

Historic Building Appraisal

The Residence of Tang Pak Kau

No. 20 Tsz Tong Tsuen, Kam Tin, Yuen Long

The Residence of Tang Pak Kau (the “Residence”), located at Tsz Tong Tsuen,¹ Kam Tin, Yuen Long, was probably built in the early 20th century. The building is also known as ‘Lai Kang Study Hall’ (禮耕堂).² **Historical Interest**

Tang Pak Kau (鄧伯裘) (1876-1950) was a distinguished member of the Tang clan in Kam Tin in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. He was the 26th generation descendent of Tang Yuen-Leung (鄧元亮), who was considered as the first generation of the Tangs in Kam Tin. Tang Pak Kau was a businessman.³ In addition to running his businesses, he devoted himself to many social services, and his contribution to the development of Kam Tin, Yuen Long and the New Territories was remarkable. He participated in the founding of the New Territories Association of Agricultural, Industrial and Commercial Research (租界農工商業研究總會), the predecessor of Heung Yee Kuk (founded in 1926) in 1923. He was one of the committee members of the New Territories Agricultural Association (新界農業會) in 1930, and the vice-chairman of the Yuen Long Merchants Association (元朗商會) in 1938. In addition, he contributed to the establishment of the Cottage Hospital (錦田婦孺醫院) for women and children and the St. John Ambulance Brigade – Yuen Long Division First Aid Station (聖約翰救傷隊元朗支隊救傷站), which were opened in Kam Tin in 1932 and 1948, respectively. He was four times the chairman of the Pok Oi Hospital in 1928–29, 1933–34, 1946–47 and 1947–48. Tang Pak Kau also contributed extensively to education in Yuen Long. He financially supported the establishment of a free school named Yuen Long Shau Kai School (元朗少岐義學) in 1926, established the Mung Yeung Private School (蒙養學校) in the same year and was the chairman of the School Building Committee of the Un Long Public Middle School (元朗公立中學) in 1949.

¹ There are two versions of Tsz Tong Tsuen in Chinese, namely 祠堂村 and 祠塘村. Both names are being used by government departments. In Chinese, *Tsz Tong* literally means ancestral hall, and *Tsuen* means village. According to the oral history interviews with members of Tang clan in Kam Tin by the Antiquities and Monuments Office on 28 March 2023, they generally believe that Tsz Tong Tsuen’s name comes from the existence of Tang Lung Yau Wan Tsuen Um Ancestral Hall (龍游尹泉菴鄧公祠), which is the ancestral hall of the Tangs living in a nearby walled village called Tai Hong Wai (泰康圍). The ancestral hall was built in 1768 in memory of Tang Man-wai (鄧文蔚). When the ancestral hall was first built, no one resided nearby. Villagers moved in to Tsz Tong Tsuen as a result of the increased population in Tai Hong Wai.

² According to the *Block Government Lease*, the original usage of part of the Residence was as a “school”.

³ Tang Pak Kau opened an oil factory called Tai Cheung (泰祥油廠) in Yuen Long in 1915.

Being a key leader in Kam Tin, Tang Pak Kau acted as a communication bridge between the villagers and the government. He represented the Tangs of Kam Tin in petitioning the government to return the iron gates of Kat Hing Wai (吉慶圍) from Ireland, which had been seized in 1899. As a result, the iron gates were returned eventually. He was appointed as a member of the Reception Committee (接待新任港督委員會成員) when Sir Andrew Caldecott (郝德傑爵士) and Sir Geoffrey Northcote (羅富國爵士) were appointed the new Governor of Hong Kong in 1935 and 1937, respectively. He was awarded a Certificate of Honour (榮譽狀) in 1930 and the King's Coronation Medal (英皇加冕勳章) in 1937, and he was appointed Justice of the Peace (太平紳士) in 1947. Furthermore, he received the Donat's Badge in Bronze (聖約翰勳章銅章) in 1939 in recognition of his devotion to the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Many gifts, plaques, couplets and calligraphy rolls from his 70th birthday gifts, as well as presents congratulating him on being appointed as the Justice of Peace, are on display in the house; all of these showcased his strong local connection and distinguished social status among the local community. Some of the names printed on the gifts belong to well-known people of the day, including the famous former-Qing *Hanlin* scholars Lai Tsi-hsi (賴際熙), Kong Hung-yan (江孔殷), Chu U-chun (朱汝珍) and Shum Kwong-yuet (岑光樾), the renowned local Chinese calligraphist Au Kin-kung (區建公) and wealthy businessmen of Yuen Long, Tang Pui-king (鄧佩瓊) and Chiu Lut-sau (趙聿修). When Tang Pak Kau died four years later, many high-ranking officials came to express their condolences.⁴

