

Heritage Appraisal of Hau Mei Fung Ancestral Hall, Kam Tsin, Sheung Shui

Historical Interest

The Hau clan, being one of the earliest and most prominent clans to settle in Hong Kong, originated in Shanggu (上谷), which is in present-day central and western Hebei Province (河北省). During the Song dynasty (宋朝) (960-1279), their clansmen migrated to Guangdong Province (廣東省)¹. Two branches later settled in Ho Sheung Heung (河上鄉) and Guk Fung Ling (谷豐嶺)², and further expanded to various locations including Kam Tsin (金錢), Ping Kong (丙崗), Yin Kong (燕崗) and Hung Leng (孔嶺). Kam Tsin was so named because of its fung shui setting reflected “a butterfly playing with a cash coin” (蝴蝶玩金錢). According to geomancers, the shape of the mountain behind the village resembles a butterfly whereas the land on which the village is situated is like a cash coin³.

Hau Mei Fung Ancestral Hall (the “Ancestral Hall”) (味峰侯公祠) in Kam Tsin was built at around the late eighteenth century by Hau Cheuk-wan (侯倬雲) to commemorate his great grandfather Hau Jui-fei (侯聚裴), alias Hau Mei-fung (侯味峰) (1634-1688), a student of the Imperial Academy (國學生)⁴. Hau Cheuk-wan obtained the degree of *juren* (舉人) in the fifty-third year of the Qianlong (乾隆) reign (1788) during the Qing dynasty, was then appointed as a *jiaoyu* (教諭) (director of studies at county level) of Lingshan (靈山) in Lianzhou (廉州)⁵, and later was promoted as *Fujiaoshou* (府教授) (director of studies at prefecture level) of Shaozhou (韶州)⁶. The Ancestral Hall represented the

¹ The Haus in Guangdong Province branched into Six Major Lineages (六大房): namely (i) Nanhai County lineage (南海縣房), (ii) Panyu County lineage (番禺縣房) [with a Xinan County (新安縣) sub-lineage], (iii) Xinhui County lineage (新會縣房) and (iv) Xiangshan County lineage (香山縣房), all within Guangzhou Prefecture (廣州府); (v) Enping County lineage (恩平縣房) and Xingxing County lineage (新興縣房) within Zhaoqing Prefecture (肇慶府); and (vi) Jiaying Prefecture lineage (嘉應州房).

² Hau Ng-long (侯五郎) (1022-1084), a *jinsi* (進士) of Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) who decided to move from Panyu (番禺) County to Baoan (寶安) County, was revered as the 1st generation of the Xinan (新安) lineage. His descendants Hau Chung-yau (侯仲猷) and Hau Chung-yin (侯仲宴) of the fifth generation respectively settled in Ho Sheung Heung (河上鄉) and Guk Fung Ling (谷豐嶺) in the late Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). Hau Jui-fei (侯聚裴) (1634-1688) of the nineteenth generation, alias Hau Mei-fung (侯味峰), was a descendant of Hau Chung-yin.

³ 譚思敏：《香港新界侯族的建構》，香港：中華書局(香港)有限公司，2012年，頁64。

⁴ 侯氏族譜編纂委員會：《香港新界侯氏族譜》，香港：侯氏族譜編纂委員會，1985年，頁15。

⁵ 張一兵：《嘉慶新安縣誌校注》，北京：中國大百科全書出版社，2006年，頁587。

⁶ 侯氏族譜編纂委員會，op. cit.，頁66。

social and economic status of the Mei-fung branch of the Hau clan in the territory. Since its establishment, it was mainly used as a family ancestral hall (家祠) for worshipping ancestors and dealing with matters concerning the Mei-fung branch.

In the early 20th century, the cockloft of the Ancestral Hall reputedly served as the vacation residence of Sir Robert Ho Tung's family. General Ho Shai-lai, Sir Robert's son, recalled that his mother rented the cockloft of the ancestral hall in Kam Tsin⁷ with an annual rent of three dollars so the family could spend vacations there during the years when Tung Ying Hok Po (東英學圃)⁸ in the vicinity was being built⁹. In 1974, General Ho also recalled his fond childhood memories of playing with the children in Kam Tsin and Lady Ho Tung's attachment to the area in his speech given in the Kam Tsin Village Ho Tung School (金錢村何東學校)¹⁰.

