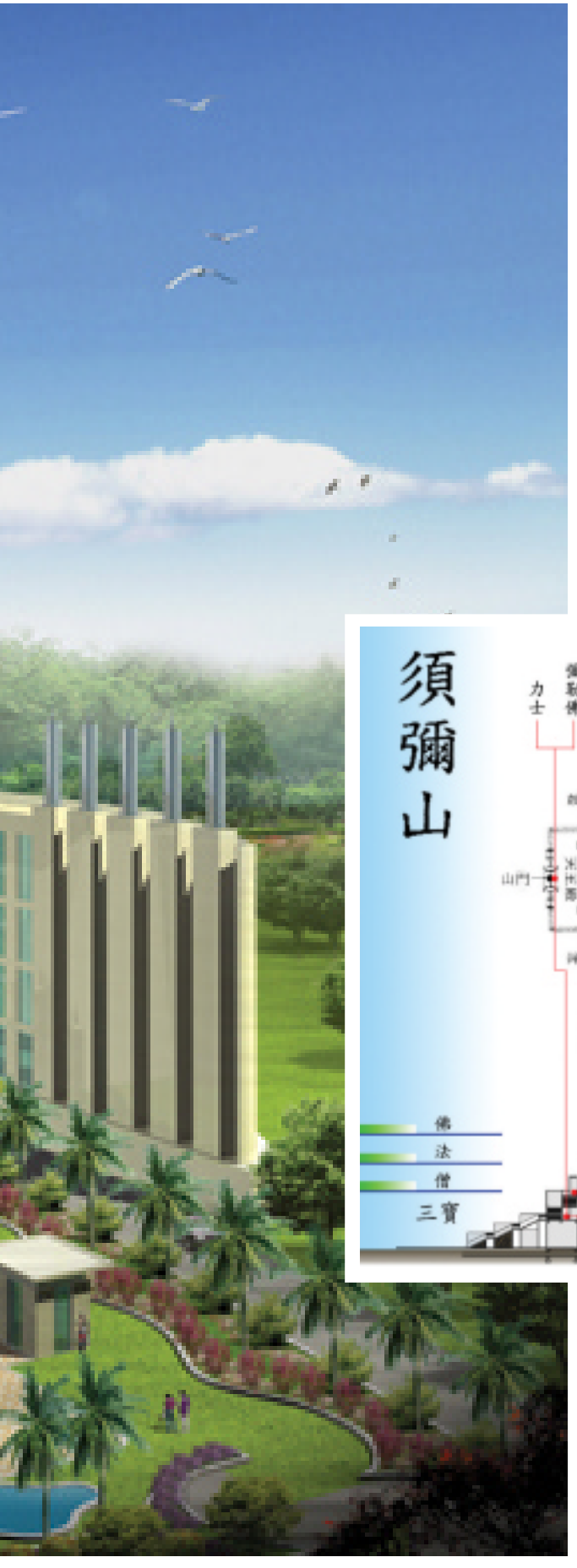
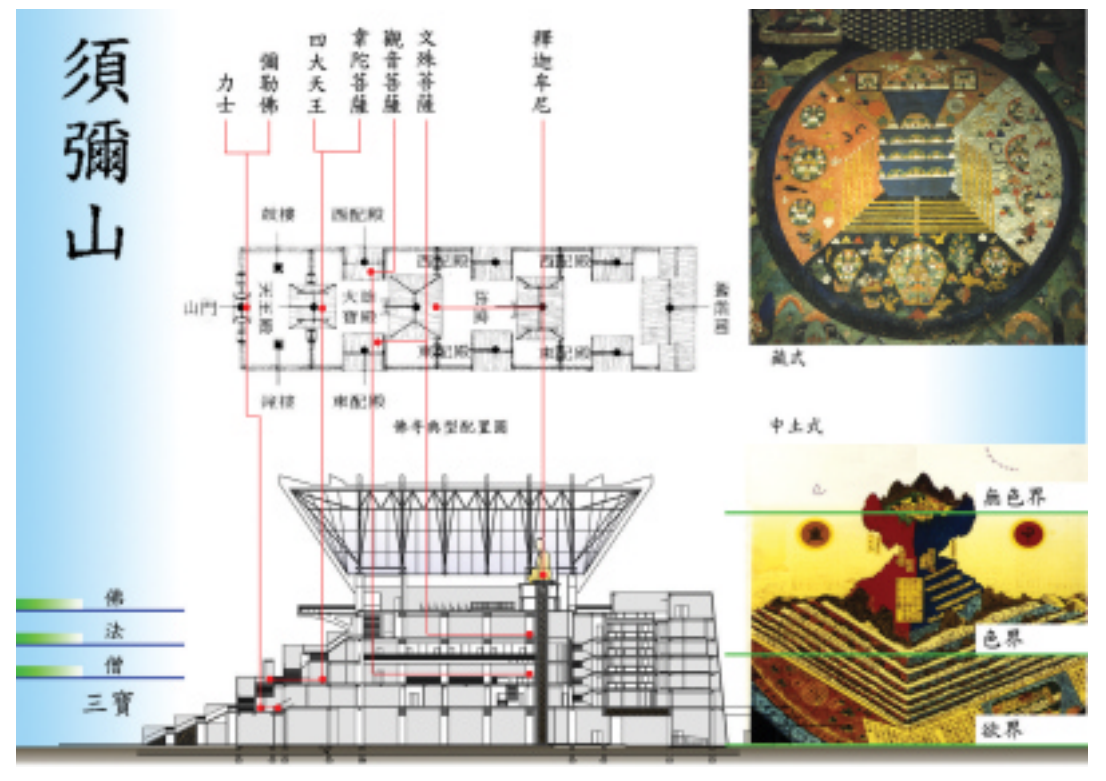


Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery, Lam Tei

Grand extension

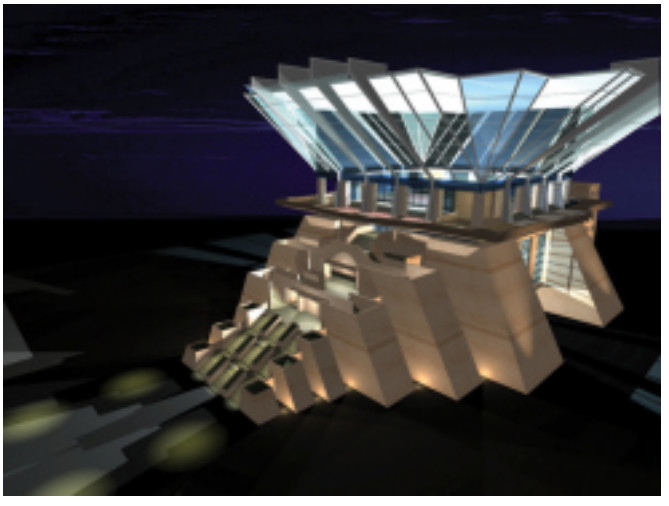
The Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery development at Tuen Mun's Lam Tei district is extending existing facilities, dating back to 1950, on a grand scale.



Now nearing completion on its 9,616 sq m Castle Peak Road site, the new development will provide a 7,122 sq m monastery and a 4,222 sq m home for aged women. Set to stand prominently next to the current Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery and Temple, the new building is taking the form of a solid, stepped structure topped by a lotus-shaped glazed main hall — a signature feature set to be lit up from within by night when it opens towards the end of this year.

When Michael Chiang and Associates Ltd (MCAA) was commissioned to handle architectural design duties, company director Michael HM Chiang embarked on a period of extensive research. His study of historic Buddhist architecture and the faith's underlying concepts took him to China, Taiwan, India and elsewhere before founding a planning approach on the religion's cosmology.

