

Ancestral Halls in Tai Po

Susanna Lai Kuen SIU

Foreword

Historical records and surveys reveal that about 160 ancestral halls had been built in Tai Po across an area of 14,800 hectares in the past, of which 120 still survive. They are different in structure, history and size. Most of them are still performing their traditional role as a place for ancestral worship and clan activities, and are the main focus of the village. They are also an invaluable cultural heritage of Tai Po.

Ancestral hall is a major as well as a unique type of Chinese traditional architecture. Chinese traditional architecture is, in fact, the most expressive of architectures. Be it the design, structure, decoration or spatial arrangement and organisation, the ancestral halls embody Chinese traditional morals and rituals, as well as the philosophical underpinning of man's kinship with nature. They serve functional, symbolic and expressive purposes, which appeal to visitors. It is indeed an important exemplification of the Chinese cultural system.

Ancestral hall is a pleasant blending of traditional Chinese official and vernacular architecture. It has both solemn ambiance and welcoming scale. It also richly embraces Chinese humanity, religion and philosophy. Furthermore, ancestral halls are symbols of clan culture and internal cohesiveness as they are built with the concerted wealth and manpower of the whole clan. Ancestral hall is also a space of power which has built up through the dialogue and interaction amongst the nation, the region and the clan. As such, ancestral halls have rich historical, architectural, aesthetic and cultural values worthy of research.

Although Hong Kong is located at the periphery of the Lingnan regions and is very remote from the cultural and political centre, the rich culture of Central China was brought to Hong Kong through several southbound movements of population. In addition, Western culture, which came in modern times, has made the culture in Hong Kong very unique. Such uniqueness is also reflected in the architecture of ancestral halls.

Although Hong Kong experienced some political turmoil in the past, clan activities and construction of ancestral halls did not cease except during the period of the Coastal Evacuation which was in force in early Qing dynasty. In addition, the non-interference policy adopted by the British Government, with respect to traditional Chinese culture, sustained the clan culture. Within this framework the ancestral halls and the related culture continued to develop and even renew.

Although the rapid urbanisation in Hong Kong had rendered total destruction of traditional villages on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula, many traditional ancestral halls still survive in the New Territories and on the outlying islands, among which, those in Tai Po pride themselves on both quantity and diversity, and undoubtedly deserve much research and appreciation.

Development of Clan Culture

Ancestral worship is an ancient social practice which can be traced back to pre-historic times some 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. During the reigns of Yao and Xun, the worship of heaven, earth and ancestors was an important event for the nation since the ancient saying goes, "the well-being of the nation depends on rituals and warfare." By Shang dynasty, temples for ancestral worship began to emerge. In Zhou dynasty, a rigorous system of social hierarchy based on clan relationship was developed. Such hierarchy was headed by the "tianzi" (Son of Heaven, i.e. the emperor) whose power originated from Heaven. Below him was the "zhuhou" (feudal lordship) and the nobility, whose positions were inherited. The worship of heaven and ancestors could strengthen the cohesiveness generated from blood relations. The *Wangzhi in Liji* (*Royal Regulations from Book of Rites*) (禮記·王制) by Confucius had laid down clear regulations for the system in establishing clan halls. Among the regulations, the rules for establishing clan halls for government officials, scholars and the common people had a profound influence on southern China. After that time, the rules of the lineage system experienced many ups and downs. In Song dynasty, the Imperial Examination, which had developed to an

advanced stage gave rise to a bureaucrat class. This newly emerging class strongly advocated the re-establishment of the clan system and the revival of the ancestral customs, such as constructing ancestral halls, restoring ancestral graves, compiling clan genealogy, acquiring communal land and promoting filial piety, loyalty and trust, caring for family members and peace within the clan in order to maintain social stability. During the Ming dynasty, especially after the Jiajing reign in mid-Ming, clan activities experienced a major development as a result of the debates of Daliyi (Major Rituals). The debates prompted a change of system for imperial clan halls, as well as relaxing the regulations for ancestral worship by government officials and common people. As a result, common people were entitled to construct ancestral halls. This gave rise to competition for constructing ancestral halls in society thus pushing the construction of ancestral halls to a climax. Soul tablets of founding ancestors and immediate ancestors were worshipped in ancestral halls, which for the first time made ancestral halls become venues for frequent ancestral worship. Besides, many clans with the same surnames strongly advocated organising united clan activities, thus making large donations and the acquisition of communal land a common phenomenon, and the main resource of income for funding ancestral worship, sponsorship and welfare for the clans. Genealogies were compiled and familial rules were drawn up to help build up an order within the clan.

