

Historic Building Appraisal

Yan Wah Lo

Kwu Tung, Sheung Shui, N.T.

Yan Wah Lo (仁華廬) is a Hakka (客家) dwelling constructed in the 1920s by *Historical Interest* Yeung Ngan-yau (楊雁友) who was an overseas Chinese working in Bandung (萬隆) of Indonesia. The building is in Kwu Tung (古洞) between Sheung Shui and San Tin (新田). It is in the east of Shek Tsai Leng (石仔嶺) of Kwu Tung near the Kwu Tung Rural Committee's office building (古洞村公所). Ngan-yau was born in Meixian (梅縣), the home county of Hakkas, of Guangdong (廣東) province. He had a grocery in Bandung and when he accumulated a sum, he wanted to build a house in Meixian. The site he wanted to build a house in Meixian had already been occupied. Then he chose to settle in Hong Kong due to its geographical advantage and social stability (moreover, the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia restricted Chinese from purchasing any farmland and real estates. With the help of a Hakka native in Yuen Long, bought land in Kwu Tung and built the house. Hakka artisans for the construction of the house and building materials were from Meixian. The Hakka house was not completed due to the outbreak of the war in the mainland. The house he wanted to build was like the Pun Uk (潘屋) in Au Tau (凹頭) of Yuen Long. The residence is still owned by the descendents of Ngan-yau in the corporate ownership of Yeung Ngan Yau Tso (楊雁友祖). It has been rented to relatives of the Yeungs from the mainland since the 1970s.

The southeast facing residence was intended to be built in a Hakka *Architectural Merit* two-hall-two-row (兩堂兩橫) style. The right row and the adjoining open courtyard were not built. It now is Qing (清) vernacular Hakka dwelling having a two-hall-one-row (兩堂一橫) plan. The core centre of the building is a two-hall-one-courtyard middle bay with a side chamber or side room on either side of the entrance and main halls and the open courtyard. A row of five bedrooms with a kitchen is on the left separated by a long lane of open courtyard. An entrance is at the entrance hall and the open lane. The gable wall of the side row of houses is of the same direction of the two entrances. The building is constructed of green bricks with its walls to support its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. The name of the house “仁華廬” (Yan Wah Lo) is moulded above the entrance doorway flanked by a couplet “仁端統四，華祝多三”. The walls are plastered and painted. The open courtyard is covered with corrugated sheets. A semi-circular mound of earth called *huatouying* (花頭塋) or *huatai* (化胎) was at the back of the building, a *fung shui* provision of the Hakkas. The apex of the gable wall of the side row is of the wood (木) style of the Five Elements (五行).

It is a Hakka dwelling to witness the settlement of the Yeungs in Kwu Tung.	Rarity
The incomplete Hakka dwelling is rare of considerable built heritage value.	Built Heritage Value
Added corrugated sheets at the open courtyard are no good to the building. This would slightly affect the authenticity of the building.	Authenticity
Ngan-yau's wife and his son Wun-kam (煥錦) lived in the house after it was built whilst he was still working in Indonesia remitting money through a banking house (錢莊) named Ng Fook Fat (吳福發寶號) in Yuen Long to his family. Yan Wah Lo accommodated an Oi Wah School (愛華學校) with two teachers employed to provide free education to the Kwu Tung children before the Second World War. Generally the village elders of Kwu Tung who were literate and aged over 60 by the time of the survey in early 2003 had studied at the school. It was reopened after the war. It became a subsidized primary school called Kwu Tung Public Oi Wah School (古洞公立愛華學校) in the 1960s. The school was then relocated to a new school building in Ho Sheung Heung Road (河上鄉路). Cantonese opera performances were organized and paid by the Yeungs in the open ground in front of the house at the Kwun Yam Festival (觀音誕).	Social Value, & Local Interest