Fundamental aspects of the design reflect the Buddhist view of the universe, at the centre of which stands Mount Meru as a peak surrounded by a great salt lake, four continents, iron-clad mountains on the periphery and the four elements of air, earth, wind and fire beyond. Mount Meru itself is ringed by seven mountain ranges, each divided by freshwater lakes, and above this is a mystical palace with four protectors beneath a realm without form. Within



this universe are the revered Three Jewels of Buddhism — the Buddha, the Sangha (the monastic community) and the Dharma (the doctrines) — as well as the grouping of the three realms of desire, form and formlessness.

Bearing this in mind, the monastery is being built on seven levels, with steps on the outside positioned as if forming a pathway up a mountain — a route lined with planters large enough to hold trees. The lowest level houses a carpark shielded from view by recessed landscaping, and the office/administration areas are on the next floor up. Above this are a double-storey hall with mezzanine-level meditation space for monks, a library floor, a platform and the main shrine hall accommodating an eight-m-tall statue of Buddha Sakyamuni flanked by statues of disciples Sariputra and Mogallana. To the rear of the building is an aged women's home, extending existing facilities at the Miu Fat complex.

The realms of desire, form and formlessness are referenced in the layered facilities as well. Office areas deal with mundane matters, thus linked with desire, while the form-related areas of libraries, meditation rooms and conference halls are directly above. The transparency of the upper hall suggests formlessness. The Three Jewels are present in the Buddha, library texts (Dharma) and the monks (Sangha).

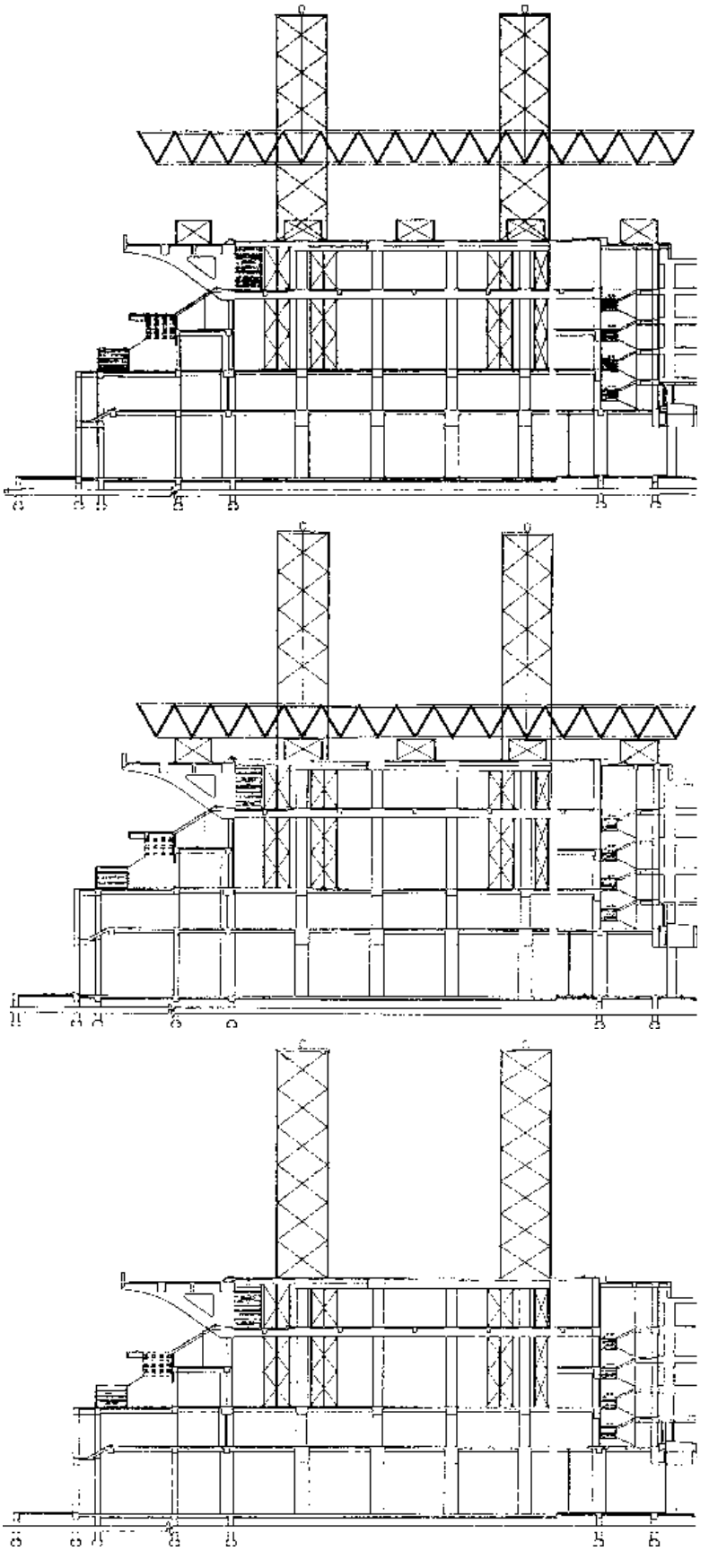
A further influence on the planning was the layout of the traditional Chinese Buddhist monastery. Historically, the monasteries follow specific configurations from the front gateway through to