By the Qing dynasty, the construction of ancestral halls had increased in popularity. The stability and the developments in early Qing prompted population growth and an expansion of clans. As a result, branches of clans started to migrate from their origins. Wealthy branches even moved their ancestor graves and built new ancestral halls in their new centres to mark their new establishments. Those who stayed might also build their own branch ancestral halls if resources permitted. It was not uncommon to have different hierarchies of ancestral halls; like main clan hall, branch halls and family halls, these could amount to a few dozen in places where big clans settled. This clear tier-structure of clan ancestral halls was an important feature of ancestral halls of the Qing dynasty.

The popularity of clan hall construction in the Ming and Qing dynasties was also due to the strong efforts of "shenjin", the people who had had titles bestowed on them by the imperial court but did not hold an official position, or those who were retired from the government. These people had a special status to perform as the middlemen between the government and common people. They were entitled to many privileges; they could even act as judges to rule on public affairs. They were a force of influence in society. Many of the shenjin became leaders of their clan and managers of the clan's business. They strongly advocated the building of ancestral halls, which made ancestral halls more than a space for ancestral worship but also an icon of the clan, a place for community activities and also an administrative centre for clan heads to manage clan business.¹

Ancestral Halls in the Pearl River Delta

The construction of ancestral halls in Hong Kong began in the middle of the Ming dynasty, and experienced their heyday of development during Qing. Hong Kong is situated on the eastern coast of the Pearl River Estuary. As early as Pre-Qin dynasty period, Pearl River Delta including Hong Kong had already been settled by the Yue people. They made their living by collecting fruit, hunting and fishing. Agriculture, however, had not yet been developed.² When Qinshihuang (The First Emperor of Qin) united Lingnan and established the three administrative districts of Nanhai, Guilin and Xiang, he ordered large-scale migration of northerners to Lingnan. These migrant people settled in the coastal areas like Panyu (Guangzhou), Xuwen and Hepu. The remainder of the Lingnan areas, however, were still inhabited by Yue people.

Towards the end of the Han dynasty and also during the Wei and Jin dynasties, war continued to be waged in the north of Central China leading to the southbound migration of large numbers of Han people. They entered Lingnan along the Han, Xiang and Gan rivers. The migration of Han people continued until the Northern and Southern dynasties as well as the Sui dynasty. The people migrated into Lingnan



and became a major force of development for the area. The Anshi Rebellion in mid-Tang caused another large-scale movement of people southward. This led to fast development in Jiangnan (areas south of Yangtse River). During the Five Dynasties, the south was relatively stable, which had attracted continuous migration from the north and prompted the economic developments in the south.

Rapid development of the Lingnan region began during the Song dynasty, principally because the Court was keen to develop sea trade due to blockage of the Silk Road on land. Shibo Si (Minister of Sea Trade) was thus set up in Guangzhou to manage foreign vessels coming to China for trade and diplomacy. After the fall of Northern Song, the Court of Southern Song was established in Jiangzuo, an area south of the Yangtse River. Many Han people in the north fled to the south. Families of government officials travelled southward on the River Gan, or crossed the Nanling Range to settle in the Nanxiong region. Some chose to reach Guangzhou through River Beijiang, and settled in the Pearl River Delta area. There was a saying that; families in the Delta regions often came from the Zhuji Lane of Nanxiong.³ The immigrants of the early Southern Song dynasty brought with them the advanced culture of Central China and more advanced agricultural techniques. They quickly turned swamplands into fertile paddy fields and thus quickly settled down in the Pearl River Delta. Since Hong Kong was located east of the Pearl River Estuary, people had migrated from northern China to settle there since the Song dynasty. The Tangs, originating from Baishaxiang of Jishui county in Jiangxi province, moved to Hong Kong at that time. Clansman Tang Fu toured Hong Kong in the Northern Song dynasty and was very impressed by the beautiful scenery and culture there. He then moved the tombs of his three immediate past ancestors to the region and settled down in Kam Tin. One of his descendants was married to a lady of Song Royalty surnamed Chiu. The royal couple had four sons named Lam, Kei, Wai and Tsz. The descendants of Wai settled in Tai Po Tau and established their clan.