The rectangular-shaped green brick single-storey traditional Chinese building is different from surrounding village houses because it has an extreme length to depth proportion (5:1), a large L-shaped open courtyard at the back and a conspicuous watchtower of three-storey height. The exterior of the residence is purely in the traditional Chinese Qing vernacular style, as reflected in its flushed gable roof system, green-brick external wall and mouldings. However, the building structure and interior decorations juxtapose traditional Chinese elements and Western components.

Architectural Merit

The site that the Residence stands on comprises various lots of land acquired over the 1905-1922 period, suggesting that it had undergone several phases of extension. Viewing the elevation, construction joints can be clearly seen on external walls; granite blocks are laid as bases for the central portion,

⁴ 鄧緝煌，《鄧伯裘先生哀思錄》(香港：編輯自編，1950)。

while rubble is used for the left unit. As granite corner stones are located at the corners of the central unit and on the two sides of the main entrance, it is likely that the central unit was the first one to be built, and then the other units combined together to form a compound. On the external wall, the wall friezes and gable friezes are decorated with mouldings featuring plants and mythical figures, some of which are still well preserved.

There is only one entrance to the building. The entrance faces the south-western direction. The rectangular residence can be further divided into two rows: the main residential portion is located in the rear part, while the kitchen, storerooms, light wells and circulation space are in the front row.

Right behind the main entrance is the light well, with very impressive Western style decorations upon entrance into the building. Tuscan columns and archways act as a frame guarding the opening of the entrance court. The couplets and altar in the central unit lie on the central axis with the main entrance. A bedroom is located on the left, with fine wood carvings, lattices and a cockloft above. To the right of the altar, there is a finely carved wooden frame decoration. Passing through the wooden swinging doors with a traditional Chinese sliding door, a spacious side hall comes into sight, again with Tuscan columns and archways. Tiles laid in patterns with border lines are used as floor finishes. Three doorways lead to other areas: the spacious backyard, the courtyard on the right with bathrooms and toilets and the watchtower.

The three-storey watchtower is a special architectural feature at the north end corner of the Residence. The interior of the watchtower is mildly decorated, with a floral pattern at dado level and ceiling mouldings. The whole staircase and the floor are finished with red and green terrazzo. Its design of small, minimal windows and ornamentation explained that it was built for surveillance and security purposes. Prudent security of the tower is secured by the thick partitions, a huge and heavy entrance door and pole-bars.

For the left dwelling unit, which was addressed as “the new study room” by the family, Tuscan columns and archways are installed on the two sides of the entrance to the living area, which is divided into three bays. It is noteworthy that the Western style features of Tuscan columns and archways are consistently adopted in the residence, including this living room, for both decoration and intermediate support of the roof. The bases of the columns combine concrete and terrazzo. The wall friezes are finely decorated with murals featuring landscapes and people and calligraphy; most of them are well preserved with attractive colour.