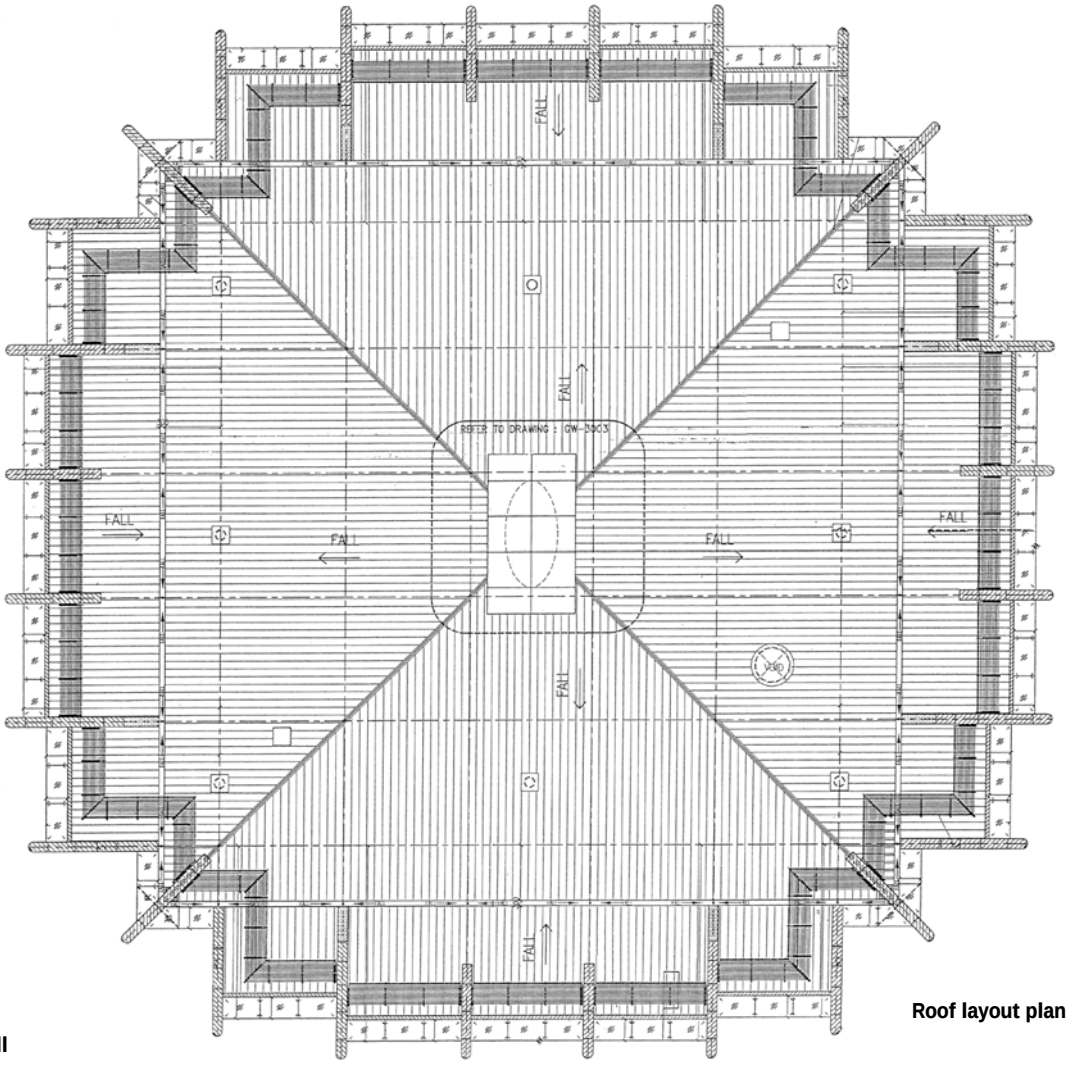
the main hall, with visitors reaching individual gate-keeping features, shrines and statues via a series of courtyards. Those entering are greeted by the statue of the Maitreya — the future Buddha — before passing depictions of two gods that serve as guardians casting away evil spirits. Visitors then arrive at four heaven kings and, later, shrines dedicated to figures such as goddess of mercy Kuanyin before coming in front of the main Buddha statue.

