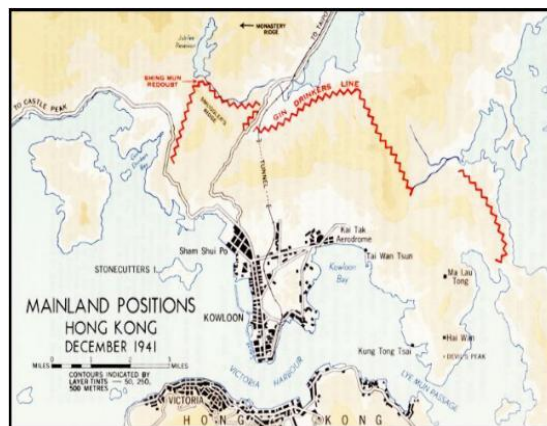


Fig. 1. The location of the Gin Drinkers Line. (Source: The Bottle Shop webpage)

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E. Marino et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 5th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 806, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-170-8_130

Shing Mun Redoubt was interconnected by tunnels and consists of a vast network of bunkers and pill-boxes, each named by soldiers of the Middlesex Regiment after a street in London. Although some tunnels are now flooded and silted up, most of them are relatively intact[1]. The design purpose of Redoubt is to persist for at least 14 days and inflict casualties on the Japanese. However, it was completely occupied in just one night during a surprise attack when the war broke out in December 1941.

1.2 Analysis from the Cultural Landscape Perspective

Virtually all landscapes have cultural associations, as almost all landscapes are influenced to some extent by human behavior or perception. The Shing Mun Redoubt is a military fortification artificially built on the ridge of the Smuggler's Path. According to the World Heritage's categorization of cultural landscapes, the Shing Mun Redoubt is a Relic Landscape in the Organically Evolved Cultural Landscape. Although it has been abandoned for many years, the Shing Mun Redoubt played a role in defending Hong Kong before the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War[3].

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the boundary of a cultural landscape should all areas that are crucial to the location. As the Shing Mun Redoubt is a part of the 18km long Gin Drinkers Line, to maintain the integrity of the place as a unit, it is necessary to establish a broad boundary displaying the Gin Drinkers Line.

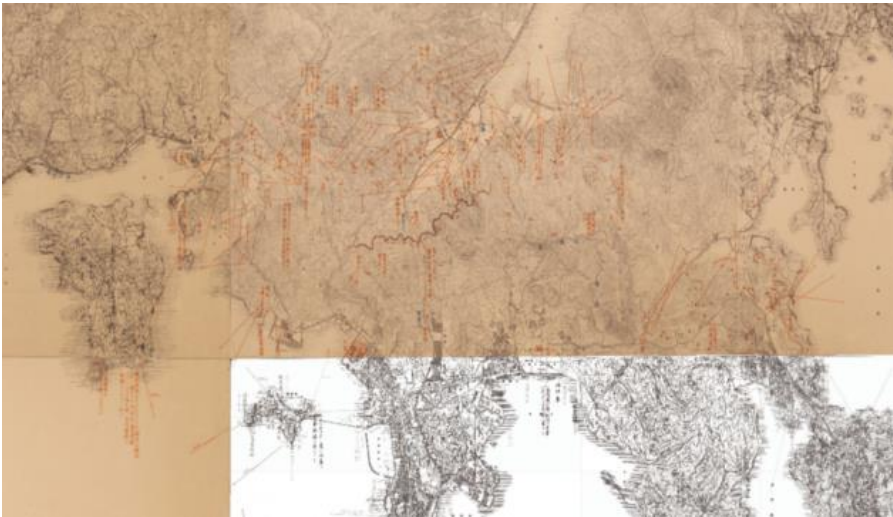


Fig. 2. The Map of Hong Kong's Defences 1939 (Source: HK Maps)



Fig. 3. The Boundary of Gin Drinkers Line (Source: Cynthia)

As demonstrated in Figure 3 a series of more concentrated and well-preserved war-time monuments, the Shing Mun Redoubt, which contains an artillery observation post and four sets of pillboxes with medium machine guns, should also be defined as a cultural landscape boundary. Figure 4 illustrates the serial numbers of the bunker were PB400, PB401, PB402, and PB403[4]. The system was interconnected with tunnels.



Fig. 4. The Boundary of the Shing Mun Redoubt military trail (Source: Cynthia)

2 Statement of Significance

2.1 Description

The Shing Mun Redoubt is a twelve-acre citadel World War II fortification situated underground in the north of Smuggler's Ridge, including a huge bunker network, four pillboxes equipped with medium machine guns, and light artillery positions connected by concrete tunnels, with additional wire mesh protection[5].

2.2 Historical value

The Shing Mun Redoubt was a key defensive position on the 18 kilometers Gin Drinkers Line located in Smuggler's Ridge, occupying a commanding position, which can well see the two main roads from the Chinese border and the New Territories to the Kowloon Peninsula, and used the Shing Mun Reservoir as a natural barrier[3].

