

Historic Building Appraisal

Nos. 4 & 5 Kau Wa Keng, Kwai Tsing, N.T.

The Tsangs (曾) in Kau Wa Keng, also locally known as Kau Wa Keng Old Village (九華徑舊村), are Hakkas (客家) who settled in the village in the Qianlong (乾隆, 1736-1795) reign of the Qing (清) dynasty. Before their arrival, the village was settled by a family surnamed Ng (吳). Tsang Bak-tao (曾伯韜) first moved from Wangniugang (望牛崗) of Danshui (淡水), Huizhou (惠州), to Lizhujiao village (壙竹角村) of Baoan (寶安), Guangdong (廣東) province, that is, the present-day Tai Lam Chung (大欖涌) in 1737. His second son Wai-heng (維亨) later moved to Kau Wa Keng in the mid-18th century. Wai-heng is considered as the founding ancestor of the village.

*Historical
Interest*

Hong Kong Island was declared as a free port in 1842 and the Kowloon Peninsula was leased by Britain in 1860, which resulted in the general growth of China trade. A large number of Chinese were employed by shipping companies. Many villagers in Kau Wa Keng started to work as seamen before the lease of the New Territories. Their remittances made the village well-off.

These two houses were probably built in the 1930s by Tsang Hin-chung (曾憲琮). Born and educated locally, Tsang Hin-chung worked on a ship, the “Empress of Japan” (日本皇后), initially as a seaman and then a chief steward and earned a great deal of money. Like many other seamen, he returned to Hong Kong to build a house for his family and descendants. Apart from being a residence, the house was also the venue for holding ceremonies for the family of Tsang Hin-chung. The house possesses special social value to the village as it served as the recruitment centre of seamen for the “Empress of Japan” and many villagers were recruited. During the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945), these houses were looted. Tsang Hin-chung lived in the two houses with his family until his death in the late 1950s.

Nos. 4 and 5 are an interesting blend of mixed Chinese and Western design. Many villagers worked overseas and when they returned to their villages they used Western ideas in designing their residences. Nos. 4 and 5 actually comprise two semi-detached houses forming one building. The walls of the building are rendered and white-washed with small windows. The most distinctive elevation is the front facade which is composed of arched verandahs supported by columns. Probably the verandahs were open originally but the openings are now enclosed with wooden framed windows. An arched pediment flanked by ornamental posts dominates the centre. A low decorative parapet wall of pierced grille panels and intermediate posts runs around the

*Architectural
Merit*

perimeter of the roof which has a wide projecting eaves.

As more and more old village houses are being demolished and rebuilt, it is becoming more difficult to find old houses like Nos. 4 and 5. No major alteration which may have diminished the authenticity of the exterior can be identified.

***Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The social value of the building lies in its role as a family residence and also as a recruitment centre for seamen. Many family ceremonies and celebrations were held there and the houses acted as a binding force among the family members. The interesting mixed style design gives the building local colour and interest.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Nos. 4 and 5 have group value with other historic buildings in the village, and the former Lai Chi Kok Hospital (荔枝角醫院) (Grade 3).

Group Value

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