

**Heritage Appraisal of  
Residence of Tang Pak Kau  
No. 20 Tsz Tong Tsuen, Kam Tin, Yuen Long**

The Residence of Tang Pak Kau, located in Tsz Tong Tsuen<sup>1</sup> *Historical Interest* in the Kam Tin area of Yuen Long, is believed to have been built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building is also known as *Lai Kang Tong* (禮耕堂), which can be translated as “hall for the propriety and cultivation”.<sup>2</sup> A 26<sup>th</sup> generation descendent of Tang Yuen Leung (鄧元亮), who is considered to be one of the founders of the Tang clan in Kam Tin, Tang Pak Kau (鄧伯裘) (1876-1950) was a distinguished member of the Tangs in the area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The residence thus serves as testimony to the life of a prominent figure in Kam Tin and his remarkable contribution to the development of the area and also of Yuen Long and the New Territories as a whole.

Following the tradition of providing an education for the younger members of the Tang clan in Kam Tin,<sup>4</sup> Tang Pak Kau set aside part of his residence as a private school for Tang children in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Known as Lai Kang School, it is believed to be

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<sup>1</sup> Tsz Tong Tsuen can be written in two ways in Chinese, 祠塘村 and 祠堂村, and both versions are currently used by government departments. Tsz Tong literally means ancestral hall, while Tsuen is a village. Members of the Tang clan in Kam Tin who were interviewed for an oral history record by the Antiquities and Monuments Office on 28 March 2023 generally believe that the name Tsz Tong Tsuen is derived from Tang Lung Yau Wan Tsuen Um Ancestral Hall (龍游尹泉菴鄧公祠) of the Tangs in the nearby walled village of Tai Hong Wai (泰康圍), which was built in 1768 in memory of Tang Man-wai (鄧文蔚). The area around the hall was sparsely inhabited at this time, and it was only when the population of Tai Hong Wai outgrew the village’s walls that people started to settle Tsz Tong Tsuen.

<sup>2</sup> The couplets painted on the wooden door panels at the entrance to the building begin with the words “propriety” and “cultivate” and can be regarded as Tang Pak Kau’s personal motto or an expression of what he hoped to achieve.

<sup>3</sup> Tang Pak Kau opened an oil factory called Tai Cheung (泰祥號榨油廠) in Yuen Long in 1915 and later became an agent for A.S. Watson & Co., Ltd. selling its carbonated water. By all accounts a very successful businessman, he acquired a number of land lots in Kam Tin, Yuen Long, Lo Wu and Fanling, as can be seen from the archives of the Public Records Office, Hong Kong (HKRS96-1-6029) and 經濟資料社：《香港工商手冊》，香港：經濟資料社，1946年，頁200.

<sup>4</sup> Of the six private study halls that were built in Kam Tin, five were originally established solely for teaching purposes: Yi Tai Study Hall (declared monument), Lik Wing Tong Study Hall (Grade 1), Chou Wong Yi Kung Study Hall (Grade 2), So Lau Yuen (Grade 3) and Tang Yu Kai Study Hall (Grade 3). The sixth, Cheung Chun Yuen (Grade 1), provided facilities for both ancestral worship and education.

<sup>5</sup> The Block Government Lease and an antique pendulum clock inside the residence offer

Tang Pak Kau's first attempt in his lifelong pursuit to develop education in Yuen Long. He later provided financial support for the establishment of a free school, Yuen Long Shau Kai School (元朗少岐義學) in 1926, founded Mung Yang School (蒙養學校) in the same year and served as the chairman of the School Building Committee of Un Long Public Middle School (元朗公立中學) in 1949.

In addition to promoting education, he participated in the establishment in 1923 of the New Territories Association of Agricultural, Industrial and Commercial Research (租界農工商業研究總會), the predecessor of the Heung Yee Kuk (founded in 1926). He also served on the committee of the New Territories Agricultural Association (新界農業會) in 1930 and as vice-chairman of the Yuen Long Merchants Association (元朗商會) in 1938. Moreover, he contributed to the establishment of the Cottage Hospital (錦田婦孺醫院) for women and children and of the St. John Ambulance Brigade – Un Long Division First Aid Post (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 also appointed as the chairman of Pok Oi Hospital for four terms in 1928-29, 1933-34, 1946-47 and 1947-48.

