

Historic Building Appraisal

Sha Lo Tung Lei Uk

Sha Lo Tung, Tai Po, N.T.

Lei Uk (李屋, literally meaning the village of the Leis) is in the upland valley among the hills of Sha Lo Tung (formerly 沙螺洞 and now known as 沙羅洞) south-west of Pat Sin Range (八仙嶺), Tai Po. Sha Lo Tung is still a member of Tsap Wo Yeuk (集和約), one of the seven village alliances under Tai Po Tsat Yeuk (大埔七約, literally meaning seven alliances of Tai Po). It was Tai Po Tsat Yeuk that established Tai Wo Shi (太和市, literally meaning Tai Wo market), later known as Tai Po Hui (大埔墟, literally meaning Tai Po market). *Historical Interest*

Formerly known as Lo Wai (老圍), it is was occupied by the Leis (李氏) and the Cheungs (張氏), both were Hakka (客家人) and settled there some 300 years ago. The Leis came from Guishan (歸善, now known as Huizhou 惠州) of Guangdong (廣東) province. Lei Tsz-ching (李子禎, 1656-1728), the fifteenth generation ancestor of the Leis settled first in Wai Ha (圍下) of Shuen Wan (船灣) in 1689 and his son Wai-yan (維仁, 1684-1770) married a girl of the Cheungs in the then Lo Wai. He later settled in the village and became the founding ancestor of the Leis in Sha Lo Tung. The Leis, like the Cheungs, were farmers growing rice and vegetables and rearing chickens, ducks and pigs having their produce sold in Tai Wo Market. With the increase of population, the Cheungs moved westward and established their own village then called Cheung Uk (張屋). The former Lo Wai was then called Lei Uk.

Sha Lo Tung was one of the bases of the guerillas against the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945) because of its geographical advantage. From around the 1960s, villagers moved to the urban area or overseas when the agricultural activities dropped.

The Hakka village houses are single-storey buildings of one-hall Qing (清) vernacular design. The longest row of houses in the west is known as Ma Tseuk Ha (麻竹下). The other two in the east are known as Lo Wai (老圍). An ancestral hall was in the latter row. The village houses are constructed of grey or mud brickwork or a mix of both with rubble having its walls supporting its pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and clay tiles. The houses were without courtyard and one or two pieces of glass was among the clay tiles on its roof for natural light. A stove was built inside the small house with a living room on the ground floor and a bedroom on its mezzanine floor. As the houses were relatively small, no columns and trusses were constructed. Timber planks *Architectural Merit*

and joists were used to support its mezzanine floor. Decorations in the form of frieze painting and plastered mouldings are minimal with floral and bird motifs, but most of them faded away due to weathering.

It is the oldest Hakka village in Sha Lo Tung having 300 years of history with its houses kept intact to witness the settlement of the Leis. No significant alterations to the village houses can be identified. Lei Uk is a rare surviving example of settlements retaining most of the old houses, albeit they are humble and partially in bad and deteriorating condition.

***Rarity, Built
Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The Leis played an active role in matters concerning the benefits of local community of Tai Po Market. The Leis, for instance, had contribution for the construction of the Kwong Fuk Bridge (廣福橋) first built in 1896. They were also active in setting up the Heung Yee Kuk (鄉議局) in 1926. The village life in the old days is still fondly remembered and reminisced by the Leis who have moved to the urban area or overseas. Lei Uk, together Cheung Uk, is also a well-known attraction to historians, conservationists, hikers and photographers.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

Lei Uk has group value with Cheung Uk (Grade 2) in Sha Lo Tung.

Group Value