The Pearl River Delta had experienced rapid development since the Song dynasty. The developments in political, economical, social and cultural areas experienced

an even more rapid development during the Ming dynasty. Legal reforms were made after the debates on Daliyi during the Jiajing Reign, this resulted in, among other changes, the relaxation of the construction of ancestral halls, which was extended from royal families to nobles, government officials and even common people. This prompted the development of clan activities. New clans began to emerge at the Pearl River Delta, due to their increased wealth resulting from the rapid economic development of that time. The clans united members who obtained official titles, either through passing the Imperial Examination or through donations, to organise and strongly promote clan activities, which to strengthened the cohesion of the clans. As a result, construction of ancestral halls, renovation of ancestral tombs, compiling of genealogies and acquisition of communal property became common place. The most influential and reputable members tended to be chosen as clan chiefs. The chief had to manage the clansmen and properties of the clan. He also needed to be a bridge between the clan and the government. If the clan could manage its resources successfully, its wealth would increase, leading to the further rise of the social status of the clan. Some of the newly emerged clans in the Pearl River Delta also strongly advocated the union of clans with the same surnames to establish a lineage network which was based on land rather than direct blood relationships. This led to the formation of a super clan structure which in turn, organized a number of lineal patriarchal groups into a strong geopolitical group.

During the early Ming dynasty, the Mans moved to Tai Po in Hong Kong. They were direct descendants of Man Tin Sui, brother of the famous Southern Song general Man Tin Cheung (Wen Tian Chang). The Mans originally lived in Tung Ching Hau Hang in Sam Mun, Paoan County. During the Yuantong Reign of the late Yuan, Man Yam moved to To Tsz Jin in Tai Po and made a living producing ceramic wares. He later moved again to Man Ka Chong of Pun Chong and farmed for a living. Eventually, he settled in Tai Hang and became the founding ancestor of the Chi Tong Village. His descendents grew in number and later branched out and established two walled villages, namely Chung Sum Wai and Fui Sha Wai. These three villages are collectively known as Tai Hang Heung today;⁴ later, the clan further branched out to San Tin.



In the early Qing dynasty, the remaining forces of Southern Ming were still present on the coast of Guangdong. Society was seriously disturbed when the Qing Court thus issued an order prohibiting people from going to the sea to earn a living. The court further ordered, in the 18th year of the Shunzhi Reign (1661), that the population in the coastal areas of Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong had to move inland 30 to 50 Chinese miles. The Evacuation Order was only lifted in the 8th year of the Kangxi Reign (1669). The order broke the balance of power amongst the major clans in Hong Kong. Because the villages and fields in the coastal areas were left abandoned during the withdrawal from the coast, the later Qing Court had to institute a reward system for land development to encourage Hakka people to move to coastal areas to revive the economy there. This policy led to a large influx of Hakkas into Hong Kong. As most of the flatland was already occupied by the major Punti (local) clans, Hakka people could only settle down in hilly areas. They turned hills into agricultural lands. The remains of the terracing fields and stone boundaries created by Hakka people can still be seen in Tai Po today. During mid-Qing period, the Hakka people in Hong Kong had to move again because of the population pressure on the hillsides. These migrations were short-distanced, small scale and repetitive. Some Hakka people moved to the areas which were already settled by major Punti clans. They rented fields from the Punti clans and established a feudal relationship with them. Due to their contacts with the major Punti clans, the ancestral halls of those Hakka people slowly adopted the architectural features of Punti clan halls.

The Hakka people who migrated to Hong Kong were originally small family units and of different family names. After about one hundred years of development during the reigns of Yongzheng, Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns, their population grew substantially. Additionally, as there were two additional quotas of "xiucai" (Graduate of First Degree) for Hakka people since the 7th year of the Jiaqing Reign,⁵ the number of local Hakka people gaining honours in the Imperial Examination gradually increased, this raised the social status and the wealth of Hakka people. New ancestral halls, which were different from those of the prominent local clans, appeared as the Hakka established themselves.

The Significance of Ancestral Halls to Hong Kong

Hong Kong has long been a migrant society. Since Northern Song dynasty to the early Qing, many clans had moved here from far and near. After the middle of the Qing Dynasty, this migration tended to become shorter in distance and more repetitive. It was against this background of a mobile population that clanship and geographically based societies in Hong Kong were developed.

Construction of ancestral halls is an important indicator for a mobile population. It indicated that a group and its wealth had reached a certain level and that it had become relatively stable. As a result, the clan would decide to settle down and not to move any great distance. In other words, the establishment of ancestral hall could signify that the clan had moved from the "migration period" through the "transitional period" and finally to the "settlement period". The migration process of a clan had, therefore, been completed. Such process often took between one hundred to two hundred years to complete.

When the major clans moved to Hong Kong, they also moved the remains of their ancestors because this was required if they were to settle down in a new place. They also established a land-based clanship through ancestral halls and ancestral worshipping in order to strengthen the relationship and inheritance between clansmen and their ancestors, which confirmed their rights to reside in that area.

