

## Historic Building Appraisal

No. 31 Lee Yick Street

Yuen Long Kau Hui, Yuen Long

Yuen Long Kau Hui (元朗舊墟, literally, Yuen Long Old Market) is in the north-east of the present Yuen Long town centre with Nam Pin Wai (南邊圍) and Sai Pin Wai (西邊圍) in its south and west. The market lied along three streets where shops of mixed trades were located. Cheung Shing Street (長盛街) is the longest one. The other two shorter streets, Lee Yick Street (利益街) and Wine Street (酒街), form a parallel pair. There were two entrance gates to the market – Tung Mun Hau (東門口) and Nam Mun Hau (南門口), which were locked up after the market hours to guard against theft and robbery. Two temples, inns and pawnshops were also in the market. *Historical Interest*

Yuen Long Kau Hui was established during the reign of Kangxi emperor (康熙) under the leadership of Tang Man-wai (鄧文蔚). Tang was a 23<sup>rd</sup> generation member of the Kam Tin Tang Clan who attained a jin-shi (進士) degree and then decided to move the market from Tai Kiu Tun (大橋墩) to the present site. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the market was a hub of commercial activities of the Hong Kong region. Farmers, boat people and traders came as far as from the coastal districts of Guangdong province (廣東省) to buy and sell agricultural produce and daily necessities.

No.31 is one of the surviving shop-cum-residence buildings in Yuen Long Kau Hui. It is not known when the shophouse was built. It probably has an age of over 100 years. Before the decline of the market, the building housed a shop called Chai Chung Tong (濟眾堂) for the trading of rice. Before the 1959, it was owned by Chiu Lut-sau (趙聿修, 1906-1974), a very successful businessman and a renowned figure in social and welfare services in Hong Kong. The house has been owned by the Wus (胡) since the 1950s.

The shophouse at No.31 Lee Yick Street is a long and narrow building with its entrance facing the street. The building is connected to others along the street. It shares with its two neighbouring buildings a common wall on either side. It is a two-storey building of Qing vernacular style with a front façade of recessed ground floor entrance and a projected balcony above. The ground floor probably had a shop hall in its front portion for trading with a counter and shelves for displaying its commodities and a workshop, storage, processing area at the back. The upper storey with bedrooms and service facilities was for accommodation purpose. It is constructed of green bricks, concrete and iron bars with its walls to support its pitched roof of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. Its walls are plastered and painted. The balcony is fenced with vase-shaped green glazed *Architectural Merit*

ceramic balustrades. The entrance on the ground floor is of ceiling-high wooden planks.

It is a shophouse to witness the history of the Yuen Long Kau Hui.

**Rarity**

It has some built heritage value.

**Built Heritage Value**

Its authenticity is kept.

**Authenticity**

It has group value with other historic buildings in the old market, including Tai Wong Old Temple (大王古廟), Yuen Kwan Yi Tai Temple (玄關二帝廟), Chun Yuen Pawn House (晉源押) and other shop-cum-residence buildings.

**Group Value**

Market days fell on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> days of each of the three ten-day periods of every lunar month; on these days, the place would be bustling with traders involved in the buying and selling of agricultural produce (e.g. rice, vegetables, sugar cane, wine, fish, meats, soy sauce, spices), farming and kitchen utensils, furniture and all kinds of daily necessities.

**Social Value,  
& Local Interest**

The market operated from 6 a.m. until dusk. It was managed by Kwong Yu Tong (光裕堂), a trust of a branch of the Kam Tin Tang Clan. The market was getting less prosperous and shops were closing down since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in face of competition of other markets especially when the Yuen Long New Market (元朗新墟) in its southwest opened in 1915.

The Wus were not locals. A workshop was housed in the building for the wholesaling and processing of salted cabbages in the 1950-70s. The salted cabbages were imported from China stored in crocks. The cabbages were cleaned and cut before sold to groceries in Yuen Long San Hui (元朗新墟, Yuen Long New Market). The used crocks were sold to the villagers in Nam Sang Wai (南生圍) for storage of water. The Wus also owned a shop selling the cabbages at Shui Che Kwun Street (水車館街) in Yuen Long town centre. The building has been used as a storeroom for old furniture since the 1970s