Tang Pak Kau was one of the prominent figures in Kam Tin in the late 19th and early 20th century. He is remembered by people living in Kam Tin and Yuen Long even today, especially among the elders. His residence is an important building in Kam Tin, which testifies to the development of Kam Tin and Yuen Long. In addition, the building is located next to the main footpath connecting the railway station and the main street of Kam Tin. It is a landmark in Tsz Tong Village.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The Residence not only has group value with Tang Lung Yau Wan Tsuen Um Ancestral Hall (龍游尹泉菴鄧公祠), which is in the same village, but also with the historic places in the vicinity, such as Kat Hing Wai, Tai Hong Wai and Wing Lung Wai (永隆圍), as well as the historic buildings like Tang Kwong U Ancestral Hall (廣瑜鄧公祠) (Declared Monument), Yi Tai Study Hall (二帝書院) (Declared Monument), Tang Chan Yui Kuen Ancestral Hall (鎮銳錫鄧公祠), Lik Wing Tong Study Hall (力榮堂), So Lau Yuen (泝流園), Chou Wong Yi Kung Study Hall (周王二公書院), Cheung Chun Yuen (長春園), Hung Shing Temple (洪聖宮) in Shui Tau Tsuen (水頭村), and Tang Tsing Lok Ancestral Hall (清樂鄧公祠) and Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟) in Shui Mei Tsuen (水尾村), all of which are in nearby areas of Kam Tin. Most of these historic places and buildings are examples of the Tangs' contribution to the development of the territory since the 11th century, and the Residence has witnessed Tang Pak Kau's charitable acts for his fellow clansmen and townsmen alike.

Group Value

A residence of a renowned character of the Tang clan in Kam Tin is rare. Unlike the villages nearby, Tsz Tong Tsuen, where the Residence is situated, did not have a wall to withstand bandit attacks. A watchtower was therefore erected in the Residence. It is unique for a residential building to have a three-storey watchtower in the territory. The L-shape of the rectangular-shaped Residence and the watchtower is also a distinguishing feature. It is very impressive in that this traditional Chinese Qing vernacular residential building is juxtaposed with Chinese and Western elements, which reflects the living of the Chinese gentry class in the early 20th century.

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

Although its internal walls have been plastered and some windows have been replaced, the building is in a basically unaltered condition. Some of the decorations, including reliefs and murals, still remain with their original colour. Most of the original fine details of building fabric and finishes, which display fine workmanship, have been retained.

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Historic Building Appraisal
Battery Path Steps and Balustrades
Central, Hong Kong

Battery Path has been in existence since the 1850s although the name did not appear on any plan until 1867. The name “Battery Path” is believed to have been derived from the Murray Battery in its vicinity, which was built between 1841 and 1842 as one of the first coastal defence gun batteries to command the centre of the city. A map from 1845 shows that the Murray Battery was 150 feet above sea level, in a position that could easily defend the town and the anchorage. The battery was named after Sir George Murray, who served as the Master-General of the Board of Ordnance. Battery Path was a pathway stretching from the junction of Queen’s Road (now Queen’s Road Central) and Ice House Lane (now Ice House Street), leading up to Johnston’s House (now the former French Mission Building) and St. John’s Cathedral as well as to Murray Battery and Government Offices (now the site of the former Central Government Offices). The area where these buildings situated was commonly known as “Government Hill” at that time. *Historical Interest*

According to the earliest available maps, the steps of Battery Path were constructed around 1867 in an L-shape, starting from Queen’s Road, at a position obliquely opposite the first generation Hong Kong City Hall (now the HSBC Main Building and part of the Bank of China Building) and going straight up to the top of Battery Path near Johnston’s House, from where people could further proceed to other religious and government premises such as St. John’s Cathedral and Government Office.

Sedan chairs were widely used in Hong Kong in the early days. Government records show that the use of sedan chairs progressively increased between the 1860s and 1890s with a total of 28 public stands located in Central in 1894. Among them, two were located on Queen’s Road near Battery Path, suggesting that the path was well used by sedan chairs. The steps, on the other hand, were built specially for pedestrians as an additional and more shorter and direct means to travel between Queen’s Road and the top of Battery Path.

