

## Blue House

Penang on Penang Island is a port city in Malaysia. In the late Qing Dynasty, most of the overseas Chinese here came from Fujian, known as "Little Xiamen" in history.

Not far from the sea in the northeast of Penang, there is a "Lotus River". Previously, it was a waterlogged depression with some water accumulation. The locals called it "Luanba" and planted some lotus flowers inside, which later turned into a street.

In 1898, the usually deserted streets suddenly became lively, and several Hakka tycoons were optimistic about the feng shui of the "Lotus River" and wanted to "develop real estate". Eight years later, this became a Hakka street, dotted with houses of all sizes. One of the most large-scale buildings is the most elusive: carved beams and painted rafters, which is full of antiquity, is neither like an official government office nor a folk house. This Chinese garden style mansion only shows a luxurious and dignified appearance that can not be underestimated. Many people privately estimate that it should be a Buddhist temple, right?

During the Republic of China era, a scene that often appeared outside the doors of large houses deepened this speculation: a group of neatly arranged children knelt on both knees, all bald, like a temple ritual. Many passersby, upon seeing this scene, also clasped their hands together and muttered words in their mouths. This kind of "conditioned reflex" piety will inevitably be ridiculed by insiders in the future. The bald children are not monks, they just shaved off Qing's braids and knelt at the door to welcome their master back to the mansion.

The owner of the big house is Zhang Bishi. At the time, he served as the Consul General of Singapore and was also commissioned by the court to conduct business inspections in Southeast Asia, serving as the Minister of Penang Island Management and Education.

The Zhang family's mansion was built by a high-level domestic architect with an old-fashioned courtyard layout and a duplex structure. There are upper and lower corridors connecting the front and rear large houses and the east and west wings, which are roughly similar in style to Zhang Bishi's other private residences. The design concept may seem outdated, but it contains the owner's thoughtful consideration: there is no banquet that never ends, and the east and west of the river cannot be controlled by human labor. In case the family situation falls, selling the property is a common occurrence for future generations. Indeed, on that day, it was not easy to sell old-fashioned houses, so as not to lose the last place for future generations to stand. This large house was named "Lotus River Building" by its owner, but later it was called "Blue House" by locals because the walls were painted blue. "Blue House" is not an ordinary private residence, but also used by Zhang Bishi as a "yamen" for managing court affairs and personal business, which is somewhat similar to today's work from home. It's called home because it has his wife, son, and a group of relatives and servants inside. In the moments of pride and disappointment in the official market, when one is in high spirits or feeling disheartened, with family gathered around, what great blessings! Speaking of being a "yamen", it goes without saying that he has the convenience of daily life. In terms of public affairs, he does not delay the handling of diplomatic affairs in

Southeast Asia, and in terms of private affairs, he can take care of his business in the British Malaysian Peninsula, killing two birds with one stone.

There was originally an observation deck at the northern end of the Blue House, facing northeast. Climbing on it, one could enjoy a distant view of the sea, which was connected to the mountains and waters of his hometown. The feeling of home is deeply felt only by the human body living overseas. Unfortunately, this observation deck was destroyed by a Japanese bomb during World War II.

The exterior of the blue house is painted with blue paint, presenting a cool blue color while still maintaining the traditional Chinese style. Covering an area of 4900 square meters, with a building area of 3100 square meters, it has 38 rooms, 5 courtyards, 7 staircases, and 220 windows. The size of the building can accommodate nine generations of the Zhang family. The interior decoration and furnishings are very exquisite, blending Chinese and Western elements. A large number of exquisite craftsmanship products are dazzling, including exquisite Eastern traditional wood carving, Victorian iron craftsmanship, and almost extinct porcelain carving. There are even more than ten "Triumphal Triumph Illustrations" and woodcut versions of the Twenty Four Histories inscribed by Emperor Qianlong in the inner room. Their "specifications" and "grades" are no less than those of ordinary royal mansions. Without corresponding identities, they cannot carry these precious ink treasures.

After World War II, the blue houses gradually became sparsely populated and dilapidated. In the 1950s, there was a poem that said: "On the old stage of the Jade Tree and Qiongzhi, Zhang Gongtang went to Yan's house and returned, so the children of the family should be safe and sound. Where will the lotus flowers bloom outside the door?" Witnessing the desolate scenery of empty buildings and changing things, one's emotions were overflowing.

Later on, the descendants still sold the blue house when their family moved to another country. Unexpectedly, the buyers of the blue house happened to be local overseas Chinese celebrities and professionals in the real estate and construction industry with historical perspectives, who weighed the cultural content of the blue house. In order to find competent repair personnel, they spared no expense in searching for folk repair experts in mainland China. Through decoration, they highlighted the original appearance of the blue house. The architectural features of the Blue House have also attracted film and television directors from all over the world to come here to film. They have performed in the real-life drama "Seven Aunties" and have been loved by drama fans.

Under the protection of the local government and relevant personnel, the Blue House has been established as an Overseas Chinese Museum for visitors to visit. Despite more than 100 years of wind and rain, it still stands tall today. In 2000, Blue House was awarded the title of "Outstanding Project of Pan Pacific Cultural Heritage" by UNESCO. This one News can be considered the best reward and comfort for both new and old owners.

Due to Zhang Bishi's significant contributions to Penang, the Penang City Government changed the Malay name of "Hong Kong Alley" to "Zhang Bishi Road" at the request of Zhang's Qinghe Church in Penang, in memory of this revered overseas Chinese giant. Nowadays, this is a key cultural relic protection unit in Malaysia and a famous Chinese heritage tourist attraction, receiving hundreds of thousands of guests from all over the

world every year.