

Historic Building Appraisal
Entrance Gate, Enclosing Walls and Shrine
Yan Shau Wai, San Tin, Yuen Long, N.T.

Yan Shau Wai (仁壽圍) in San Tin (新田) is a walled village established by the Mans. They are the descendants of Man Tin-shui (文天瑞), a brother of Man Tin-cheung (文天祥) who was a renowned patriot fighting against the Mongols to protect the Song emperors in the late Southern Song (南宋, 1127-1279) dynasty. Man Sai-gor (文世歌, 1390 – 1457) moved from Tuen Mun (屯門) to San Tin in the Ming (明, 1368 – 1644) dynasty, and is regarded as the founding ancestor (開基祖) of the Man clan there. **Historical Interest**

Yan Shau Wai is the first village established by the Mans in San Tin having a history of about 600 years, i.e. established around the fifteenth century. In order to protect the villagers against banditry and piracy, the settlement of Yan Shau Wai was enclosed by an entrance gate, walls and watchtowers at the corners. Within the walls were closely-packed row houses with lanes in between. As time passed, the lineage grew in size and their settlements expanded to include Tung Chan Wai (東鎮圍), Shek Wu Wai (石湖圍), Fan Tin Tsuen (蕃田村), Wing Ping Tsuen (永平村), On Lung Tsuen (安龍村), Tsing Lung Tsuen (青龍村), San Lung Tsuen (新龍村) and Chau Tau Tsuen (洲頭村) as well. They, together with Yan Shau Wai, were collectively known as three *wai* (三圍, literally three walled villages) and six *tsuen* (六村, literally six villages). According to the village elders, since their defensive power had been greatly enhanced due to the growth of the clan in size, the other Man's villages were not built with entrance gates, enclosing walls and watchtowers like Yan Shau Wai.

Apart from village houses, Man Ancestral Hall (文氏宗祠), managed by the clan's trust known as Tun Yu Tong (惇裕堂), was built at Fan Tin Tsuen (蕃田村). According to Man's clan genealogy, this clan hall was first built in 1444. The Mans then suffered the Coastal Evacuation Order (遷界令, 1662 – 1669), which was carried out during the Kangxi reign (康熙, 1662 – 1722) of the Qing (清) dynasty.¹ They were forced to move to the inland areas.² The Mans returned to San Tin and rehabilitated their houses and villages after the evacuation order was repealed in 1669.³ Therefore, it is believed that the entrance gate, enclosing walls, watchtowers and the shrine of Yan Shau Wai were first built around the fifteenth century, and were

¹ The Coastal Evacuation Order was a scorched earth policy that all buildings had to be torn down and farmlands abandoned.

² The Dongguan District (東莞縣) was the major destination of the migrants. Hong Kong was in the Xin'an District (新安縣), and this district was incorporated into the Dongguan District after the implementation of the Coastal Evacuation Order.

³ 蕭國健,《清初遷海前後香港之社會變遷》(臺北市:臺灣商務印書館,1986),頁213及247(註58)。

probably restored around the early eighteenth century.

Yan Shau Wai is a walled village built roughly on a square plan. The entrance gate, parts of the enclosing walls and the shrine have now been retained. The entrance gate is located at the south-western corner of the walled village. It is unusual for the entrance gate to be positioned at the corner rather than on central axis. According to the village elders of the Man clan, there were paddy fields in front/ to the south of Yan Shau Wai and a river (now known as Shenzhen River, 深圳河) at the back/ to the north of it. Pirates came from Shenzhen River at times. The entrance gate was positioned at the south-western corner, where it could have an unobstructed view of the paddy fields from the Wai's front.

