

**For Discussion
on 20 February 2013**

**BOARD PAPER
AAB/4/2013-14**

**MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**REAFFIRMATION OF THE RECOMMENDATION TO DECLARE
TAT TAK COMMUNAL HALL
AT PING SHAN, YUEN LONG AS A MONUMENT**

PURPOSE

To seek Members' reaffirmation of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB)'s recommendation to declare Tat Tak Communal Hall (達德公所) in Ping Shan (屏山), Yuen Long as a monument under section 3(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance ("the Ordinance") (Cap. 53).

HERITAGE VALUE

2. Tat Tak Communal Hall at Ping Shan, 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. 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 of the socio-economic development and local defence of the area.

3. 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). 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. His third son, Tang Fan-yau 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.

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

5. 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.

6. The educational and social significance of Tat Tak Communal Hall to the local community is also worth mentioning. 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 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). After the closure of the orphanage in 1958, a private primary school then made use of the Communal Hall for teaching children until the 1970s. Since then, the Communal Hall has been left vacant.

7. 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 Communal Hall 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.

8. The building is constructed of grey bricks with pitched roofs and granite blocks as the lower course. Murals with auspicious motifs and calligraphy are found above the entrances of the building. 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.

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

10. Tat Tak Communal Hall has high group value. Together with other ancestral halls, study halls and temples along the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, the Communal Hall forms a unique lineage building cluster depicting the historical and socio-cultural development of the Tang clan in Ping Shan. A heritage appraisal and photographs of Tat Tak Communal Hall are at **Annexes A and B** respectively.

GRADING AND DECLARATION

11. In recognition of the historical and architectural values of Tat Tak Communal Hall, the AAB accorded a Grade 1 status to the building in 1997. In the same year, the AAB recommended declaring the Communal Hall as a monument in view of its historical and architectural merits.

12. The previous grading of Tat Tak Communal Hall was reviewed by the AAB as part of the recent assessment exercise of 1,444 historic buildings based on the updated assessment criteria. After reviewed by the Assessment Panel, the Grade 1 status of Tat Tak Communal Hall was proposed to be retained, which was subsequently endorsed by AAB at its meeting on 17 May 2010.

13. At its meeting on 26 November 2008, the AAB endorsed the establishment of a formal relationship between the statutory monument declaration system and the administrative grading system for historic buildings. Under the endorsed arrangements, Grade 1 buildings, defined as “building of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible”, will serve as a pool of highly valuable heritage buildings for consideration by

the Antiquities Authority as to whether some of these may have reached the “high threshold” of monuments for the statutory protection under the Ordinance.

14. The Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) considered that with its significant heritage values as explained in paragraphs 2-10 above, Tat Tak Communal Hall has reached the “high threshold” to be declared as a monument and protected permanently under the Ordinance.

RESTORATION

15. Due to extensive land filling immediately in front of Tat Tak Communal Hall, the building is situated about one metre below the surrounding ground level and has suffered from perennial flooding since the completion of the new town development at Tin Shui Wai in 1988. Rear part of the building was also damaged by a landslide in the 1990s. Feasibility study was carried out in 2004 to explore various preservation options for the Communal Hall and the recommended option of reconstructing the building on a raised foundation in its original location was presented to the AAB and accepted by the members at its meeting on 15 September 2004.

16. Subsequently, AMO conducted an in-house survey of the Communal Hall to review the reconstruction option. AMO later decided to further explore the possibility of in-situ preservation by arranging a technical feasibility study in 2009 so as to better preserve and restore the historic building. The technical study demonstrated that *in-situ* preservation of the building is feasible, subject to the geotechnical, structural and drainage improvements to the site. The AAB has been kept informed of the progress and outcome of the aforesaid study in its progress reports.

17. Detailed design of the aforesaid improvement works to the slope behind Tat Tak Communal Hall and drainage system of the site has been recently completed. AMO has arranged a further temporary support and urgent repairs to the Tat Tak Communal Hall in late 2012. With the assistance of the Drainage Services Department and the Civil Engineering and Development Department respectively, drainage works and slope improvement works will be carried out in 2013. After the slope and flooding problems of the surrounding

area of Tat Tak Communal Hall are solved, full restoration of the Communal Hall will start in late 2013 and is expected to be completed in 2015. Tat Tak Communal Hall will become one of the major attractions along the Ping Shan Heritage Trail after the full restoration.

ADVICE SOUGHT

18. Members are requested to reaffirm the AAB's previous recommendation made in 1997 for declaration of the Tat Tak Communal Hall at Ping Shan, Yuen Long as a monument under section 3(1) of the Ordinance. The proposed boundary of the declaration is shown in **Annex C**.

NEXT STEP

19. If Members support the proposal to declare Tat Tak Communal Hall as a monument, the AMO will take this forward in accordance with the provisions of the Ordinance.

Antiquities and Monuments Office
Leisure and Cultural Services Department
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