The financial resources required for constructing an ancestral hall were by no means easy for an agricultural society to shoulder. The resources needed were normally beyond the capability of individual clansmen to bear and had to be shared amongst the entire clan. Furthermore, the recurrent expenses for managing and maintaining ancestral halls were also significant. Costs were mostly paid out by the income generated from the clan's communal property. This system was adopted by both the Punti and Hakka clans. Those who did not have communal property to generate income had to collect contributions from clan members to cover the expenses for ancestral worship.



The ancestral halls in Tai Po could be divided into two types, i.e. Punti and Hakka. Their halls have distinctive differences in their structure, scale, decoration and quantity. The typical layout of Punti ancestral hall is two-hall and three-compartment. Since the Punti major clans settled and developed earlier than other clans, they were generally better off. Consequently, their ancestral halls were more sophisticated in terms of scale and decoration. The Hakka ancestral halls were more flexible in layout, smaller in scale and less decorative. From the mid to late Qing dynasty, Hakka ancestral halls began to adopt Punti features, thus narrowing the differences between the two types of ancestral hall architecture.

Site Selection and Orientation of Ancestral Halls

Traditional Chinese architecture is usually reputed as "architecture without architect." Using ancestral hall construction as an example, the role of architect was shared by the fengshui master, the artisan and the head of the project at different stages of the construction. When a clan decided to build an ancestral hall, the most important thing was to select the site and orientation for the building. The site had to be selected with utmost care since ancestral hall was the symbol of the clan's authority as well as the unifying force of the clan. The ancestral hall had to be located at a site where human and natural forces best complemented each other. Field studies reveal that there were often two levels of consideration when selecting sites for ancestral halls, i.e. macro and micro levels. Macro level referred to the spatial relationship between the ancestral hall and its environs, as well as the relationship of the physical locations between the settlements and the clan's property. Micro level, on the other hand, meant the location with best fengshui and the power of the spirits.

Most of the ancestral halls in Tai Po were located in the centre of clan settlements, with the mountains behind them, close to the clan's property or cultivated fields. The location of the Punti clan's property was not a major concern for selecting the site for their ancestral hall since

their clan property was scattered in various locations. Instead, the proximity to the clan settlements was their main consideration since clansmen had to visit their ancestral hall everyday to offer incense to their ancestors. Furthermore, the ancestral hall was the venue for holding clan activities and giving lecture to youngsters. The ancestral halls of major Punti clans were therefore usually close to their settlements. The main factor to determine the location of Hakka village ancestral halls was different. Hakka people usually lived close to the land they cultivated. The areas of agricultural land were usually rather small, since they were rented from major Punti clans or opened up from hilly lands. As such, agricultural land determined the locations of their settlements, and their settlements in return determined the locations of their ancestral halls.

The site selection and orientation of the ancestral hall, of course, had to be in harmony with its natural and physical environment as well as fengshui. *Zhai Pu Zhi Yao* (宅譜指要) (Guidelines for Residences) of Qing dynasty had the following analysis of site selection and fengshui theory for ancestral hall, "Since ancient times, the location of the main ancestral hall is in close vicinity of the residences of clansmen so that men and women could pay worship to their ancestors conveniently. Ancestral hall must not be built close to the "longmai" ("dragon veins" which mean the fengshui movement in the ground) which is beneath the altar of monastery and temple. The ancestral hall should be strategically located with a hill at the back, a clear and open view in front, and a river meandering from the back hill to the open space in front. There should be three wide paths leading from the village to the ancestral hall. In front of the ancestral hall, there should be an open space. The ancestral hall must not be built on area with no "qi" (energy). Nor can it be built right next to the open waters with no support in the front or behind."⁶ People in ancient times believed that there was energy running in the earth, between mountains and rivers. People would be blessed if they lived in the areas where the energy accumulated. The energy would gather when meeting waters but disperse when meeting wind. The ideal location, therefore, would be where wind could be kept and water is near to make life flourish. The fengshui master had to be able to determine the flow of

the energy and identify the location which could hold the energy. After identifying the location, he would then base on the characteristics of the owner to find the best spot and orientation for the ancestral hall which could complement the owner. The perfect setting a fengshui master preferred would be a place where "there is a mountain behind the ancestral hall to support it. There is also a mountain of the dragon on the left and a mountain of the tiger on the right to guard the hall. In front of the hall, there should be an extensive open area. Closer to the ancestral hall should be a small mountain which is surrounded by water. The ancestral hall should face the mountains standing at a distance. There should also be protective hills in the far distance to guard and mingle with the rivers."⁷