A key leader in Kam Tin, Tang Pak Kau acted as a bridge between local villagers and the Hong Kong government. He represented the Tangs of Kam Tin when they successfully petitioned the government to demand the return of the iron gates of Kat Hing Wai (吉慶圍) to their original position after they had been seized and taken to Ireland in 1899. He was appointed to the reception committees that welcomed two new governors of Hong Kong, Sir Andrew Caldecott in 1935 and Sir Geoffry Northcote in 1937. He was awarded a Certificate of Honour in 1930 and the King's Coronation Medal in 1937. He was later appointed a justice of the peace in 1947. Furthermore, he was made a Donat of the Order of St. John in 1939, receiving the distinction of the bronze cross, in recognition of his dedicated service to the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

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clues to the early history of the building. According to the lease, part of the residence, specifically KHWL 183 and KHWL 184 in DD 109, was originally designated for use as a "school". The clock is inscribed with the words "LAI KANG SCHOOL".

A large number of gifts, plaques, couplets and calligraphy rolls celebrating his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday as well as presents congratulating him on being appointed a justice of the peace are on display in the residence, all of which highlight his strong local connections and distinguished status in the community. Some of the names printed on the gifts belong to well-known people of the day, including the renowned 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 famous local Chinese calligraphist Au Kin-kung (區建公) and the wealthy Yuen Long businessmen Tang Pui-king (鄧佩瓊) and Chiu Lut-sau (趙聿修). When Tang Pak Kau died four years later, many prominent figures, such as the outstanding businessman and civic leader Sir Shouson Chow (周壽臣), the Chairman of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Chau Cham-kwong (周湛光) and the Chairman of the Po Leung Kuk Choi Cheong (蔡昌), and high-ranking officials, including the acting Colonial Secretary, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, the Director of Education and the District Commissioner of the New Territories, offered their messages of condolences.<sup>6</sup>

The rectangular, grey brick, single-storey building is very different from the surrounding village houses, as it is five times longer than its width and has a prominent watchtower three storeys in height at one end. The entire exterior of the residence is built in the traditional Chinese Qing vernacular style, which is reflected in its flush gable roof system assembled using single-roll double pan tiles with a bare ridge and its grey-brick external wall and mouldings. The building structure and interior decorations, however, feature a striking juxtaposition of traditional Chinese elements and Western components.

*Architectural  
Merit*

The site that the residence stands on comprises various land lots that were acquired from 1905 to 1922, which suggests it underwent several extensions. Looking at the elevation, construction joints can be clearly seen on the external walls: granite blocks have been laid to form the base for the central section, while undressed stone has been used for the section on the left. As granite corner stones are

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<sup>6</sup> 鄧緝煌，《鄧伯裘先生哀思錄》(香港：編輯自編，1950)。

located at the corners of the central section and on the two sides of the main entrance, it is likely that this was the first part to be built and was then extended by the other sections, which all combine to form the present compound. The wall friezes and gable friezes are decorated with mouldings featuring plants and mythical figures, some of which are still well preserved.

The rectangular residence is also divided into two rows, with the main residential area to the rear and the kitchen, storerooms, light wells, passages and corridors at the front. Just after the entrance to the building is a light well decorated with Tuscan columns and arch that act as a frame guarding the opening of the vestibule. The altar to Man Cheong (“God of Literature” (文昌)) and accompanying couplets in the main section lie on the central axis with the main entrance, which is probably related to the building’s original use as a school.<sup>7</sup>

To the right of the altar is a finely carved wooden moon gate, which helps divide the central section into two smaller units. Passing through the wooden swinging doors and a traditional Chinese sliding door, a spacious side hall comes into sight, again featuring Tuscan columns and arches. 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 at the north corner of the residence is a special architectural feature of the compound. The interior is modestly decorated, with a floral pattern at dado level and ceiling mouldings. The whole staircase and the floor are finished in red and green terrazzo. Its design with small windows and minimal ornamentation indicates that it was built for surveillance and security purposes. The security of the tower itself is ensured by thick partitions, a huge and heavy entrance door and security bars.

