

Historic Building Appraisal

Sha Lo Tung Cheung Uk

Sha Lo Tung, Tai Po

Cheung Uk (張屋, literally meaning the village of the Cheungs) is in the upland valley among the hills of Sha Lo Tung (formerly 沙螺洞 and now known as 沙羅洞) south-west of Pat Sin Range (八仙嶺), Tai Po. Sha Lo Tung is still a member of Tsap Wo Yeuk (集和約), one of the seven village alliances under Tai Po Tsat Yeuk (大埔七約, literally meaning seven alliances of Tai Po). It was Tai Po Tsat Yeuk that established Tai Wo Shi (太和市, literally meaning Tai Wo market), later known as Tai Po Hui (大埔墟, literally meaning Tai Po market).

*Historical
Interest*

The name of Cheung Uk originates from the surname of the family in the village who settled there some 300 years ago. They were Hakka (客家人) from Chengxiang (程鄉) of Chaozhou (潮州), Guangdong (廣東) province. They first moved to Dongguan (東莞) and then to Lo Wai (老圍) of Sha Lo Tung. Lo Wai was also occupied by the Leis (李氏). With the increase of population, the Cheungs moved to the present site of Cheung Uk and Lo Wai was later named as Lei Uk (李屋). The Cheungs and the Leis were farmers growing rice and vegetables and rearing chickens, ducks and pigs having their produce sold in Tai Wo Market. Besides, Sha Lo Tung was one of the bases of the guerillas against the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945) because of its geographical advantage.

The population of Cheung Uk in 1960 was 260. With the drop of agricultural activities and villagers moving overseas and working in the urban area, the village became gradually deserted from the 1960s. In the mid-1970s, only a few dozens of elderly still resided in the village.

A total of about 50 village houses survived in the early 2000s but they were deteriorating. It was said that more than 60 houses were built, most of which were residential, while three were ancestral halls. Only one ancestral hall remains. The Hakka houses were built in around six rows in accordance with the typography and *fung shui* facing north-east, so that the village would be guarded by a wooded hill (風水林, *fung shui* wood) at the back. Most of the houses are single-storey one-hall Qing vernacular buildings. A stove was built inside the small house with a living room on the ground floor and a bedroom on its mezzanine floor. Most of them were without courtyard with a piece of glass or two among the clay tiles on its roof for natural light. The houses are mostly symmetrical constructed of grey or mud brickwork or a mix of both with rubble

*Architectural
Merit*

having its walls supporting its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. Drippers are with some houses for draining rainwater. As the houses were relatively small, no columns and trusses were constructed. Timber planks and joists were used to support its mezzanine floor. Decorations in the form of frieze painting and plastered mouldings are minimal with floral and bird motifs; but most of them faded away due to weathering.

It is a Hakka village having 300 years of history with its houses kept intact to witness the settlement of the Cheungs. No significant alterations to the village houses can be identified. Cheung Uk is a rare surviving example of settlements retaining most of the old houses, albeit they are humble and partially in bad and deteriorating condition.

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

The ancestral hall housing a soul tablet of the Cheung's ancestors is called Sam Yik Tong (三益堂). The village life in the old days is still fondly remembered and reminisced by the Cheungs who have moved to the urban area or overseas. Cheung Uk, together Lei Uk, is also a well-known attraction to historians, conservationists, hikers and photographers.

***Social Value,
& Local Interest***

Cheung Uk has group value with Lei Uk (Grade 3) in Sha Lo Tung.

Group Value