

## Historic Building Appraisal

Yu Cheung Tong

Nos. 1-3 Po Sam Pai, Tai Po, N.T.

Po Sam Pai (布心排) on the northern shore of Plover Cove (船灣) is a **Historical Interest** multi-clan village of the Hakka (客家), which was first inhabited by the Chans (陳), the Laus (劉) and the Fans (范) in the late seventeenth century. Law Wan-ching (羅運清) moved with his son Tai-yuen (太原) from Yantian (鹽田) of Shenzhen (深圳) to Sam Mun Tsai (三門仔) of Plover Cove in the late nineteenth century. They worked as fishermen but later abandoned the trade because they lost their boat. They moved to Po Sam Pai where Wan-ching involved in hawking and Tai-yuen worked as a cook in Kowloon. In the 1920s Tai-yuen ran a grocery in Tai Po Kau Railway Station (大埔滘火車站) called Law Yik Lee (羅益利). The business was flourishing that Tai-yuen bought land to build a house for him and his three sons and an ancestral hall. The residential house is on the other side of Ting Kok Road (汀角路) opposite the ancestral hall. The house, known as Yu Cheung Tong (豫章堂), was built in 1936, whereas the Law Ancestral Hall (羅家祠) in 1938.<sup>1</sup> Yu Cheung refers to the Laws who has an ancestor Law Yu-cheung (羅豫章) in the Han (漢) dynasty (206 B.C. – 24 A.D.) giving help to establish the empire.

Tai-yuen employed a building contractor in Lam Tsuen (林村) to build the **Architectural Merit** house and the stones used were quarried from a small island called Yeung Chau (洋洲) in Plover Cove. The building is a three-unit-two-storey dwelling with a mix of Chinese and Western design. Each unit has its own entrance on the ground floor. The building was constructed of grey brickwork with its walls of rammed earth supporting the pitched roofs of timber rafters, purlins and tiles. Its upper floors are with timber circular joists and boards. Its front facade bears Western influence, such as the ornamental piers and a parapet having a semi-circular pediment in the middle engraved with the name of Yu Cheung Tong in Chinese and the year 1936 at the roof level, and the arched window hood mouldings. Internally, each unit is similar having living room right behind the entrance and bedroom at the rear. Bedrooms are on the upper floor with mezzanine.

Yu Cheung Tong is a rare splendid dwelling of a wealthy family in Po Sam Pai to reflect a piece of past Plover Cove. It is a unique house there having **Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity** Qing (清) vernacular design blending with Western architectural elements, which were fashionable in the 1930s. The roof of No. 2 collapsed due to a fire

<sup>1</sup> According to land records, the family name “羅” is romanised as either “Law” or “Lo”.

which broke out around the mid-1990s. No significant alteration which may have diminished the authenticity of the exterior can be identified.

Yu Cheung Tong has been the private residence of the Laws for decades, *Social Value,* and has borne witness to the clan's prosperity. The building, situated at the roadside of Ting Kok Road and having an attractive appearance, is a local landmark, and was dubbed a large, stylised residence in Po Sam Pai. *& Local Interest*

Yu Cheung Tong has group value with the Law Ancestral Hall (羅家祠, *Group Value* Grade 3) of the same clan, which is situated across Ting Kok Road.