It was traditionally believed that the "xue" (centre) of an ancestral hall is the spot beneath the soul tablets. The xue determines the axis and orientation of the hall. Each axis complements the other and sets out the layout of the ancestral hall. If the hall can "hold the wind and water" and "maintain the energy of life," descendants of the clan would be showered with blessings.⁸ The open space in front of the ancestral hall, apart from providing a space for clansmen's activities, also helps improve the ventilation and lighting of the building. If a fengshui master was not commissioned to advise on site selection, the chief carpenter would then, with the help of a fengshui compass and through survey, observations of the landscape and the flow of waters, and the climate, identify the orientation of the ancestral hall.⁹ To use our contemporary language, it is the process of identifying the location and orientation of an ancestral hall based on the factors of topology, geographical setting, landscape, climate and ecology.

Different Types of Ancestral Halls

The ancestral halls in Tai Po as stated can be classified into two types, i.e. Punti and Hakka. The typical layout of a Punti ancestral hall is two-halls, three-compartments and one-courtyard. The Man Ancestral Hall in Tai Hang and Chung Si Tak Tong in Chung Uk Village are two examples. However, there are also some exceptions which have three

halls, three compartments and two courtyards, such as King Law Ka Shuk in Tai Po Tau. No matter whether they are three halls or two halls, the ancestral altars are usually housed in the main compartment or minjian¹⁰ of the second hall, i.e. the main hall. Apart from the collective soul tablet of the founding ancestors, individual soul tablets for other ancestors are also worshipped in an ancestral hall. The number of soul tablets can reach as many as one hundred. Some of the Punti ancestral halls are named as "shushi" (study hall), or "kasuk" (family study hall) but are used as an ancestral hall. This was, in fact, a common practice during the Daoguang reign of Qing dynasty. It was possibly due to the policy to advocate clan schools by the court on the one hand, and the increase in the economic power of the local clans in mid-Qing on the other. Wealthy branches of the Punti clans could, therefore, afford to build a study hall or a family study hall for use as an ancestral hall as this would also be an educational venue for their youngsters.

Although the Hakka ancestral halls are not as elaborated as those of the Punti clans, their quantity and variety, however, out weight the latter. The Hakka people in Tai Po moved into the region during early Qing. Since theirs was a hard living and they had no official titles, the space for their ancestral worship was initially confined within their living space. This complied with the regulation that "common people should worship their ancestors in their own houses". Hakka people had strongly-rooted clan values. They considered that "each clan should have its ancestral hall" and "each clan should have an ancestral hall no matter it is rich or poor".¹¹ As a result, the number of Hakka ancestral halls is large. The Hakka ancestral halls in Tai Po can be classified into three main types. The first type, which is also the most common type of the ancestral hall, is housed in a unit at the centre of a row of dwellings. This central space is a respectable space, which implies it is protected by the dwellings on both sides. This reflects that the Hakka people did not forget to worship their ancestors and always gave the best to their ancestors, even during very difficult times, when resources were limited. This concept conveys a strong family ethic. This space for ancestral worship was also close to the living space of the clansmen, reiterating the strong belief of Hakkas that common people should worship their ancestors



at their own houses. The layout of this type of ancestral hall is one-hall and one-compartment. Examples include the Lee Ancestral Hall in San Tau Kok Village, the Lee Ancestral Hall in Ha Hang, the Lam Ancestral Hall, the Pang Ancestral Hall and the Yeung Ancestral Hall in Ting Kok and the Chung Yam Choi Ancestral Hall in Tin Liu Ha. Some of this type of ancestral hall have a one-hall, one-compartment and one-porch layout. The "porch" is only a covered entrance to delineate the space of the "bi" (outside) and "li" (inside), and to separate the spiritual meanings of the two spaces. The Chung Ancestral Hall in Ping Long, the Lo Ancestral Hall in Ha Tei Ha Village and the Chan Ancestral Hall in Ha Wong Yee Au Village are a few examples of this kind of layout.



King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

The first type of Hakka ancestral hall gradually evolved into a second and unique type, i.e. the ancestral halls housed in the same location as two or three parallel rows of dwellings. This type of ancestral hall looks like a two-hall or three-hall type at first glance, but is in fact made up of compartments in the same position as two or three parallel and separated rows of dwellings. Each hall is separated by a pathway. Some pathways were nicely decorated with arches to highlight the position and status of the ancestral halls, e.g. the Chung Man Choi Ancestral Hall in Tin Liu Ha. There are also examples where the pathways were blocked, e.g. the Shum Ancestral Hall in Shui Wo Village.



Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

The third type of Hakka ancestral hall is a stand-alone type, which can be further divided into five sub-categories. The first sub-category is a one-hall one-compartment structure with no threshing ground in front of the hall. The hall is only about two metres wide and three metres long. The decoration of the hall is very simple. The Lee Ancestral Hall of Yue Kok is an example. The second sub-category is a one-hall, one-bay and one-porch structure with a small threshing ground in front. This sub-category accounts for most of the stand-alone type ancestral halls. They are modest in size and usually five to six metres in width, seven metres in length (excluding the threshing ground) and about 5.5 metres in height, typically 1.5 metres higher than the porch. Examples are the Leung Ancestral Hall in Ma Po Mei, the Tsim Ancestral Hall in Tsim Uk Village, Shuen Wan, the Tsang Ancestral Hall in San Tau Kok and the Ku Ancestral Hall in Ng Tung Chai. A third sub-category of ancestral



Chung Si Tak Tong, Chung Uk Village (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)

hall was housed at the central compartment of an individual three-compartment residence. The three compartments, however, were blocked from each other. Examples are the Lam Ancestral Hall in Hang Ha and the Chung Ancestral Hall in Tin Liu Ha. The fourth sub-category is a one-hall, three-compartment, one-porch and one-courtyard layout. The Cheung Ancestral Hall in Wai Tau Village and the Lee Ancestral Hall in Tai Po Mei Village are examples of this type. The fifth sub-category resembled the Punti ancestral hall, with a two-hall, three-compartment and one-courtyard layout. They are similar to branch and family ancestral halls, as well as study halls and family study halls. This type of ancestral hall reflects that the Hakka people had assimilated into the local culture. The Lam Ancestral Hall in Ha Hang Po, the Chan Ancestral Hall in She Shan Village and the Sit Ancestral Hall in Mak Uk are examples of this sub-category.

Layout of Ancestral Halls

Ancestral hall has a kind of ritual architecture as well as being the most important structure in the clan settlement. It symbolised clansmen and was the venue for holding important rites and rituals. Ancestral halls were the places where clansmen administered clan affairs and executed clan rules and familial laws. As such, the spatial arrangements of the ancestral hall had to be able to reflect the principles, rankings and restrictions stipulated in rites. As to ritual buildings, the ambiance they created had to be pure, solemn, serious, orderly and brilliant. The most effective way to create this ambiance is through the layout of the architecture.

The layout of ritual architecture is determined by the strong sense of "centre". As a result, the symmetry of the two sides is emphasized. Only then can the central axis be stressed.¹² Through the central axis, the relative relationship between the main and the subordinate, the centre and the side, the outside and the inside, and the front-facing and the back-facing can be formed. This relative relationship embraces the values of hierarchy stipulated in traditional rituals, which implies the rule of ethnic order related to

blood relationship, social order, familial order and kinship. The architecture of ancestral halls strictly followed the principle of symmetry so as to emphasize the supreme status of the central axis. As such, the space on both sides of the central axis was the major space. The central space along the axis is the main entrance in the first hall and the main altar in the second hall. The decorations of the space along the central axis were particularly elaborate and lavish. The frame of the main door was usually made of granite. Above the door frame was the plaque engraved with the name of the organisation which built this ancestral hall. On both sides of the main door, there were usually bearing stones. The ancestral altar, on which were placed soul tablets, was elaborately decorated. In front of the altar incense burners, candleholders and offerings, were placed on top of an offering table. These arrangements showed the emphasis of the space along the central axis. In a broader context, the location of the ancestral hall was also selected based on the principle "the centre as respectful" since ancestral halls are usually situated at the centre of villages and surrounded by dwellings of clansmen. Many of the Hakka ancestral halls are located in the middle of a row of village homes. Even the stand-alone ancestral halls built in the mid to late Qing dynasty, are mostly located in the front central part of the settlements, e.g. the Lam Ancestral Hall of Hang Ha Po.