In the section of the residence on the left, which the family

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<sup>7</sup> It was a tradition to install an altar to Man Cheong in study halls and ancestral halls so that sacrificial offerings could be made. Yi Tai Study Hall, built during the Daoguang (道光) reign (1821-1850) in Shui Tau Tsuen, Kam Tin, also houses an altar to Man Cheong.

referred to as “the new study room” (新書房), Tuscan columns and arches are installed at the two sides of the entrance to the living area, which is divided into three bays. Passing through the arch and a passageway, there is another light well with a covered corridor and a transparent roof that was added later. While the central part of the light well is composed of granite blocks, the floor of the covered corridor is paved with white hexagonal chip tiles interspersed with green chip tiles, which form several snowflake patterns. The northern internal wall of the light well is decorated with green glazed ceramic grilles decorated with *ruyi* (如意, sceptres) and crab apple patterns, topped by a plaster moulding with an auspicious motif. It is notable that the Western features of Tuscan columns and arches are consistently adopted in the residence, including in this living room, both for decorative purposes and as intermediate support for the pitched roofs constructed of timber purlins, battens and tiles. The bases of the columns are built in a combination of concrete and terrazzo. The wall friezes are finely decorated with murals featuring landscapes, people and calligraphy; most of them are well preserved and retain their attractive colouring. The floor is also finished with hexagonal chip tiles with a large snowflake pattern at the centre. The new study room provides the best example of this unique design and its juxtaposition of Chinese and Western architectural and decorative features.

The building was extended several times by Tang Pak Kau in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this is authentically reflected in the physical fabric of the residence. Several alterations have also been made – some of the windows have been replaced, internal walls have been replastered, and light wells have been covered to modernise the building for residential use by the Tang family – but overall the building retains much of its original appearance from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original colours of some murals can still be seen, while most of the original fine details of the building fabric and finishes, which display fine workmanship, also remain.

***Authenticity***

Unlike the villages nearby, Tsz Tong Tsuen, where the residence is situated, was not enclosed by a wall to defend it against attacks by bandits. The residence therefore incorporates security

***Rarity***

considerations in its design, in particular in the form of the three-storey watchtower, which, although there are several examples elsewhere in Hong Kong,<sup>8</sup> is the only one of its kind in a residence in Kam Tin.

The L-shaped layout of the rectangular residence and the watchtower is also a distinguishing feature. What further sets it apart is the impressive juxtaposition, in a village house, of traditional Chinese decorative features and Western structural components, which reflect the life of the Chinese gentry in Hong Kong in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A prominent figure in Kam Tin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tang Pak Kau is still remembered by people living in Kam Tin and Yuen Long even today, especially by the older generations. His residence is an important building that bears witness to the development of Kam Tin and Yuen Long and especially the history of private schools in the territory in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the residence is the only historical building that testifies to Tang Pak Kau's contribution to education in Yuen Long. In addition, the building is located next to the footpath connecting the train station and the main street of Kam Tin and stands as a landmark in Tsz Tong Tsuen.

***Social Value &  
Local Interest***

The residence shares a group value not only with Tang Lung Yau Wan Tsuen Um Ancestral Hall (Grade 3) in the same village, but also with historic places in the vicinity, including Kat Hing Wai (Grade 1), Wing Lung Wai (featuring Grade 2 and 3 historic buildings)<sup>9</sup> and Tai Hong Wai Entrance Gate and Watchtower (northwest) (Grade 3) as well as Tang Kwong U Ancestral Hall (declared monument), Yi Tai Study Hall (declared monument), Lik Wing Tong Study Hall (Grade 1), Cheung Chun Yuen (Grade 1), Chou Wong Yi Kung Study Hall (Grade 2), Tang Chan Yui Kuen Ancestral Hall (Grade 3), So Lau Yuen (Grade 3), and Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Shui Tau Tsuen and Tang Tsing Lok Ancestral Hall (Grade 1) and Tin Hau Temple (Grade

***Group Value***

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Antiquities and Monuments Office's records, other examples of residential buildings with a watchtower include the Ho Residence in Pak Sha O, Tai Po (watchtower and side chamber, Grade 1), Yuen's Mansion in Chung Hau, Mui Wo on Lantau Island (east and west watchtowers, both Grade 2) and No. 15 Hok Tau Tsuen in Fanling (watchtower, Grade 2).

<sup>9</sup> The entrance gate to Wing Lung Wai is a Grade 2 historic building, while both Chung Shing Temple and Kang Sam Tong are Grade 3 historic buildings.

3) in Shui Mei Tsuen, all of which are in areas neighbouring Kam Tin. These historic places and buildings form a heritage cluster reflecting the development of the Tang clan in the territory from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, while the residence of Tang Pak Kau bears witness to his achievements and the benevolent acts he performed for his fellow clansmen and townsmen alike.