

Historic Building Appraisal

Li Cottage, Tung Lo Wan, Sha Tin, N.T.

The Li Cottage (玉山艸堂) was built around 1918 to provide a resting-place for the Li family descendents who paid homage to their ancestors at the tomb nearby. There is a path leading from the Li Cottage to the tomb up on the hill. *Historical Interest*

The Li Cottage was built by Mr Li Shui (or Sui)-kam (李瑞琴) (1871-1953), alias Li Ping (李炳), Li A Ping (李亞炳) and Li Ping-wing (李炳榮). It was named after his father, Li Yuk-shan (李玉山). Li Yuk-shan and his wife were buried in the tomb near the Li Cottage. Born in Wuhua county in Guangdong province (廣東省五華縣), Li Shui-kam migrated to Hong Kong in his youth. Eventually, he became a building contractor¹ and was successful in business, in charge of many different projects such as waterworks, schools and road improvement works.

Li was also a notable philanthropist and community leader. He served on the Boards of Directors of the Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院) (1909) and the Po Leung Kuk (保良局) (1911, 1912, 1914 and 1915). He also subscribed funds for the construction of the Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary (深水埔公立醫局) (Grade 2) in the benefit of local inhabitants in the 1930s. Together with other social leaders such as Li Yau-chuen (李右泉), Tso Seen-wan (曹善允), Chou Shou-son (周壽臣) and Li Po-kwai (李葆葵), he successfully petitioned the Government to allocate land for the construction of the Chinese Permanent Cemetery in Aberdeen (香港仔華人永遠墳場).

Moreover, Li was a leading figure of the Hakka (客家) community. With the aid of his fellow regionals, he took the lead to establish the Tsung Tsin Association Hong Kong (香港崇正總會) in 1921 and became its Permanent Honorary President (永遠名譽會長). He also raised funds for building Wuhua Zijinshan School (五華紫金山學校) in his homeland.

In recognition of his public service, Li was made a Justice of the Peace (JP) in 1921. When Li passed away in 1953, the social celebrities who paid their farewell to him included the Secretary for Chinese Affairs R.R. Todd (華民政務司杜德), local tycoons Sir Robert Ho Tung (何東爵士) and Aw Boon Haw (胡文虎), and members of the Executive Council and Legislative Council

¹ Li Shui-kam ran a construction firm named Wing Tai (榮泰建造店).

such as Chau Sik-nin (周錫年), Chau Tsun-nin (周竣年) and Kwok Chan (郭贊).

The Li family is keen on promoting education and made donations for the construction of schools. Those named after Li Shui-kam, alias Li Ping, include a primary school, Kowloon Women's Welfare Club Li Ping Memorial School (九龍婦女福利會李炳紀念學校), and S.K. H. Li Ping Secondary School (聖公會李炳中學) established in 1960 and 1984 respectively.

The Li Cottage is situated at the corner of Tung Lo Wan Hill Road and Chung Ling Road. It is elevated above road level on a platform cut into the hillside supported by stone retaining walls. The entrance gate is situated next to a village shrine set into a recess in the retaining wall. The name of the house in English, "Li Cottage", is engraved on one of the gate pillars. A U-shaped ramped path leads up to the front of the house.

***Architectural
Merit***

The house itself is an enclosed courtyard house which faced south. Western and Chinese styles are combined together in the architectural composition of the front facade. The main feature of the facade is the perron or double-entry external symmetrical stone staircase which leads up to the main entrance. Plain wooden doors are hung in a recessed doorway framed in granite with an engraved lintel above. The entrance is flanked on either side by small arched windows with wooden casements hung on iron strap hinges. The upper part of the wall is rough cast rendered and the lower part of the wall is a battered rubble wall which forms a plinth. The wings on either side of the central entrance hall have flat roofs and rectangular shaped windows with miniature Tuscan columns, green glazed ceramic bamboo pattern grilles, and ornamental cills. The pitched roof over the entrance hall has green glazed ceramic Chinese tiles, ornamental gables and red italics bracketed eaves.

The internal courtyard elevations of the house are also architectural compositions blending Western and Chinese architecture. Tuscan columns on pedestals flanking doorways, windows featuring foliated and geometric tracery are combined with Chinese tiled roofs. Ornamental eaves and gables, and decorative panels of Chinese scenes under the eaves. One interesting feature is a moulded ornamental window grille with repeated Chinese coin motifs. The walls facing the courtyard are plastered and painted white. There is a circular stone bowl or fountain feature in the centre of the courtyard. The rear wall of the house is simply plastered and painted with no architectural features of note.

Internally, the walls and ceilings of the rooms are plastered and painted

white. The main rooms have beautiful tile floors of different patterns with ornamental borders some in the Greek key pattern. A Western style wooden staircase serves the first floor.

The house owner Mr. Li Shui-kam was well-acquainted with Qing Dynasty loyalists such as Chan Pak-tao (陳伯陶) (1855-1930) who attained the degree of Tan-fa (探花, the third place in the Imperial Civil Examination) and Lai Chi-hsi (賴際熙) (1865-1937), a scholar of the Hanlin Academy (翰林院士) who taught at the Chinese Department of The University of Hong Kong. The four Chinese characters “Yuk Shan Tso Tang” (玉山艸堂) carved on the front door lintel of the entrance hall were the calligraphy of Chan Pak-tao.

The Li Cottage’s grandiose style makes it a rare building type in the neighbourhood. The house would appear to have been built as a place for worshipping ancestors, and as a weekend holiday home. As far as can be seen externally the house largely retains its authenticity.

***Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The Li Cottage holds some social value in the local community. Although it was built for private use by the Li family, it was built on retaining walls at raised levels, making it prominently located at the foothill on Tung Lo Wan Hill Road. To date, the house is surrounded by prosperous greenery, which makes it virtually hidden from the public road.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The Li Cottage is near to To Fung Shan Road (道風山路) which leads to Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre (道風山基督教叢林) (Grade 2) on the hill.

Group Value

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