Lee Ancestral Hall, San Tau Kok Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Lee Ancestral Hall, Ha Hang (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Pang Ancestral Hall, Ting Kok (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Yeung Ancestral Hall, Ting Kok (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Lam Ancestral Hall, Ting Kok (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Chung Yam Choi Ancestral Hall, Tin Liu Ha (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Chung Ancestral Hall, Ping Long (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Chung Man Choi Ancestral Hall, Tin Liu Ha (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Lo Ancestral Hall, Ha Tei Ha Village (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Shum Ancestral Hall, Shui Wo (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Chan Ancestral Hall, Ha Wong Yee Au Village (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Lee Ancestral Hall, San Tau Kok Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Tsim Ancestral Hall, Shuen Wan Tsim Uk Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Tsang Ancestral Hall, San Tau Kok Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Leung Ancestral Hall, Ma Po Mei (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Koo Ancestral Hall, Ng Tung Chai (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Cheung Ancestral Hall, Wai Tau Village (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Lee Ancestral Hall, Tai Po Mei (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Chung Ancestral Hall, Tin Liu Ha (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Lam Ancestral Hall, Ha Hang Po (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Chan Ancestral Hall, She Shan Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Sit Ancestral Hall, Mak Uk (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)

As the principle of "centre as respectful" is strongly emphasized, the space on both sides of the central axis becomes secondary in importance. The two spaces, however, are of different hierarchy. The left is considered more superior than the right. This is the thinking passed down from the Zhou dynasty when the system of ancestral temples was established. The principle of "left superior and right inferior" was also reflected in the arrangements of soul tablets in the ancestral halls in Hong Kong. Soul tablets of founding ancestors are usually placed in the centre with soul tablets of following ancestors arranged on either side. Soul tablets of "chiu" generations, i.e. second, fourth, sixth and so on generations are placed on the left whereas soul tablets of "mu" generations, i.e. third, fifth, seventh and so on generations are placed on the right. Such a spatial arrangement highlighted the central axis, as well as the spatial hierarchy of both sides, i.e. superior on the left and inferior on the right. The same spatial hierarchy is also observed in Hakka ancestral halls even as small as those which have only one hall. The collective soul tablet of the ancestors is placed at the centre of the altar, whilst the tablet of the earth god is put under the altar at the centre position. Other gods, mostly Guanyin (Kwun Yum), are worshipped on the left of the collective ancestral tablet. The worship of Guanyin by Hakka people is probably due to their belief that Guanyin could bring sons to them, or they were thankful to Guanyin who had protected them during the migration. There is usually no deity worshipped at the space on the right. Such arrangements show that ancestors are more important than other deities in Hakka ancestral halls.

Courtyards and halls are placed layer after layer along the central axis to create a spatial depth and a central line for the expansion of the building. The whole structure is enclosed by walls on four sides, thus creating a hidden and coherent inner space. The main entrance acts as the starting point of the space of the entire building complex. It is also the main space of the ancestral hall which is open to the outside. Privacy as well as the importance of the space increases as one goes further inside to the courtyards and halls. This spatial arrangement reflects the belief that the front is inferior to the back. For both Punti and Hakka ancestral halls, the first hall or the porch is the only part

which faces the outside. It is also the transitional space between the outside and the inside. Behind the transitional space is the courtyard which creates an august ambiance to complement the solemnity and importance of the second hall where ancestral soul tablets are placed.

The height of the different parts of the ancestral hall also exemplifies the concept that "the back is superior to the front." The Punti ancestral halls are often the tallest and the most extravagant buildings in the villages. As to the architecture of ancestral halls, the first hall is shorter than the second hall. The same is observed in the Hakka ancestral halls which have a shorter front porch and a taller main hall. This spatial arrangement complies with the traditional Chinese concept of ritual buildings, that the front is inferior and the back is superior.

For both Punti and Hakka ancestral halls, there is always a spacious open ground in front of the buildings. According to *Zhai Pu Zhi Yao* (宅譜指要) (Guidelines for Residence) of Qing, buildings should have spacious communal area in front. This area is the public space for the clan. Apart from complying with the fengshui requirement, the space also has pragmatic uses. It could emphasize the grandeur of the ancestral hall and serve as a venue for clan activities and a place for gathering. Normally, the space is used for drying grains or for socialising. From an architectural perspective, it could adjust the micro-climate by promoting air movement and ventilation, as well as reducing the temperature.

Construction of Ancestral Halls

Punti ancestral halls are mostly built with green bricks, timber and stones. Since dignity and the central axis have to be emphasized, the façade of the ancestral hall is usually heavily decorated. The façade was built with green bricks. Its minjian, i.e. the central compartment was indented with an entrance framed by granite. Above the door frame was a board engraved with the name of the ancestral hall, or the name was engraved directly on to the granite door frame. The main entrance was fronted by two bearing stones.

