

Historic Building Appraisal
Lo Ancestral Hall
Wo Hop Shek Village, Fanling, N.T.

The Lo Ancestral Hall (羅氏宗祠), managed by Lo Lai Hing Tso (羅乃興祖), is located in Wo Hop Shek Village (和合石村) in Fanling. It is believed that the village was founded by the Pangs (彭) from Yu Kok Village (魚角村), a Hakka village in Tai Po, shortly after 1899. In 1930, the government moved the Los to the village from the Shing Mun Valley (城門谷) in Tsuen Wan due to the construction of the Shing Mun Reservoir (城門水塘). According to Sessional Papers 1928, eight villages in the Shing Mun Valley (城門八村), namely Shing Mun Lo Wai (城門老圍), Pak Shek Wo (白石窩), Pei Tau To (坡頭肚), Shek Tau Kin (石頭見), Fu Yung Shan (芙蓉山), Nam Fong To (南傍肚/南塘肚/南房肚), Tai Pek Lek (大陂瀝) and Ho Pui (河背) would be affected. At that time, those villages were inhabited by 855 Hakka Chinese, most of whom were surnamed Cheng (鄭), but among them also were the Cheungs (張), Kos (高), Los (羅), Tangs (鄧) and Tsangs (曾). The villagers were to be relocated to various places including Kam Tin (錦田) in Yuen Long, Pan Chung (泮涌) in Tai Po and Wo Hop Shek (和合石) in Fanling. The majority of the new village sites was on Crown Land, while small areas of private land, if included in the new sites, would be purchased by the government.

*Historical
Interest*

As set out in 1928, the government would bear the cost of preparing the sites for the new villages and making wells. Besides, the villagers would be allowed to construct houses using their own contractors, at the rate of 12 cents per cubic foot (based on the size of their old houses), which could be reimbursed. The cost of building outhouses and temples would also be reimbursed by the government. Also, since there was very little unoccupied agricultural land in the vicinity of the new villages, cash compensation would be paid to enable the villagers to purchase privately-owned agricultural land in place of their old holdings. Moreover, the new villages would, where possible, be sited with reference to their proximity to land suitable for pineapple growing, forestry and grass-cutting.¹ In addition, payments would be made to cover travelling expenses in connection with the move and payments to fung-shui experts for their services in relation to the siting of wells and buildings. However, owing to the protracted negotiations on the new sites and the rates of compensation, it was not until 1930 that building works could commence and were all practically completed that year. All the resettlement was completed by the end of 1931, after all the compensations had been settled.

¹ Each of the eight villages at Shing Mun had a forestry area where it grew pineapples and held grass cutting rights.

Around 80 villagers from Fu Yung Shan and Nam Fong To were resettled in Wo Hop Shek.² A lot index plan of “DD No. 51” on Wo Hop Shek Village, dating back to 1932, indicates two rows of houses, within which the ancestral halls of the Los and the Chengs were situated in the front row. These suggest that the Los and Chengs migrated from Fu Yung Shan and Nam Fong To to Wo Hop Shek. The remaining villages of the Shing Mun Valley were resettled in other places. In Wo Hop Shek, the Block Crown Lease of Survey District No. 51 dated from 1905 to 1907 shows that there were paddy fields at today’s Wo Hing Tsuen (和興村) and its surrounding areas were mostly owned by the Pangs. Due to a lack of unoccupied agricultural land near the village, the Los mainly earned a living by root cutting and herb picking when they first came to Wo Hop Shek. Then from the early 1960s, the clansmen began emigrating overseas, mainly to the UK, in search of better opportunities.

The one-bay Lo Ancestral Hall is situated on the central axis of the settlement, which comprises two rows of village houses inhabited by the Los and the Chengs. It stands in the front row alongside a lane, which forms the village’s central axis and divides the settlement into two halves, with the Los residing to the southwest (or on the left-hand side of the ancestral hall) and the Chengs to the northeast (or on the right-hand side of the building). The ancestral hall was built on a “two-hall-one-courtyard” plan. The small open courtyard is located between the entrance and main halls as is traditionally the case. The building has walls constructed of grey brickwork, which support a pitched gable roof of round fir purlins, battens and clay tiles laid in traditional Hakka style. The roof ridge has a pair of simple geometric dragon ornaments (夔龍) at either end.