While this traditional layout uses a single storey, the Miu Fat monastery design positions these features across the various floors of the building. Those taking the ground-floor main entrance pass the Maitreya, and other shrines and statues are on the floors above in appropriate locations below the topmost hall. Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, is placed at the library, for example.

One distinct feature not readily apparent to visitors is the monastery's adherence to the tradition of having all statues served by the *chi* (life force) from the earth. Based on archaeological finds in Indian stupas (religious

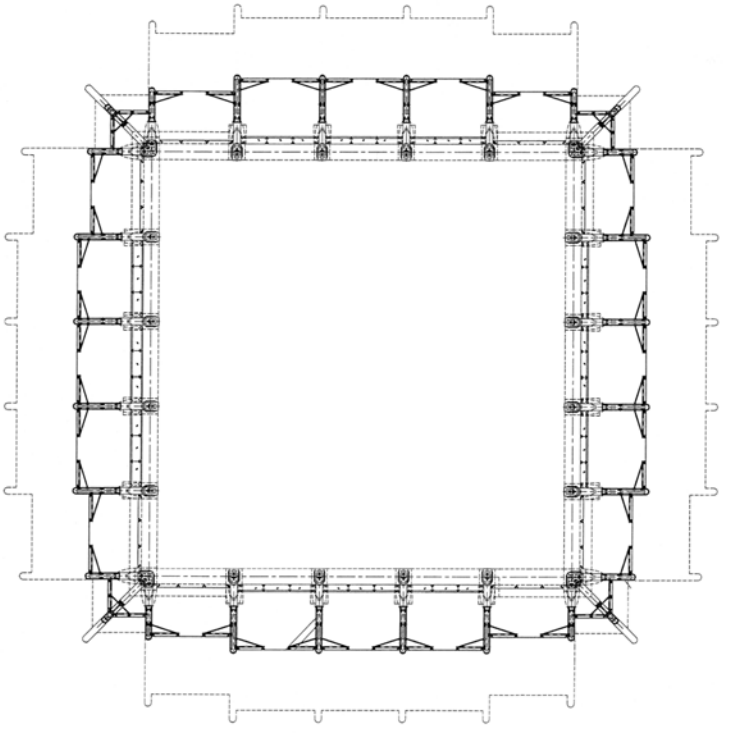
Raising the space frame for the roof





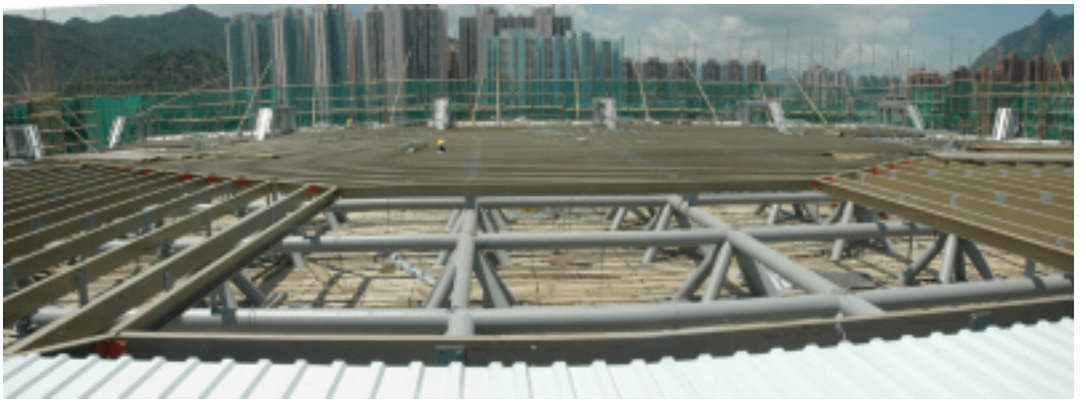
Roof layout plan

