

Historic Building Appraisal
Village house at No. 34 Lin Ma Hang,
Sha Tau Kok, N.T.

The village of Lin Ma Hang (蓮麻坑) is located in the border area to the south of Shenzhen (深圳). It is a Hakka (客家) village inhabited by clans surnamed Cheung (張), Koon (官), Lau (劉), Sin (冼), Tsang (曾) and Ip (葉), with the Ip clan being the biggest in population. The Ips were originated from Luoxi Yue (螺溪約) of Jikang City (吉康都) in the county of Haifeng (海豐縣). Ip Si-fat (葉思發), the 11th generation ancestor at Luoxi Yue, started to settle in Lin Ma Hang over 300 years ago, and he is respected as the founding ancestor of the Ip clan in Lin Ma Hang. Lin Ma Hang is a member of the Ten Village Alliance in Sha Tau Kok (沙頭角十約). When the border was ‘closed’ in 1949, the village was split into two parts with the northern section initially named as Cheung Ming Tsuen (長命村) and later renamed as Cheung Ling Tsuen (長嶺村), whilst the southern section retains its original name of Lin Ma Hang. *Historical Interest*

At the frieze of the front elevation above the main entrance doorway of the house, there are Chinese calligraphy reading: “時在乙丑歲” (that is, the year of *yi-chou*), suggesting that the construction of the house was completed in 1925. According to the land records, the house partly falls on unallocated government land and partly falls on private land lots (Lots 656, 658, 659 and 1243 in D.D. 47) all owned by the Ip Clan members which altogether constitute the footprint of the subject village house. Land records show that Lot 658 was registered in 1899 with Ip Ting-sz (葉定仕) as the owner. Three of the lots are rectangular in shape tidily adjacent to one another, indicating that there were three smaller units on the site when the British took over the New Territories in the early 1900s, and the units were subsequently demolished to make way for the present building.

The village house has been left vacant since the late 1970s after the tenant moved out. Nowadays, it is a property of Mr Ip Cheung-lam (葉祥霖) (1928-) who is a member of the 10th generation of the Ip Clan in Lin Ma Hang. Mr Ip’s father, Ip Kat-fun (葉吉勳) (c.1898-1948) went over to Panama (巴拿馬) where he sent remittances to his family at home. Mr Ip’s family seniors told him that the village house was built at a cost of 480 silver dollars (大洋), a very large sum of money for those days. Mr Ip’s grandfather, Ip Ting-hei (葉定義) was a younger brother of Mr Ip Ting-sz (葉定仕) who is well known in history as a staunch supporter of the revolutionary movement led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Whilst Ip Ting-sz prospered greatly in Thailand, his younger brother Ip Ting-hei worked in Jamaica (牙買加) and left considerable wealth to his family.

No. 34 Lin Ma Hang is believed to be an early prestigious residence/ *Architectural*
 mansion in Lin Ma Hang. It is one of the largest houses in the village being two *Merit*
 storeys high and three bays wide. It is rectangular in plan, with a pitched roof of
 Chinese tiles, flush gable ends and a geometric pattern ridge. The house faces
 west and has a paved rectangular courtyard or *wo tong* (禾塘) in front for
 drying rice.

The corners of the house are formed of vertical granite slabs up to first
 floor level above which the corners are built of grey bricks. Horizontal granite
 bond-stones can be seen half way up the wall corners. Walls are tamped earth
 construction or built of unbaked sun-dried adobe clay blocks - a traditional
 technique utilizing locally available soils. Walls are finished with white lime
 plaster which serves not only as a protective coating against rain, but also
 reflects sunlight and keeps the dwelling cool. Dry ditches or channels at the
 sides and rear of the house protect the walls from rising damp. The eaves of the
 roof are corbelled out from the face of the walls to throw off rainwater.

The main door entrance is framed in granite works with carvings on the
 surface. The door is unusually tall to allow light and ventilation into the
 entrance hall which has no sky-well over it. The doorway is fitted with old
 timber inner doors and horizontal draw-bars iron fence gate. The blocked-up
 holes are evidence that there were originally vertical bars as well. Remains of
 old pintles show that the doorway was also fitted with traditional wooden
 half-doors to allow ventilation, but to keep out free-ranging livestock such as
 chickens, pigs, dogs, etc. Decoration to the walls is provided by a timber fascia
 board or painted panel below the eaves depicting birds and flowers with poetic
 Chinese characters above the main entrance. Construction of the roof is of
 timber using Chinese fir poles and boarding.

Most of the windows are small in size (approx. 12" x 18"), unglazed,
 framed in granite, and barred and shuttered for security reason. Defense was a
 necessary part of rural community life of this village, which was often attacked
 by bandits and hostile clans in the old days. Lin Ma Hang was in a vulnerable
 position being close to the border with China. It is near to the East River area
 which had a very bad name in the early 20th century as a haunt of bandits and
 criminal gangs who made frequent raids into the New Territories in search of
 plunder and firearms. The small size of the windows also prevents hot sunrays
 in summer and cold winds in winter from entering the dwelling. This results in
 a dark dim interior cool in summer but warm in winter.

Internally, there is a large central room or entrance hall separating interior
 rooms at either side and at the rear. The entrance hall is opened to the outside
 by means of a large central doorway. It is the largest and highest room in the
 house extending up to the exposed underside or soffit of the roof. Opposite the

entrance door is placed an altar table for ancestral worship and for the paraphernalia of ceremony such as wine cups and incense stick holders. A built-in wooden wall cupboard at one side may have been a repository for medicine or dried seafood and a small steelyard (釐戥). An old clock hangs on the wall where once family portraits may have hung above the altar table.

The entrance hall also served as a place to store farm implements and tools that could not safely be left outside. The interior rooms at ground floor level served as kitchen and toilet cubicle, rooms for daily activities, and storerooms for farm produce. These storerooms have wide doorways framed in granite to protect the corners of the walls from damage. A wooden staircase in one of the rear rooms leads up to cocklofts or sleeping rooms under the roof. A carved wooden beam in the roof apex which can be seen from the entrance hall is elaborately carved and inscribed with the Chinese characters “百子” (a hundred sons) and “千孫” (a thousand grandsons). The installation of this beam is for hanging lanterns to celebrate the birth of male heirs which is an old custom.

The interior also has a cement screeded floor and is sparsely furnished with a few old chairs presenting a spartan appearance. One of the rear rooms contains a foot-operated pestle and mortar for polishing rice and the kitchen is fitted with a low concrete bench. A wooden ladder is propped against the front wall to provide access to the high level windows over the entrance door.

No. 34 is a good example of a South China rural dwelling house built using traditional construction techniques. As many of such old houses have been destroyed, it is now a rare surviving one with built heritage value. Few alterations have been made so that the house retains its authenticity. The old cooking stove and chimney in the kitchen have been demolished however, and some of the windows seem to have been altered.

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

The Ips exemplify much of the early history of Sha Tou Kok, where many males went abroad to make a livelihood. The house is no doubt important to the village inhabitants as a visual reminder of their cultural identity and in their collective memory. Grading and subsequent publicity would increase its recognition by a wider public.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Being a residence of members of the Ip Clan, the village house has group value with the residence of Ip Ting-sz (葉定仕故居) (Declared Monument) and the Ip Ancestral Hall (葉氏宗祠) (Grade 3) in the village. Other historic buildings nearby include the Old Bridge at Lin Ma Hang (蓮麻坑古橋) (Grade 3) and Koon Ancestral Hall (官氏宗祠) (Grade 3).

Group Value