

Historic Building Appraisal

No. 34 Nam Mun Hau

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 23rd 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 18th and 19th 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.

Nos. 33, 34 and 35 Nam Mun Hau (南門口) is a block of three connected buildings at the southern mouth of the old market with their entrances facing Cheung Shing Street. It was at the bank of a branch of the Shan Pui River (山貝河) where boats from nearby villages or far away anchored for the market-goers to do trading at the market. The site has been owned by the Tangs (鄧) under the name of the trust called Kwong Yu Tong (光裕堂), the branch of Tang Man-wai. The block of building was built in the 1920s. No. 34 is in the middle of the block.

Before the Second World War, a furniture shop was housed in Nos. 34 and 35 Nam Mun Hau then in the ownership of Wong Choi-kwei (黃才桂) who was a resident of Nam Pin Wai. Wooden furniture such as desks and chairs were made by him for sale to the local villagers. After the War it became a blacksmith shop for the repair of damaged iron pots. Later on, it was used as a restaurant. No.34 is occupied by a grocery with a canopy at the entrance. The shopkeeper's family was at the upper floor but it has moved away. Rooms on the ground and upper floors are rented to different tenants.

The block is a two-storey shophouse-cum-residence building. The three units are connected to each other under one single roof. No.34 shares with its two neighbouring units a common wall on either side. It is a two-storey building of Qing vernacular style with a front façade of recessed ground floor 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 with its walls to support its pitched roof of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. Its walls are plastered and painted. The fence of the balcony is of vase-shaped green glazed ceramic balustrades. The interiors are partitioned with its walls painted.

*Architectural
Merit*

It is a building to witness the settlement and 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 3rd, 6th and 9th 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 20th 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.