After the Second World War, a large number of Hau clansmen moved overseas to earn their living. The Ancestral Hall was successively leased to a flourmill, an incense factory and a rattan factory. The Ancestral Hall has now been returned to its original function of ancestral worship, and is still owned and managed by the descendants of Hau Mei-fung.

Like other village houses in Kam Tsin, the Ancestral Hall was built with its entrance facing east. It is a Qing vernacular two-hall-three-bay building with an internal courtyard flanked by two side chambers with humpbacked roofs (捲棚頂). Structurally, the timber trusses, stone columns and grey brick walls with granite cornerstones support the pitched and flush gable roofs (硬山頂). The granite architrave of the main entrance bears the inscribed characters “味峰侯公祠”, which is the name of the Ancestral Hall.

*Architectural
Merit*

⁷ Although General Ho Shai-lai did not explicitly mention the name of the ancestral hall where they were living, Hau Mei Fung Ancestral Hall was almost certainly the subject as it was the only ancestral hall in Kam Tsin.

⁸ In the turn of the twentieth century, Sir Robert Ho Tung bought a piece of land near Kam Tsin. Lady Ho Tung later set it up as a farm for family retreats and to put her interest in experimental agriculture into practice, which eventually benefitted the agricultural development of the New Territories. See 鄭宏泰、黃紹倫：《三代婦女傳奇—何家女子》，香港：三聯書店(香港)有限公司，2010年，頁126-133。

⁹ 羅慧燕：《藍天樹下—新界鄉村學校》，香港：三聯書店(香港)有限公司，2015年，頁61-62。

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Ancestral Hall's decorative plasterwork is exquisite. The main ridges are decorated with plaster reliefs of auspicious animals in the middle and grass motifs at the curled-up ends. The ridge-gable junctions of the entrance hall roof are decorated with plaster dragon fish (鰲魚), while those on the rear hall roof are in the form of lions. The gable corner walls (墀頭) and friezes of gable walls and side walls are decorated with plaster auspicious objects, flowers and birds in polychrome colours.

The Ancestral Hall also features fine masonry craftsmanship. The entrance hall has a pair of internal eaves columns made of precious red sandstone which symbolised the wealth of the Mei-fung family. Granite slabs were laid in regular patterns on the courtyard floor. The rear hall is fronted by a porch with a humpbacked roof supported by octagonal granite columns. The entrance lintel and interior columns of the rear hall are also made of granite.

Fine wood carvings can be found on the timber camel's humps (駝峰)¹¹ and other timber structures in the entrance hall, as well as on the ancestral shrine in the central bay of the rear hall. These timber structures are embellished with ornate carvings of auspicious animals, flowers, geometric patterns and folk stories.

Despite its previous industrial use in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ancestral Hall has kept its integrity intact since all the outstanding architectural features, including those in plaster, masonry and timber, together with the building's architectural layout, are well preserved.

Authenticity

Apart from representing the Mei-fung branch of the Hau clan, the Ancestral Hall is also a piece of architecture that had witnessed the early interaction between a prominent indigenous clan in the New Territories and their socio-economic counterpart in urban Hong Kong. Architecturally-speaking, a rear hall fronted by a porch with humpbacked roof is a feature rarely seen in traditional Chinese buildings in Hong Kong.

Rarity

¹¹ The stow-wood inserted between beams was named a "camel's hump" because of its shape.

Traditional ceremonies are still actively practised in the Ancestral Hall. Lantern lighting ceremonies (點燈) are held there in the first lunar month, on a day chosen using geomancy. In traditional wedding ceremonies, bridegrooms and brides of the Mei-fung branch would go there to perform rituals seeking the blessing of ancestors.

***Social Value &
Local Interest***

Hau Mei Fung Ancestral Hall, Hau Chung Fuk Tong Communal Hall (Grade 2), the Earth God Shrine of Kam Tsin (Grade 2) in Kam Tsin, and Hau Ku Shek Ancestral Hall (Declared Monument) in Ho Sheung Heung form a heritage cluster relating to the historical development of the Hau clan in the New Territories. Together with the Lady Ho Tung Welfare Centre (Main Block and Bungalow – both accorded Grade 2) in Kwu Tung, which was constructed using donations from Sir Robert Ho Tung and Lady Ho Tung, the Ancestral Hall is a testimony to the couple's affiliation with and contribution to the communities in the Kam Tsin area.

Group Value