

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Tai Ho Watchtower

#### Tai Ho, Lantau Island

Tai Ho (大蠔) is a multi-surname Hakka (客家) village in the north of Lantau Island mainly occupied by the Cheungs (張氏), the Hos (何氏), the Chau (鄒氏) and the Kwoks (郭氏). The Cheungs, the major surname clan in the village, shares the same origin with those clansmen in Pak Mong. They came in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Cheung Tat-hin (張達顯, 1740-1800) moved from Boluo of Guangdong province (廣東省博羅) and settled first at the foot of Por Kai Shan (婆髻山). Tai Ho is located in a valley between ranges of two mountains, Por Kai Shan in its west and Lo Fu Tau (老虎頭) in its east. Cultivation land is in its north and south and Tai Ho Wan (大蠔灣) is further north. The watchtower in Tai Ho was erected in **around 1941** by the Cheungs for defensive purpose against pirates, bandits and the invading Japanese. *Historical Interest*

The watchtower is a detached building constructed on a slope in the west of the village. It is facing northeast providing a watching position at a high level. It is around 5 metres tall with a near square base of around 3.5 metres. It is a Chinese vernacular structure constructed of granite blocks and concrete with its walls to support the flat roof. 23 rows of granite blocks are rendered in regular bonding with cement and sand mortar. Internally it is not plastered. The door is at the southwest elevation. A square opening is at the ceiling for access to the flat roof. The flight of steel ladder for climbing to the roof does not exist. Three small openings are on four sides of the tower with hood mouldings on the external walls. Narrow gun holes are on the upper level of the walls. *Architectural Merit*

It is a watchtower in Tai Ho village to remind the settlement of the villagers. *Rarity*

It has some built heritage value. *Built Heritage Value*

Its authenticity is kept. *Authenticity*

Many villagers participated in the construction of the tower. It provided watching and security purposes for any possible attack from the sea in the Tai Ho Bay direction and other directions. Watchmen of the tower would light up a fire and beat the *gong* in case of any danger arose. The guard duty was in two shifts each day performed by the villagers. The *gong* is still kept by the Cheungs. The village was attacked by the Japanese soldiers during the Japanese Occupation (1941-45). Many villagers provided help to the guerrillas against the Japanese *Social Value, & Local Interest*

were imprisoned, beaten and ill treated by the Japanese at the hill behind the village.

Apart from the closely-associated watchtowers in the neighbouring Ngau Kwu Long and Pak Mong villages, three other towers were erected in Mui Wo, including Luk Tei Tong, Chung Hau and Butterfly Hill. Those in Tai Ho, Pak Mong, Luk Tei Tong and Chung Hau are still preserved and all have good value from a heritage point of view. Tai Ho New Village in its present day is quite scattered, and most of the village houses are left vacant. The watchtower has group value with the rebuilt ancestral hall of the Cheungs in the village. *Group Value*