

Historic Building Appraisal
Watchtower and Side Chamber of the Ho Residence
Pak Sha O, Tai Po

The Ho Residence (何氏舊居) in Pak Sha O (白沙澳) of Hoi Ha (海下), Sai Kung peninsula, was built by the Ho brothers in 1911-1915. The village of Pak Sha O was inhabited by both Punti (本地) and Hakka (客家) with six families of five different surnames who engaged mainly in farming, firewood collecting, charcoal production, fishing and building construction. The Hos were Hakka from Yantian (鹽田) of Shenzhen (深圳) whose founding ancestor Ho Cheung-yuen (何祥元) settled in the village before the 1860s. Two grandsons of Ho Cheung-yuen, Yik-piu (奕標, 1869-?) and Yik-ko (奕高, 1875-1950s) worked as seaman and fireman in the Blue Funnel's steamships starting from the 1910s. They became heads of the workers and later operated a recruitment agency called Yan Yee Wo (仁義和) in Yau Ma Tei (油麻地) for foreign steamships in the first half of the 20th century. With the booming of their business, they built the residence for the Ho families. They stayed in the Ho Residence until the 1970s when many of the members moved to the urban areas and overseas. Part of the residence has been rented out for residential uses since 1980s. *Historical Interest*

The compound is composed of two rows of residential blocks and another to their right. The rear row has an ancestral hall in the middle. A watchtower is at the right end corner of the vertical block. The buildings are in Qing (清) vernacular design with the use of some contemporary features like green glazed ceramic vase-shaped balusters for decoration. The two horizontal rows are in symmetrical layout with the ancestral and entrance halls on the central axis. Each hall is flanked by a side chamber on its left and right having rooms of different designs. An open courtyard is between the two halls and another between the vertical and the horizontal blocks. The buildings are constructed of grey brickwork with its walls to support its pitched/flat roofs of timber rafters, purlins and ceramic tiles. The front row of the horizontal blocks is the most decorative building of the compound with elaborate wall paintings, fascia boards and plastered mouldings. *Architectural Merit*

The side chamber are subdivided into six units for residential use with two having cocklofts. A flight of granite staircases is on the left of the row of building whilst doors are also opened on the right of the units. The watchtower is of three storeys accessed with timber staircases. The row of building has pitched roofs. The watchtower is in square plan having the

highest watch position in the village for watching and security functions as bandits and pirates were active in the 1910-1920s.

The compound is a rare combination of residential units, an ancestral hall, an entrance hall and a watchtower to witness the historic glory of the Hos, and have extremely high built heritage value. Minor modifications are done to the buildings. Its authenticity is kept.

**Rarity, Built
Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

A teacher named Ho Sz-yam (何仕欽) was invited to teach at the ground floor of the watchtower until 1930. After that, the children had their lessons at a school organized by Yung Sze-chiu (翁仕朝), a noted scholar and herbal doctor in Pak Sha O Ha Yeung (白沙澳下洋).¹ In 1947-1948, a new school called Ming Sun School (明新學校) was operated in Pak Sha O for children of the village and nearby villages.

**Social Value
& Local Interest**

The Hos had their ancestral worship at the ancestral hall in which photographs and a soul tablet are placed. Wedding ceremony, meals and other rituals were held at the compound of the residence. As some members of the Hos became Catholics, some funeral rituals were held at the ancestral hall by the Catholic Fathers.

A *dagangu* (打更鼓) patrol system was organised by local villagers who took turn at night and beat the drum at intervals so as to report time.

The Ho Residence has group value with King Siu Sai Kui (京兆世居) and Hau Fuk Mun (厚福門) at Pak Sha O Ha Yeung (白沙澳下洋, Grade 1).

Group Value

¹ King Siu Sai Kui and Hau Fuk Mun were built by Yung Sze-chiu.