

Heritage Appraisal of Tat Tak Communal Hall
Ping Shan, Yuen Long, New Territories

Tat Tak Communal Hall (達德公所) at Ping Shan (屏山), Yuen Long is the only remaining purpose-built communal hall in Hong Kong which served as an assembling cum worshipping place for a joint village alliance and a management office of an open market in Hong Kong. It is also one of the few remaining sites in direct connection with the anti-British resistance in the New Territories in 1899. Thus, the Communal Hall is an important historic testimony to the socio-economic development and local defence of the area.

***Historical
Interest***

Tat Tak Communal Hall was built by Tang Fan-yau (鄧勳猷) (1812-1874) and his clansmen in the seventh year of Xianfeng reign (咸豐) (1857) of the Qing dynasty (清朝) as an assembling place for village guards (更練) and members of Tat Tak Alliance (達德約), as well as the management office of Ping Shan Shi (屏山市).

The name of the Communal Hall was derived from Tat Tak Alliance, a village alliance comprising about 39 villages in Yuen Long and Tuen Mun to secure their economic and social resources. The Alliance was established in around the 18th century. Tang Shui-tai (鄧瑞泰) (1777-1831), alias Chap-ng (輯伍), the 20th generation ancestor of the Ping Shan Tang clan, led the Tat Tak Alliance at the time. He was the *juren* (舉人) in the Provincial Examination (鄉試) held in the ninth year of Jiaqing reign (嘉慶) (1804). His third son, Tang Fan-yau who was also a *juren* in the seventeenth year of Daoguang reign (道光) (1837), inherited his father's position as the leader of the Alliance and built Tat Tak Communal Hall in 1857 with the support of his clansmen. Two side chambers namely the "Hall of Lonesome Consolation" (慰寂祠) and "Hall of Bravery" (英勇祠) were added to the building in the fifth year of Tongzhi reign (同治) (i.e. 1866) to dedicate to the martyrs who died in armed conflicts between Tat Tak Alliance and neighbouring villages.

The convenient geographical location also made the Communal Hall a gathering venue for merchants who came from

nearby villages including Ping Shan, Ha Tsuen (廈村), Pat Heung (八鄉), Kam Tin (錦田), San Tin (新田) and Tai Po Tau (大埔頭). The water way in front of the Communal Hall named Lung Mei Hang (龍尾坑) once brought in goods and merchants from the neighbouring villages and places as far as Mainland China. The open area in front of the Communal Hall had once served as a market place named Ping Shan Shi (屏山市) and was under the management of the Tat Tak Alliance. According to the current Manager of Tat Tak Communal Hall, a granite gateway engraved with “屏山市” was once erected near the Communal Hall.

Tat Tak Communal Hall is believed to be one of the initial meeting places for organizing the armed resistance against the British takeover of the New Territories in 1899. It is said that a public notice calling for support to the armed resistance was issued in Ping Shan area after a meeting had been held at the Communal Hall on 28 March 1899. A stone plaque dated 1938, which was believed to be inscribed with the names of the martyrs in the resistance, was installed at the main hall of the Communal Hall. Two stone tablets of “Man Cheong” (文昌 God of Literature) and “Kwan Ti” (關帝 God of Martial Arts) were also worshipped in front of the aforesaid stone plaque.

A large renovation to the Communal Hall was carried out in 1938-1939 with funding donated by the Ping Shan Tang clan and the neighboring villages related to the Tat Tak Alliance including Lin Fa Tei (蓮花地), Wang Chau (橫洲), Shan Ha Tsuen (山下村), Lung Kwu Tan (龍鼓灘), So Kwun Wat (掃管笏), etc. After the Second World War, the Communal Hall was temporarily used to accommodate the surplus students from the Tat Tak Public School (公立達德學校) in Hang Mei Tsuen (坑尾村), Ping Shan. From 1951 to 1958, the Tat Tak Communal Hall housed the “Uen (Yuen) Long Children’s Home” (元朗兒童教養院), which was one of the orphanages run by a missionary organization called the Christian Children’s Fund (基督教兒童福利會). Cheung Tin-zoek (張天爵), the then Director of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Guangdong Province (廣東省僑務處處長) in the 1940s, was the Chief of the orphanage at that time. After the closure of the orphanage in 1958,

a private primary school set up by Cheung Tin-zoek then made use of the Communal Hall for teaching children until the 1970s. Since then, the Communal Hall has been left vacant.

As a venue for meeting, Tat Tak Communal Hall was built in a simple but functional design. The Communal Hall was originally a two-hall and three-bay structure and was later expanded with the addition of two side chambers on its left and right in 1866. The granite door frames and name plaques of all the chambers are still well preserved. An annex kitchen block and a dining hall were further added to the south-east of the premises in the early 1950s when it was occupied by the Yuen Long Children's Home.

***Architectural
Merit***

The building is constructed of grey bricks with pitched roofs and granite blocks as the lower course. Murals with auspicious motifs such as peacock and magpie, as well as calligraphy are found above the entrances of the building. Under the eaves are finely carved fascia boards depicting auspicious motifs including bamboo, peony, plum blossom, etc. The roof ridges are decorated with geometric plaster mouldings at both ends. A *caimen* (彩門), which is a colourful wooden panel, decorated with elaborate flowery carvings and Chinese folklore is placed atop the screen door at the entrance hall.

Western architectural elements such as stained glass door panels and reinforced concrete beams on top of the grey-brick to support the roof structure, which are believed to be added during the later renovations in the 20th century, are found in the Communal Hall.

The original building form and some decorative features of the Communal Hall are still visible. Some of the significant architectural heritage assets of the building are still retained. For instance, the timber entrance doors with carved door gods are rare examples in the New Territories. Other features such as grey-brick and timber structure, granite name plaques and door frames, plaster mouldings on the main ridges, ceramic leaking windows, woodcarvings and murals are also impressive. The stoves and chimney stacks of the annex kitchen block are still intact.

Authenticity

It is the only remaining example of communal hall which served as the office for the local militia and open market in Hong Kong. In many old market towns, main temples in the markets were used by the local community as their office for dealing with the market management issues. Besides, the Communal Hall is one of the few remaining sites in direct association with the anti-British resistance in the New Territories in 1899. The building also bears witness to the changes of the physical and cultural landscape in Ping Shan.

Rarity

The Communal Hall has high social value and performed several social functions as a militia and memorial building of the Tat Tak Alliance as well as a market management office of Ping Shan Shi, which served some 39 village settlements in Yuen Long and Tuen Mun areas. The Communal Hall is still regarded as an iconic building to commemorate the anti-British resistance in 1899 by the Ping Shan Tang clan. Even in the post-war period from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, the Communal Hall, which was used as an orphanage and a school, played an important role in providing educational and social welfare services for the community. It is an important historic landmark serving the local community since its establishment.

Social Value & Local Interest

Apart from the Tat Tak Communal Hall, there are several declared monuments including the Tang Ancestral Hall (鄧氏宗祠), Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall (愈喬二公祠), Tsui Sing Lau Pagoda (聚星樓), and Yan Tun Kong Study Hall (仁敦岡書室), and graded historic buildings such as Kun Ting Study Hall (覲廷書室) (Grade 1), Ching Shu Hin (清暑軒) (Grade 1) Entrance Hall of Shut Hing Study Hall (述卿書室前廳) (Grade 1) etc., located in Ping Shan area. The above declared monuments and graded historic buildings have formed a unique lineage building cluster depicting the historical and socio-cultural development of the Tang clan in Ping Shan.

Group Value