

Historic Building Appraisal

Sha Lo Tung Lei Uk

Sha Lo Tung, Tai Po, N.T.

Sha Lo Tung Lei Uk (沙羅洞李屋) is in the upland valley among the hills of *Historical Interest* Sha Lo Tung south-west of Pat Sin Range (八仙嶺), Tai Po. Formerly known as Lo Wai (老圍), it is also called Lei Uk as it was occupied by the Leis (李氏) who came to the area which had been occupied by the Cheungs (張氏) some 300 years ago. With the increase of village population, the Cheungs moved westward and established their own village then called Cheung Uk (張屋, Village of the Cheungs). The old village was called Lei Uk, Village of the Leis. Both the Leis and Cheungs were Hakkas and the former came from Guishan (歸善, now known as Waizhou 惠州) of Guangdong (廣東) province. Lei Tsz-ching (李子禎, 1656-1728), the 15th generation ancestor settled first in Wai Ha (圍下) village of Shuen Wan (船灣) in 1689 and his son Wai-yan (維仁, 1684-1770) married a girl of the Cheungs in the then Lo Wai. He later moved uphill and settled in the village becoming the first generation ancestor of the Leis in Sha Lo Tung. The present Lei Uk village is two separate irregular-shaped rows of village houses on the western foots of two slopes. The entire village is deserted with the villagers moving out to the city areas or overseas when the agricultural activities dropped. The first row to the east has most of the houses long fallen into ruin whilst the west row has been deteriorating.

The two rows of Hakka (客家) village houses are single-storey buildings of *Architectural Merit* one-hall Qing (清) vernacular design. They were connected together in three rows, the longest being in the west known as Ma Tseuk Ha (麻竹下). The other two are in the east row known as Lo Wai (老圍). An ancestral hall was in the latter row. The village houses are constructed of green or mud bricks or a mix of both with rubble having its walls supporting its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. The houses were without courtyard and one or two pieces of glass was among the clay tiles on its roof for natural light. A stove was built inside the small house with living room on the ground floor and bedroom on its mezzanine floor. As the houses were relatively small, no columns and trusses were constructed. Timber board and joists were used to support its mezzanine floor. Decorations in the form of painting friezes and plastered mouldings are minimal with floral and bird motifs most of them faded away due to weathering.

It is the oldest village in Sha Lo Tung having some 300 years of history to *Rarity* witness the settlement of the Leis.

The humble village houses though partially in bad and deteriorating condition are having high built heritage value. ***Built Heritage Value***

The Hakka houses if not deteriorated are still with their originality. ***Authenticity***

The Leis were farmers growing rice and vegetables and rearing chickens, ducks and pigs having their produce sold in the Tai Wo Market (太和市, later known as Tai Po Market). The Leis played an active role in matters concerning the benefits of the areas. The Village was one of the villages of Tsat Yeuk (七約). The Leis had contribution for the construction of the Kwong Fuk Bridge (廣福橋) built in 1896. They were also active in the set up of the Heung Yee Kuk (鄉議局) in 1926. Sha Lo Tung was one of the bases of the guerillas against the Japanese during the Second World War (1941-45) because of its geographical advantage. ***Social Value & Local Interest***