

Historic Building Appraisal
Law Mansion
Nos. 50A, 51 & 51A Cha Kwo Ling Road, Cha Kwo Ling, Kowloon

Law Mansion (羅氏大屋) is a village house in the centre of Cha Kwo Ling Village (茶果嶺村). It is believed to have been built about a hundred years ago. It was originally a residence but was converted into three small factories in the 1950s. As the factories retreated in the 1980s, the house was used as a warehouse for a short period of time. It is now converted back to a residence and is leased to several households, of which most of them are new immigrants from the Mainland. Most of the houses in the village were demolished to make way for the construction of Eastern Harbour Crossing and few old houses remain. The village house has borne witness to the transformation of eastern Kowloon.

Cha Kwo Ling lies to the southeast of Kowloon Bay. It is a small hill located at the eastern corner of the Kowloon peninsula, between Lei Yue Mun and Kwun Tong. It is so named because the shape of the hill resembles a Hakka delicacy called *cha kwo* (literally meaning tea dumpling). There is another saying that the knoll gets its name from the large amount of *cha kwo* wrapping leaves in the nearby area. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Hakkas migrated into the area. Historically, there were four villages in the area, namely Lei Yue Mun Village (鯉魚門村), Ngau Tau Kok Village (牛頭角村), Sai Tso Wan Village (茜草灣村) and Cha Kwo Ling Village (茶果嶺村).

The four villages were known collectively as Si Shan (四山), literally, four hills. The Qing government appointed a gentry in each hill to become the *tau yan* or *shan yan* (頭人/山人, headman) responsible to rule the area and to collect tax for the government. The four headmen were known as Si Shan Tau Yan (四山頭人, headmen of four hills). On the other hand, the four villages formed the Si Shan Kung So (四山公所, literally meaning communal hall of four hills) which ran the quarrying business of the area. This headmen system ended before the Second World War. An ancestor of the Law Mansion was a *shan yan* (headman of Cha Kwo Ling).

The earliest settlers of Cha Kwo Ling were said to be the Laws (羅氏) and Tangs (鄧氏) coming from Danshui, Guangdong (廣東淡水). As Cha Kwo Ling Hill was rich in granite, a kind of rock that is useful for construction purposes, villagers in the area were mostly stonemasons. Later the Tsangs (曾

氏), the Wongs (黃氏) and the Laus (劉氏) began to settle here. All these families had their own quarry at that time. Therefore, quarrying became the main occupation of the residents in this area. It is said that the building materials of the Old Supreme Court (built in 1912, Declared Monument) and the sea walls of Kennedy Town and North Point were obtained from Cha Kwo Ling.

It is a two-storey house of Qing vernacular design, with a pitched roof and flush gable end walls. The walls are built of rather unusual elongated granite blocks. The house is divided into three units each with its own separate entrance. Windows are steel framed and fairly uniformly placed. Some windows are barred. The central part of the frontage is recessed and the rear of the house abuts on to other houses. The house is on a narrow village lane facing other stone houses. Ornamentation is sparse consisting of blank panels to the wall and gable friezes, carved mouldings under the eaves, and an ovolو moulding to the main entrance casing.

Architectural Merit

The rustic village appearance of the house is marred by a proliferation of cables, junction boxes, air conditioners and an ugly typhoon canopy of corrugated steel sheets. Steel folding security gates to the entrances also detract from the overall appearance. The condition of the interior is not known.

It is a residential house to remind the changes of the village and to reveal the past village-life in Kowloon. As most of the surrounding area has been redeveloped, this old stone village house is now rare. As a rare example of a modern small house using local materials it has built heritage value.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

As the house has been divided into three units with separate entrances it has lost some of its authenticity. Although alterations have been made, the original structure can still be made out. The exterior appearance of the building is basically maintained.

The house seems to have had social value to the village both as a residence and as a factory. The house has local interest as an example of the original type of village house before redevelopment.

Social Value & Local Interest

It is within walking distance of the Tin Hau Temple (天后宮) on Cha Kwo Ling Road (Grade 3).

Group Value