

Historic Building Appraisal
Mi Tak Study Hall-Ancillary Building
Lok Ma Chau, Yuen Long

Mi Tak Study Hall (美德家塾), also known as Hin Cheung Tong (衍昌堂) in **Historical Interest** Lok Ma Chau (落馬洲) village, Yuen Long, was built by the descendents of Cheung Mi-tak (張美德) to commemorate him, the 19th generation ancestor, and used as an ancestral hall of the branch of the Cheungs and as a study hall for educating the village students. The Cheungs originated from Boxia (壘下) of Datang (大塘) in Dongguan (東莞) county of Guangdong (廣東) province and settled in the village some 500 years ago. It is believed that the study hall was built around 1870. Rows of the soul tablets of the Cheungs are on display at the altar for worship. Children of the Cheungs were taught at the study hall having Chinese classics. After the Second World War, a Mi Tak School (美德學校) was established at the study hall having modern type of education. Children had one or two years of education and continued their study at the Ting Sze School (廷士學校) in Chau Tau Tsuen (洲頭村) of Yuen Long. Mi Tak School was closed in the 1950s. A Pui Yau Kindergarten (培幼稚園) was established at the premises in 1960 until the late 1970s when the kindergarten moved to Kwu Tung, Sheung Shui.

The study hall is a Qing (清) vernacular building having a **Architectural Merit** two-hall-one-courtyard plan of three bays. It was constructed of green bricks with its walls to support its flush gable pitched roof of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. An open courtyard is between the entrance and main halls. Its recessed entrance is slightly slanted to the right for *fung shui* reasons. The symmetrical building has its altar on the central axis in the middle of the main hall. The building is with sophisticated decorations. Its ridges are with geometric and auspicious treasures plastered mouldings. Its gables are with wall friezes of plastered reliefs of baskets, treasures, fruits, bats and plants. Its wall friezes in its internal and external walls are with calligraphy and paintings of landscape, floral and plant motifs.

On the left of the front hall of the main block of the study hall is an ancillary building built for use as a kitchen. It was constructed to have the same style as the main building. Its entrance is on the right of the building. It is constructed of green bricks with its walls to support its flush gable pitched roof of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. Stove is provided in the kitchen for cooking. A chimney in the form of raised roof tiles is at the front roof of the building. Its external walls are plastered.

It is a rare study hall cum ancestral hall to witness the settlement of the Cheungs in Lok Ma Chau village. **Rarity**

The study hall is of high built heritage value. **Built Heritage Value**

A major renovation was held in 1915 and followed by some unknown ones. The hall has its authenticity kept with some minor defects. **Authenticity**

It has group value with the main block to its right. **Group Value**

The study hall has all the functions of an ancestral hall including ancestral worship, Dim Dang (點燈) and marriage rituals. It was also served as a venue for the Cheungs to deal with matters concerning the branch and for holding basin meals. **Social Value & Local Interest**

Apart from hanging a lantern, a basin meal banquet would be prepared at the kitchen (the ancillary block) to the left of the study hall in celebration of the birth of sons in the previous year (燈酒). Before the 1950s, wedding banquets lasting for three days were also prepared at the kitchen. The meals are prepared at the rural committee office (公所) nowadays. During the Chung Yeung Festival (重陽節), basin meals were prepared there after grave-sweeping. The practice, however, ceased due to the emigration of the villagers in the 1970s – 1980s.