

Historic Building Appraisal

Shun Tak Kui,

No. 171 Shung Ching San Tsuen, Shap Pat Heung, Yuen Long

Shun Tak Kui (慎德居) was built in 1936 by four Chinese, originally from Meixian (梅縣) of Guangdong province, who later moved to Indonesia to seek their livelihood. The building served as a residence and also a school (until 1960 when Shung Ching San Tsuen Primary School (崇正新村小學) was established) to provide education for local village children. The building was also used as a venue for village meetings, and also family ceremonies and celebrations.

**Historical
Interest**

Rectangular in layout, Shun Tak Kui is a 2-bay 2-storey residential building built with a central open courtyard and enclosed by single-storey structures forming wings to the main building on each side. Stout load bearing structural walls and columns support the two main pitched roofs of Chinese tiles on China fir rafters. The side structures have flat roofs with parapet walls formed in traditional pattern screen block balustraded panels. The building is situated in rural surroundings with a vegetable garden on the south side and a large paved drying or threshing area on the north side. There is a latrine block in the back garden and two wells to provide water supply. A *fung shui* pond used to exist in front of the building but it has been filled in.

**Architectural
Merit**

The main façade of the building comprises a porch or portico with two pairs of columns on either side of the main entrance supporting the entablature and 4-columned balcony above at first floor level. The main façade consists of eight well-proportioned and regularly spaced window openings. Influence of Western architectural style can be seen in the design of the single storey to the main building which have matching entrance porches with columns supporting bow-shaped pediments at the flat roof parapet level. The rear elevation of the building is similar in overall appearance to the front elevation but with four additional window openings instead of a central portico. The other noteworthy external architectural features are the unusually shaped gables of Hakka mansion, which are adorned with curved “fish-tail” ends to the ridges of the main pitched roofs, the ornamental balustrading to the balconies and flat roofs, column bases and capitals, shaped friezes to the porch entablatures, the moulded cornice at eaves level, and curved label or drip mouldings for weather protection over the heads of the ground floor windows. Circular ventilation grilles in the pattern of old Chinese coins are built into gable end walls and over doorways. Decorative panels of calligraphy and delicately painted botanical subjects are found on the entrance doorway of the first floor balcony. The external walls were originally painted white, but natural weathering has exposed the grey cement walls underneath the paint layers.

Internally the main architectural feature is the central open courtyard overlooked by an ornate balustraded galley at first floor level supported on columns. The building is divided into 32 rooms by internal cross walls and partitions to form living accommodation with the kitchens confined to the two side wings. Smaller courtyards are incorporated into the layout of the side wings. Decorative wall panels or murals are delicately painted with botanical subjects such as potted plants, tree branches, sprays of foliage, flowers and fruit, and landscape scenes. Other decorations include Chinese characters in geometric pattern roundels set within a cartouche, and painted representations of structural roof elements on panels to spandrel spaces.

The building is notable for its skillful blending of local traditional Chinese and Western architectural features and displays characteristics common to both Chinese and Western classical styles/ characters of symmetry, balance, formality and functional simplicity.

***Rarity and
Built Heritage
Value***

The building does not appear to have been radically altered except for one of the side additions built in 1956. Although in need of repair and redecoration, and eradication of termites in the roof timbers, the building is basically in a structurally sound physical condition and worth of preservation for the future.

Authenticity