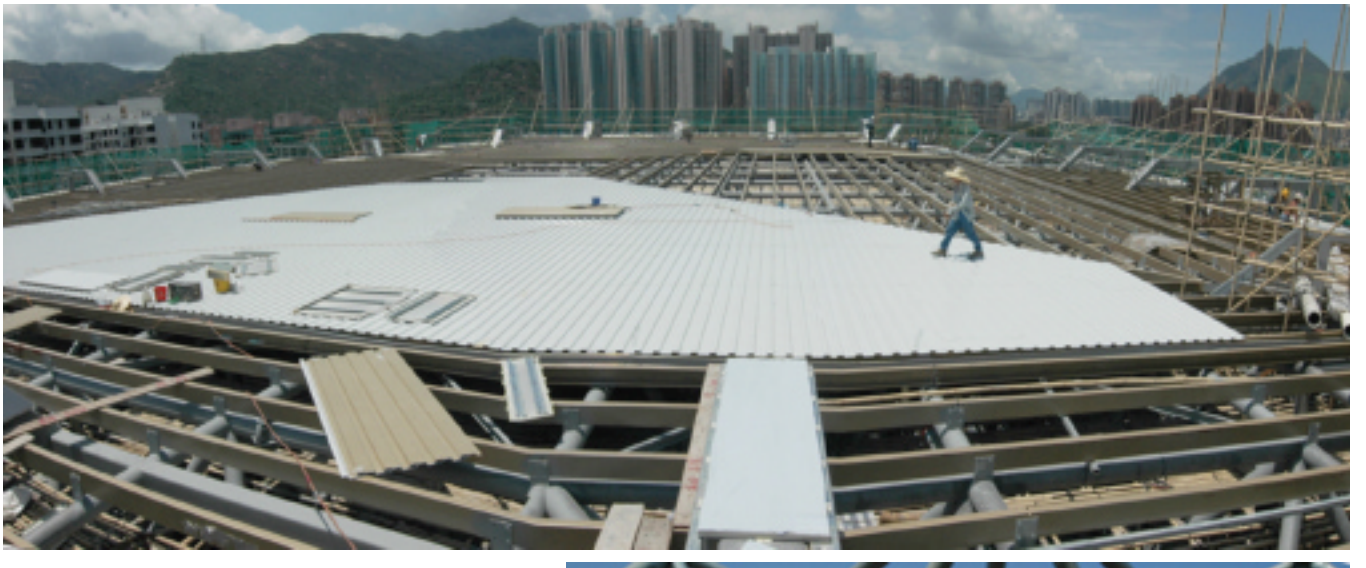
Layout plan for glass wall

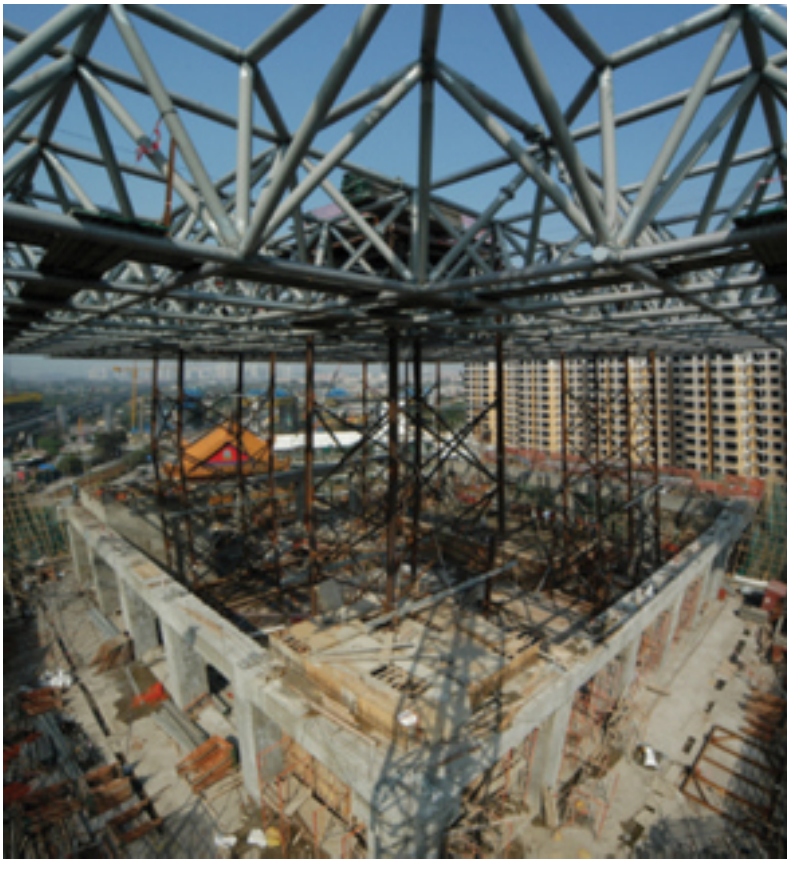


monumental structures that evolved into Buddhist pagodas in Asia), in which central spines connect to relics, the Miu Fat monastery project features a central stack of soil retained from the site's excavation. Using a system of piping, this earth is placed back, layer by layer, and provides footing for the temple's statues.

Budget constraint meant that MCAA had to take pragmatic steps, such as measures to reduce expenditure on upkeep and allow for provision of additional features at a later date. The lower portion of the building is clad in crystalline marble — not inexpensive, but durable in the long term. The stepped portions also feature inclined walls, so these panels are self-cleansing under rain. The glazing and steel of the upper hall are also expected to be easy to maintain, and the transparency means little artificial lighting is needed by day. At the rooftop, fittings and ducting are in place for photovoltaic







panels to be installed at a later date, when finances allow their purchase. Site-specific approaches meanwhile included planning the design around an existing tree at the base of the building and provision of a bridge link to the Miu Fat Temple.

client
Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery

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JMK Consulting Engineers Ltd

E&M engineer
BSA Consultants Ltd

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Ching Lee Construction Ltd