

“Hong Kong Pop 60+” Exhibition

Audio Tour Script

Film still from *Father and Son*

1981

From 1945 to 1950, many immigrants from the Mainland moved to Hong Kong, and the population of Hong Kong rapidly increased, from 600 000 to more than 2 million. In turn, demand for housing soared.

At the time, there was no public housing planning in Hong Kong. Most of the immigrants were from working-class backgrounds and were extremely poor, and had to build their own squatter huts on the hillsides or roadsides of various districts in Hong Kong and Kowloon, using simple wooden boards and tin sheets. With the surge in arrivals of working-class migrants, the number of squatter huts mushroomed. By 1953, the population of squatter areas in Hong Kong was estimated at over 300 000.

As these squatter areas were illegally built by residents, there were, of course, many safety issues. Within just a few years, large squatter areas developed their own streets, markets and canteens, just like small semi-self-sufficient communities. However, facilities were far from ideal; for instance, they lacked sewage systems and fire protection equipment. The environment inside the squatter areas was also dire, with many security and hygiene issues.

On the evening of 25 December, 1953, a wooden shack in Pak Tin Village, a squatter area in Shek Kip Mei, caught fire. This fire quickly spread through the nearby squatter areas, burning many wooden shacks, and more than 50 000 residents lost their homes overnight.

Just two months after the fire, the government built the first two-storey bungalows near Shek Kip Mei to accommodate victims of the fire. It also decided to implement a public housing programme and build resettlement estates with multi-storey blocks to solve the problem of squatters, which had existed for many years. Although the living area in the resettlement estates was not spacious, the residents had a far better place to live. After decades of development, public housing has evolved from resettlement estates into the present public housing estates.

The film *Father and Son* is set in Hong Kong between the 1960s and 1980s. It depicts the traditional concept of a father preferring to have sons rather than daughters and having high expectations of his children. Director Allen Fong presented the lives of working-class families in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s, featuring children having fun in the mountains and studying in a rooftop school in a public estate; such

scenes bring back many memories in today's audience.