

Historic Building Appraisal
Yeung Ching Study Hall
No. 1 Kau Wa Keng, Kwai Tsing, N.T.

The Tsangs (曾) in Kau Wa Keng, also locally known as Kau Wa Keng Old Village (九華徑舊村), are Hakkas (客家) who settled in the village in the Qianlong (乾隆, 1736-1795) reign of the Qing (清) dynasty. Before their arrival, the village was settled by a family surnamed Ng (吳). Tsang Bak-tao (曾伯韜) first moved from Wangniugang (望牛崗) of Danshui (淡水), Huizhou (惠州), to Lizhujiao village (壩竹角村) of Baoan (寶安), Guangdong (廣東) province, that is, the present day Tai Lam Chung (大欖涌) in 1737. His second son Wai-heng (維亨) later moved to Kau Wa Keng in the mid-18th century. Wai-heng is considered as the founding ancestor of the village. *Historical Interest*

Hong Kong Island was declared as a free port in 1842 and the Kowloon Peninsula was leased by Britain in 1860, which resulted in the general growth of China trade. A large number of Chinese were employed by shipping companies. Many villagers in Kau Wa Keng started to work as seamen before the lease of the New Territories. Their remittances made the village well-off. Subsequently, improvements to the standard of living, including education of the children, began to gain pace. Yeung Ching Study Hall (養正家塾) was founded against this background.

The school premises of Yeung Ching Study Hall, which is the only study hall in Kau Wa Keng, was probably first constructed between 1860 and 1876. In 1913, it began to be subsidised by the government and in 1914 obtained the credit as “a model village school”. In 1921, the construction of the existing school building was completed at the same location replacing the old, smaller one. The opening ceremony was attended by the then Director of Education, Edward Alexander Irving. Five girls out of 40 students were first recorded in the *Hong Kong Administrative Reports 1921*. Yeung Ching Study Hall was one of the first four subsidised village schools in 1922 which taught English.

Some of the teachers in Yeung Ching Study Hall between the 1900s and the 1920s were *xiucai* (秀才). Zeng Sheng (曾生), a Hakka of Shenzhen, who later led the Anti-Japanese Guerrillas of Huizhou and Baoan (惠寶人民抗日游擊總隊) during the 1940s and became the mayor of Guangzhou during 1960-67, had once taught in the study hall during the first half of 1936. The headmaster of the time was Tsang Kam-sin (曾金先), alias Tsang Hing-wan (曾慶雲), who was one of the core members of the leftist seamen association in the Empress of Japan steamship called Yu Han Lok She (餘閑樂社). Influenced by Tsang Kam-sin, the study hall provided refuge for leftists until the early 1950s. The school raised a national flag of the People’s

Republic of China (PRC) immediately after the establishment of the PRC government.

When the Yeung Ching School (養正學校) was opened in 1971, the study hall closed down. It is now used as the village committee office and a residence. It is owned by a trust named Tsang Chiu Fung Tso which was said to be set up in 1906 to commemorate Tsang Chiu-fung (曾朝鳳), the founding father of the five branches of Tsangs in the village.

The building is basically a two-storey pitched roof village house with a projecting single-storey flat-roofed annex in front with a recessed entrance. The parapet to the main part of the building has a wavy shaped central pediment decorated with ornamental scrolls flanked by posts capped with pyramid shaped finials and corner posts capped by ball-shaped finials. The forecourt is enclosed by a low parapet wall and there is a small footbridge to the gateway across the nullah in front of the building. The walls have been plastered and painted.

Architectural Merit

The study hall was built with a mixed Chinese and Western design. It is not particularly rare but has built heritage value. Unfortunately the building has undergone a lot of changes such as internal conversions and replacement of windows with aluminium units. However the structure seems to be basically sound.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

The social value of the old study hall lies in the historical role it played in local education. It also served as a refuge or shelter for leftists and underground communists from Mainland China until the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. As the present village committee office, it continues to play a central role in the life of its rural community.

Social Value & Local Interest

Yeung Ching Study Hall has group value with other historic buildings in the village, and the former Lai Chi Kok Hospital (荔枝角醫院) (Grade 3).

Group Value

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08-25-070. *Stonecutters Island in the background and Kau Wa Kang in the foreground* (photograph), 1927.

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