The Redoubt was designed to enable a company to hold out for at least 14 days without reinforcements. However, when the war broke out, the Royal Scot, consisting of only a row of about 30 soldiers, had almost no defense. The loss of Shing Mun Redoubt brought the collapse of the Gin Drinkers Line, marking the abandonment of Kowloon, the withdrawal of British troops from Hong Kong Island, and the smooth entry of Japanese troops into the city[6].

2.3 Architectural Value

The Shing Mun Redoubt consisted of an artillery observation post and four sets of pillboxes, and is a typical British designed military structure built between 1937 and 1938. The Shing Mun Redoubt, known as the "Strand Palace Hotel", was made of reinforced concrete. Its walls are 15 to 18 inches thick, with an observation hole and a side entrance[4]. Due to the fact that most of the remains of Hong Kong's World War II defense structure have been destroyed and nowhere to be seen, the relative integrity of the Shing Mun Redoubt is particularly valuable[7].

2.4 Social Value

As the central part of the defensive Gin Drinkers Line, the Shing Mun Redoubt was a crucial defensive point in the 1941 Japanese attack[8]. The capture of the Shing Mun Redoubt marked the collapse of the Gin Drinkers Line and the end of British protection of the entire Kowloon Peninsula in the Battle of Hong Kong. The Gin Drinkers Line fell in just a few hours, and the Japanese army suffered almost no casualties. Therefore, it is important to remember this shameful history and learn from it the lessons of failure[5].

3 Current condition and Issues

3.1 Physical Deterioration

As demonstrated in Figure 5 the redoubt relic tunnel is in disrepair. There is a large amount of vegetation coverage at each vent and highest observation point, and although cement has a certain compressive strength, these vegetation may erode the cement. Many parts of the tunnel are blocked by silt, and even ponding hinders passage. The carvings on the inner walls of the tunnel are mostly clear and even well preserved, but in some places, new graffiti covered the original engraving instructions, which had been caused by tourists in recent years but have never been repaired. This is an oversight by relevant departments and organizations, so it is urgent and necessary to systematically protect cultural relics[7].



Fig. 5. Disrepair of the Redoubt Relic Tunnel with Overgrown Vegetation and Graffiti Damage

3.2 Lack of Systematic Interpretation

For the Shing Mun Redoubt Trail, the current problem is that there is no strong sense of spatial form[8], the planning and guidance is not integral and systematic. The direction of cultural relic trail is generally determined based on the spatial characteristics of existing cultural relics. Due to the presence of buildings and urban roads around the cultural relics trail, the spatial form of the cultural relics themselves is relatively weak. As a result, it requires clear regional division, spatial layout planning, and professional visual experience guidance.

Due to the separation of surface relics in Shing Mun, the integrity of the relics is currently weak. Moreover, most of the current trails are hidden and covered by vegetation, and the existing Shing Mun Heritage Trail lacks a combination of culture, education, tourism, and entertainment, which does not help to enhance the cohesion of Shing Mun culture and the influence of heritage trails[9].

4 Conclusion

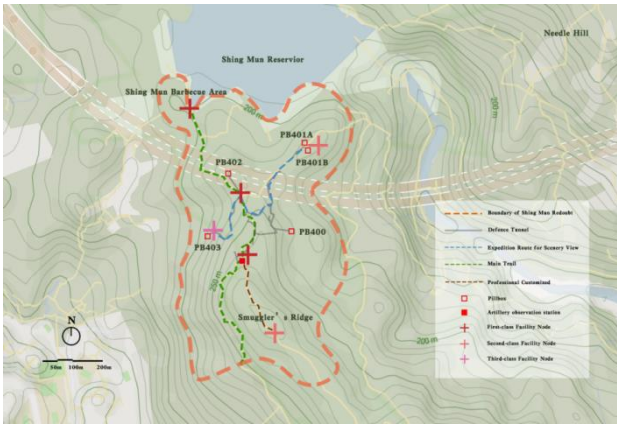


Fig. 6. The New Plan of Shing Mun Redoubt military trail (Source: Cynthia)

As demonstrated in Figure 6 the whole Shing Mun Redoubt trail is of great significance in history, architecture, and society. Based on the current distribution of the historical relics, it is necessary to reorganize historical elements and modern landscape planning elements[10].

For the above two problems, two protection strategies are proposed. As to the damage and graffiti, the physical protection and maintenance of tunnel ruins is necessary. At the same time, certain site boundaries and warnings should be set up to prevent further damage from tourists. Therefore, systematic restoration work should be carried out to ensure the integrity of the remains. The planning is suggested to connect the relics in series to form a linear space ultimately forming an overall plan. The design provides three routes. One is the main route that overlaps with the original MacLehose Trail for tourists to pass normally. Another is a professional customized route that strictly limits the number of visitors. Relevant personnel can enter the tunnel under the guidance of a guide staff, which connects the pillbox 401 and pillbox 403. There is also an adventure route suitable for adventurers here. In addition, the maintenance and upkeep inside and outside the redoubt are crucial[11].

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