

Historic Building Appraisal
Nos. 35 & 36 San Wai Tsuen, San Tin, Yuen Long
New Territories

San Wai Tsuen, originally called Fuk Hing Lei (福興里), was first founded by the Wongs (黃) and the Chius (趙). From the early to late 19th century, the Yeungs, the Lees, the Wongs and the Chans migrated from Siyi (四邑), i.e. Xinhui (新會), Kaiping (開平), Enping (恩平) and Taishan (台山), to San Wai Tsuen (新圍村) due to the social upheavals on mainland. Many of the families in San Wai Tsuen originated from Taishan. *Historical Interest*

No. 35 and No. 36, San Wai Tsuen are a pair of village houses built by **Lee-Yau-chi** (李猷滋). Yau-chi emigrated to the USA from Taishan (台山) in Guangdong in the late 19th century. He worked in a laundry and restaurant in the USA. But he settled in San Wai Tsuen on his retirement in 1932 because of the poor law and order in his homeland. He employed an architect named **Wen De** (文德) from Shenzhen to build the houses. The house was inherited by Yau-chi's two sons. His descendants still live in the houses.

The houses are situated in a small compound with shady trees in front. The mixed style combines traditional Chinese vernacular architecture with Western elements and can be classified as **Chinese Eclectic**. The central part of the houses has a shared pitched roof of Chinese tiles with flush gable end walls. The rear annex has a flat roof. Local grey bricks are used for the walls. Windows are regularly spaced and some have hood mouldings for weather protection. The original windows have been replaced with modern aluminium units. Plumbing on the rear elevations shows that modern sanitary facilities have been installed. The front façade is in Western Neo-Classical character with an open verandah with three square columns on the ground floor supported projecting balconies at first floor level. Both balconies have been enclosed with glazing. The balconies have square and round columns supporting the entablature and parapet above. No. 35 still retains its ornamental balcony balustrade but No. 36 has a solid balustrade. The parapet wall has a central panel incised '1932', and panels and posts topped with ball shaped ornaments. The whole of the façade is painted white. Access to No. 36 was not allowed, but the interior of No. 35 was seen. It has been modernised to some extent but the original wooden staircase and white washed brick walls have been retained. *Architectural Merit*

Village houses of mixed style are not uncommon in rural areas, so that Nos. 35 and 36 San Wai Tsuen are not particularly rare. They do have built heritage value however. They have been well maintained and cared for, but modernization has impaired their authenticity to some extent. *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

The social value of the houses is in the role they played in the lives of the Lee family as homes and for worship of ancestors and other social activities. As mixed style pre-war village houses they illustrate the rural development of San Wai Tsuen and therefore have historical and local interest.

*Social Value
& Local
Interest*

As the houses appear to have been modernised fairly recently, it would appear that the occupants are quite happy to carry on living in them so that the question of adaptive re-use does not really arise at present.

*Adaptive
Re-use*