The steps continued to serve their purpose well. Commercial buildings including banks, business and trading firms came to be established adjacent to the steps, for example Beaconsfield Arcade, E.D. Sassoon & Co., Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, etc. The steps linked Queen’s Road, the major thoroughfare at the commercial heart of Hong Kong, where these buildings were situated, to “Government Hill”, an uphill area

where Government, military and religious premises were a focus.

A couple of major works were carried out to the steps in the 1870s and 1930s respectively. In 1876, a tender was issued for repairs to Queen's Road, which included "rebuilding of the public steps leading from Queen's Road to the Battery Path, opposite the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank". The completion of the works was covered in a news report on 16 April 1877, describing the new flight of steps as "a very handsome piece of work". Later, in 1938, the lower part of the steps was demolished and reconstructed to give a better alignment to Queen's Road. Since then, the layout of the steps are believed to have remained the same, with the landing at the corner set back towards Battery Path.

Battery Path is a pleasant tree lined pedestrian thoroughfare bounded by rubble retaining walls on one side with a set of steps leading down to Queen's Road Central. The steps are constructed out of local dressed ashlar granite. The stairway consists of five flights of steps separated by four intermediate level landings. The treads of the steps are long narrow blocks of granite and the landings are formed by square granite slabs set on a diagonal. The treads of the steps in the upper portion near Battery Path bear a narrow groove along one edge to facilitate rainwater discharge. However, some of the grooves in the lower portion are not aligned, indicating the possible reuse or rearrangement of the granite slabs, probably as a result of the reconstruction in 1938. ***Architectural Merit***

The balustrade wall on the outer side of the steps is made up of rough rendered panelled sections with moulded granite plinths and copings set between classical style panelled piers. The piers are built of granite and each of them has a moulded panel decorated with diamond rustication at the centre. The existing ball ornament on top of each pier is made of concrete with Shanghai plaster surfacing to resemble granite. The inner side of the steps has 1950s style wave pattern railings mounted on a moulded granite plinth with glided gold finials on each main upright.

The Battery Path stairway is a familiar landmark in the Central District. Bearing witness to the development of the heart of Central for over a century, it has been much used by a variety of users at various times including missionaries, church congregations, government staff, office workers, visitors, etc. It also leads pedestrians from the busiest part of the Central District up to a relatively tranquil space, where historic buildings such as the former French Mission Building, St. John's Cathedral and the former Central Government Offices are situated, and hence merits social value and local interest. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

The steps have group value with other historic buildings and structures in the vicinity, including the former French Mission Building, St. John's Cathedral, the former Central Government Offices, Government House, and Duddell Street Steps and Gas Lamps. ***Group Value***

The steps have undergone various major works since the 1870s. One of the major works was carried out in 1876, when the steps were rebuilt. Later, in 1938, the lower portion of the steps was demolished and reconstructed. Apart from the reconstruction which took place in 1938, the steps have experienced several other alterations over the years. A photo taken around 1936 looking towards the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank from the Battery Path steps shows that there was only a lamp post but nothing sited on the piers of the steps, suggesting that the ball ornaments on the piers are later additions. Additionally, in the same photo we can see that the railings along the inner side of the steps are different from those currently in place. Together with the traces of some old socket holes left on the granite plinths along the inner side as observed on site, these give evidence of another set of railings being installed previously. ***Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity***

The panels of the outer side of the steps originally consisted of classical balustrading with vase-shape balusters, which can be seen in a photo taken around 1941 (not long before the Japanese Occupation) in their original condition. When comparing these with the existing rough rendered panels on the outer side of the steps, the latter are apparently later additions most likely put in place after the war.

The steps of Battery Path are one of the oldest surviving flights of steps in the Central District, which was the earliest developed area in Hong Kong from the beginning of British rule in 1841. Although alterations have been carried out to the stairway over the years, its old granite steps, coping stones, plinths, landings and classical piers still survive, making it a rare piece of built heritage in a heavily developed part of the city.

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