*Architectural
Merit*

Externally, the walls are of fair-faced grey brickwork, with the lower section of the front elevation walls surfaced with washed granolithic render in order to imitate a traditional “squared” granite appearance. Decoration consists of painted murals along the frieze on the front elevation, which have panels showing attractive scenes of auspicious flowers and shrubs inside a decorated border. Flowers include tree peonies, shrubs and chrysanthemum flowers. The name plaque above the entrance doors is made of finely carved grey granite.

Internally, round fir purlins support a pitched roof with a single layer of traditional clay tiles, while the walls are of fair-faced grey brickwork, which has been painted white (except for the area adjoining the entrance door) and there is no decoration. The pair of entrance doors are of traditional design with a supporting fir purlin above and with the old locking system still in working condition. The

² It was said that Nam Fong To was a single lineage village of the Los.

main focus of the interior is the altar with a single soul tablet dedicated to the Lo's ancestors. It is constructed of grey brickwork against the rear wall and has some simple decoration. The building's floor is of a simple smooth cement screed.

Although ancestral halls of this date and design are still relatively common in the New Territories, most of them feature some minor individual design features, such as decoration or construction, which make them worthy of interest. This Lo Ancestral Hall was constructed in the Hakka style and has a typical design using traditional building materials, craftsmanship and techniques of buildings of this kind. This building was renovated in 1986 and remains in well-maintained condition. No major alteration was identified. The layout of the 1930s settlement has also largely remained intact.

**Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity**

The ancestral hall serves as a valuable historical connection with the roots of this branch of the Lo clan in Shing Mun, which has been carefully remembered through the construction of this building and it is a reminder of their home village in Shing Mun many years ago. It was noted from the memorial plaque recording the 1986 renovation that the Los used to call the village "Shing Mun San Tsuen", literally meaning "Shing Mun new village", when they first arrived there.

**Social Value
& Local
Interest**

To date, the ancestral hall still continues to serve as their main centre for ancestral worship. At Ching Ming (清明節) and Chung Yeung Festivals (重陽節) (festive days for ancestral worship), the Los will first worship in the ancestral hall and then at the graves on the mountainside behind (or southwest of) the village.

To celebrate the birth of male offspring in the last lunar year, the "lighting the lantern" ceremony, locally known as dim dang (點燈), would be performed in the ancestral hall as well. Coupled with ancestral worship, a lantern (dang in Cantonese) representing a new boy (ding in Cantonese) would be lit (dim in Cantonese) in the ancestral hall on the 15th day of the Lunar New Year and would hang there from then on until the end of the 12th month of the lunar calendar, when the lantern would be burnt.³ Although lanterns have not been hung since around 2010, the Los still worship in the ancestral hall to celebrate and "inform" their ancestors of their new descendants.

Many of the Lo family have moved to urban areas of Hong Kong and overseas, leaving fewer families in the village, but the ancestral hall continues to be used, including worship during the Lunar New Year and Dragon Boat Festival

³ Dim means "to light"; while dang is the transliteration of lantern in Chinese. Dang (lantern) and ding (male offspring) are similar in pronunciation in Cantonese.

(端午節). The ancestors will also be worshipped at weddings. The groom will first worship in the ancestral hall on the night before the wedding day.⁴ He will then worship there again before picking up the bride, and finally return and worship there with the bride.

The Lo Ancestral Hall does not have group value with any graded historic *Group Value* buildings.

⁴ He will worship in the ancestral hall after undergoing a local custom known as *Sheung Tau* (上頭), which marks his maturity and gives him blessing.

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Survey and Mapping Office. Basemap (Map Ref: 3-SW-17B)

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