*Architectural
Merit*

The two-storey entrance gate is rectangular in plan and one bay wide, and has a simple flat ridge on the pitched roof. The roof structure employs a purlins-and-load-bearing-wall system. According to the village elders and a historical photo, the front facades of the lower and upper storeys are respectively built of red sandstone and grey brickwork. The entrance has a thick wall with a pair of timber doors, while opposite that there is a semi-circular archway leading to the village. However, in the 1990s, the front facade and the archway were finished with mosaic tiles. Despite that, grey brickwork can be seen on the inner face of the openings in either side wall on the upper level. Besides, a red sandstone plaque inscribed with the Chinese characters “Yan Shau Ping Hong” (仁壽平康, which literally means benevolence, longevity, peace and health) is still identifiable on the front facade of the entrance gate. Above this stone plaque is a gun loophole on the upper level, which was formerly used for look-out purposes and for firing at attacking bandits. In the past, there was an external staircase (now demolished) at the inner face of the enclosing wall connected to the left side wall of the entrance gate, which gave access to the gatehouse's upper floor and the wall's top. The village patrol forces (更練) would be on duty.⁴ The door steps and threshold at the entrance appear to be made of red sandstone, which today have a weathered appearance. The entrance is flanked by a pair of couplets with a horizontal scroll inscribed on marble, all of which were installed around 2010.⁵

Internally, the ground floor of the entrance gate is finished with cement concrete, whereas the walls have been plastered and painted. Stone benches can be found inside the entrance gate. The first floor is fitted with timber floorboards supported

⁴ The forces were disbanded in the 1960s.

⁵ The couplets are engraved with the Chinese characters “仁風共挹 壽域同登”. The first character of each couplet, when read together, bears the name of the walled village “Yan Shau”. The horizontal scroll is inscribed with “昇平”. But a historical photo shows that the old couplets read “仁馨遠播 壽域同登”, while the old horizontal scroll read “泰階”. All the inscriptions embody the wishes for good fortunes and prosperity of the Man clan.

on timber purlins.

The surviving enclosing walls can be found along the south-western, south-eastern and north-eastern sides of Yan Shau Wai, with brickwork constructed on random rubble foundations. Traces of shelter holes for the village patrol forces (藏兵洞) constructed with semi-circular arches can be found at the inner surface of the south-western wall. Parts of grey-brick walls built on random rubble foundations are also seen at the south-eastern and north-eastern walls.

The shrine of Yan Shau Wai is locally known as the Earth God shrine. It is situated within the walls near the former watchtower at the south-eastern corner. The pitched roof made up of tiles and timber purlins and rafters is supported on grey-brick walls. The walls have been plastered, with the inner face drawn with imitation brick lines. The granite threshold at the entrance is retained, although the doorframe has been finished with mosaic tiles in the 1990s. The statue of Earth God is enshrined on the altar decorated with wood carving.

The entrance gate, enclosing walls and shrine of Yan Shau Wai are a historical reminder of how the Man clan took root in San Tin. Today, the worship of the Earth God still takes place in the shrine on festive and ritual occasions, such as the Chinese New Year and weddings. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

Yan Shau Wai is within walking distance from other historic buildings, including Man Lun Fung Ancestral Hall (麟峯文公祠), Tai Fu Tai (大夫第) (both Declared Monuments), Man Ancestral Hall (文氏宗祠, Grade 1), Man San Ye Ancestral Hall (莘野文公祠), Ming Yuen Tong Ancestral Hall (明遠堂) (both Grade 2), and Nos. 21 and 22 San Lung Tsuen (新龍村) (Grade 3). ***Group Value***

Yan Shau Wai, having a history of over 600 years, is one of the oldest surviving walled villages in Hong Kong. It marks the beginning of the Mans' settlements in San Tin, from which the settlements have expanded to become three *wai* and six *tsuen*. The surviving entrance gate, enclosing walls and shrine are important historic structures that have borne witness to the development of the Man clan. In the 1990s, the facade and the outer and inner faces of the archway of the entrance gate, and the entrance doorway of the shrine were finished with mosaic tiles. This has undermined the authenticity of their appearance. However, the entrance gate is a rare surviving example of the buildings of the kind, which is built of red sandstone and grey brickwork and positioned at a corner. These merit built heritage value. ***Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity***

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