

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Lai Mansion

#### No. 485 Lai Uk Tsuen, Pat Heung, Yuen Long

The 4<sup>th</sup> generation ancestor of the Lai (黎) clan in Pat Heung, Lai Tung-suen (黎董孫), moved from Huizhou (惠州) of Guangdong (廣東) province to Dongguan (東莞) and then to Kam Tin (錦田) in the Ming (明, A.D. 1368-1644) dynasty. Lai Hui-wan (黎會雲), the 13<sup>th</sup> generation ancestor and an officer of the Qing (清, 1644-1911) government, moved with his clansmen to Tze Tong Tsuen (祠堂村) after harassment with the Tangs (鄧) in Kam Tin. *Historical Interest*

Lai Mansion (黎氏大屋) in Lai Uk Tsuen (黎屋村) in the south of Pat Heung (八鄉), Yuen Long, was built by Lai Kam-tai (黎金泰, 1856-1916). It was completed in 1919 after his death. Lai Kam-tai was a 24<sup>th</sup> generation member of the Lais. He first worked as a labourer in the gold mines in Australia in the gold rush years. He then worked in a company in Sydney on the trading of white sandalwood and dry seafood such as abalone and sea cucumber. He later became a manager of the company. He gained his fortune and returned home. Kam-tai bought lands in Pat Heung with his money and founded a trading company in Sheung Wan (上環) called Kam Tai (金泰). He established the Lai Uk Tsuen and built his residence, the Chik Kwai Study Hall (植桂書室) in 1899 and a stable in the village.

The mansion was designed by a well-known builder Tsoi Po-tin (蔡寶田, 1872-1944) of the Wing Yik Company (榮益公司). He was a successful businessman and a resident of Wang Chau (橫洲). The mansion is in front of the Chik Kwai Study Hall of the village both facing northwest. The mansion is slightly smaller than the study hall. A semi-circular lotus pond was in front of the building but has been filled up. An open forecourt was in front of the building surrounded by a low boundary wall. A pitched-roof entrance gate is on the left side of the wall and the middle of the front boundary wall is decorated with green glazed vase-shaped ceramic balustrades. It is a two-storey medium-sized Qing vernacular building having a two-hall-one-courtyard plan of three bays. The open courtyard is between the front and main halls. The building is constructed of green bricks with its walls to support its pitched roofs of timbers, rafters, purlins and clay tiles. An altar is in the middle of the end wall of the main hall in the middle bay housing a soul tablet of Kam-tai for worship. One side room is on either side of the front and main halls which has a staircase for access to the upper storey. The two-storey rooms were intended for Kam-tai's four sons. A *Architectural Merit*

kitchen is on the left of the open courtyard. The two ridges are in boat shape with plastered mouldings of flowers, auspicious animals and birds. Wall frieze plastered mouldings are also on the front façade and at the gable walls of flowers, rocks, birds and others.

It is a residential building of the Lais to witness their settlement in the village. **Rarity**

It has high built heritage value.

**Built Heritage Value**

The mansion was repaired in 1962 and 1979. The authenticity of the building is kept. **Authenticity**

It has group value with the Chik Kwai Study Hall and the stable built by Lai Kam-tai in the village. **Group Value**

Kam-tai also worked with others to establish the Hop Yik Company (合益公司) in Yuen Long which later set up the Yuen Long New Market (元朗新墟) in 1915. As he was well-versed in English, he acted as a coordinator of the villagers and the government. The mansion was occupied by his four sons, namely, Hou-fuk (厚福), Sam-fuk (森福), Wo-fuk (和福) and Au-fuk (牛福). During the Japanese Occupation (1941-45) a Japanese commander lived in the building for a few months. Only a few numbers of the Lai descendents are stilling residing in the building. Ancestral worship were made to the soul tablet of Kam-tai at the altar in the main hall of the building with offerings at the Chinese New Year, the Ching Ming (清明節) and Chung Yeung (重陽節) Festivals. **Social Value, & Local Interest**