

## Historic Building Appraisal

Yu Yuen,

Tung Tau Wai, Wang Chau, Yuen Long, N.T.

Yu Yuen (娛苑) was built in 1927 by Tsoi Po-tin (蔡寶田) (1872-1944), *Historical Interest* a prominent figure in Hong Kong and a leader of the Tsoi clan who have settled in Wang Chau, Yuen Long, hundreds of years ago. The idea of erecting Yu Yuen was conceived by Tsoi who had wished to build a summer villa in Tung Tau Wai, his birthplace, so that his family then living on Hong Kong Island could fully enjoy the ripe fruit of *litchi* (lizhi 荔枝) at peak quality provided by the *litchi* trees of the area all summer long. Yu Yuen was the private residence of the Tsoi family until 1990.

Tsoi Po-tin engaged in construction business and ran a company known as Wing Yick & Co. (榮益公司) at No. 25 Gage Street, Central District, having completed construction projects in Hong Kong and Guangzhou (廣州). Wing Yick & Co. was a building contractor of Oil Kwan Mansion (愛群大廈), a 15-storied building completed in 1937 and measured 65.27 metres in height, which was the tallest building in Guangzhou before World War II. Tsoi Po-tin was one of the founders of Hop Yick Co. (合益公司) that was set up in the early twentieth century to set up Yuen Long New Market in the Five-Hop Street area (五合街). He was also a member of the committee of Po Leung Kuk (保良局) in 1934-35.

In the spring of 1939, together with his son Tsoi Wing-yip (蔡榮業), Tsoi Po-tin presented a commemorative plaque to Tat Tak Communal Hall (達德公所) which had been a centre of resistance forces fighting against the British takeover of the New Territories in 1899 – now a building along the Ping Shan Heritage Trail (屏山文物徑). Four Chinese characters ‘Zhong Yi Liu Fang’ (忠義留芳, literally, “leaving a reputation of loyalty and righteousness”) were inscribed on this commemorative plaque, in honour of the villagers’ bravery death during their armed resistance to British takeover of the New Territories.

The architecture and symmetrical plan of the house are undoubtedly *Architectural Merit* Classical Revival. An imposing entrance gives access to a large central reception hall with rooms on either side in the Palladian style. The side rooms extend to the rear as wings to form a three-sided courtyard. A grand staircase gives access to the upper floor. The main elevation is in the front, a classical red-brick façade featuring white painted columns, balustrades, and window surrounds, a style popular in Edwardian times. A segmental pediment surrounds the projecting central bay over the entrance porch, and a domed

cupola is situated on the flat roof behind the pediment. The side elevations are not so grand being white painted stucco walls with regular rows of barred and shuttered windows. Internally, wall panelling, moulded cornices and skirtings, and glazed and panelled doors can be found.

It is rare to find an example of Western Classical architecture in a rural village setting such as Tung Tau Wai. Its elegant appearance gives a feeling of grandeur to the village. Apart from demolitions in the surrounding garden, Yu Yuen itself remains largely authentic, although abandoned and derelict.

***Built Heritage Value, Rarity and Authenticity***

It has obvious built heritage and social value as well as local interest as Yu Yuen is clearly the largest house in the village. The house has also featured in a locally produced movie *Hong Kong 1941* (等待黎明) (1984) starred by Chow Yun-fat (周潤發), Alex Man (萬梓良) and Cecilia Yip (葉童).

***Social Value & Local Interest***

Yu Yuen is close to the nearby I Shing Temple (二聖宮), a Declared Monument, which is the religious centre of the village. If Yu Yuen is to be saved then an appropriate adaptive re-use needs to be found for it which would benefit the village.

***Group Value***