On the two sides of the central compartment were drum terraces which were places to welcome important guests where the band would play music for ancestral worshipping. On the drum terraces, there were rectangular or octagonal eave columns. As in the case of the Man Ancestral Hall in Tai Hang, the eave columns were attached to the side walls. The two side compartments of the façade usually had granite crescent beams (alias shrimp shaped beam). The lower part of the green brick wall was constructed using granite slabs. As granite was an expensive material, the more granite used, the more important the façade was. The Punti ancestral halls usually had an extension of the eave which means the eave protruded to protect the members immediately beneath it from the sun and the rain. Eave boards were installed to the purlins of the extended eave to make it beautiful. There were timber or granite carved beams at side compartments. The upper part of the veranda was decorated with painting or pottery. The gable wall heads were mainly decorated with plaster mouldings with auspicious themes.



Bearing stones at both sides of the main entrance of Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



The two eave columns attached to the walls of the façade, Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Main hall of Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)




Offering table (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Leung Ancestral Hall, Ma Po Mei (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

The roofs of Punti ancestral halls were in the flush gable roof style with a uniform outline. Although the gable walls on both sides were very plain, they carried the charm of simplicity. The roofs were supported by rafters which were nailed on to purlins at equal distances apart. Thin timber boards were then laid on top of the purlins. A thin layer of stucco was then applied to the timber boards to fix the tiles which were laid on them. The layer of stucco also helped prevent leakage. The tiles were laid in alternative rows facing



upward then downward. Round tiles would then be laid down to cover the edges where two rows of upward facing tiles met. The round tiles would then be covered by hard plaster. At the end of the rows of round tiles, end tiles and drip tiles would be placed. The decorations on the roofs of Punti ancestral halls were plain and simple. For instance, there are only "bogu", i.e. a kind of simple traditional decoration which features ancient shelves, at both ends of the main ridge and vertical ridge at King Law Ka Shuk. The Man Ancestral Hall, however, has more colourful and elaborate plaster mouldings with auspicious themes as decoration. Generally speaking, the decoration of the roofs of Punti ancestral halls was simple and plain with decorations concentrating on main ridges and vertical ridges. These roof decorations gave off a sense of romance from a building otherwise designed by rational thinkers.

The two walls flanking the buildings are gable walls, which are the side walls of the building, and are taller than the roofs. They are used to prevent fire from spreading and thus are also known as "fire breaking walls". The two gable walls, although side walls, are the tallest and most conspicuous structures of the ancestral halls. To avoid them stealing the limelight of the ancestral hall on the one hand, and to make them presentable on the other, their decoration was limited to simple patterns.

At the entrance of an ancestral hall, there is usually a screen door made up of two panels. The panels are decorated with paintings and calligraphy, and are fixed in position by two wooden pillars on both sides. At the bottom of the pillars, there is a wooden threshold. This design, with a screen door, was a more recent style deployed by ancestral halls.

Courtyards of ancestral halls serve to magnify, enhance and supplement the main structure. They are closed to the outside, but open to the air inside. This style could help regulate the micro-climate inside the building. Courtyards could drain away or collect rain water. Coupled with the covered verandas on both sides, courtyards could provide shade, absorb "yang" (positive elements), draw sunlight, shield wind and help ventilation. Courtyards are covered

with granite slabs and are lower than the chambers on both sides. This layout would facilitate water from the four sides to drain towards the centre, i.e. the fengshui concept of "four waters converging to one". For ancestral halls with a three-hall and two-courtyard layout, such as King Law Ka Shuk, the first courtyard is normally bigger than the second one. No matter whether the ancestral hall is in a two-hall or three-hall layout, the second hall is usually the biggest individual structure. The lack of screen doors between columns makes the area more spacious. There are also windows in the walls. Such a design makes the first courtyard a space which is open to the inside but closed to the outside. The principal beam in the second hall is usually hung with auspicious objects. The most common objects are red clothes, rulers and lanterns. Take King Law Ka Shuk as an example, there are eight auspicious objects hung on the principal beam, i.e. chopsticks (to shoot bad people), a sieve (to send bad people away), red and green rice bags (for abundant harvest), pine (for fortune), a ruler (the lyrics of a folksong named "Leong Tin Song" (song to measure the sky), "to sell fields as far as to the King's palace, to collect rent as far as to Guangzhou"). Both King Law Ka Shuk and the Man Ancestral Hall use the second hall to worship their ancestors as well as to discuss clan affairs. The third hall in King Law Ka Shuk is currently used as storage for the ancestral hall's communal articles.

Compared with Punti ancestral halls, the materials used to build the traditional Hakka ancestral halls are much more simple, although the meaning conveyed is equally rich. Most Hakka ancestral halls were built with green bricks. Sometimes, stones and rammed earth were used to construct the walls of the second hall. Granite was only used for the door frame of the main entrance at the façade. The stand-alone type of ancestral hall usually has a porch at the entrance. Strictly speaking, the porch cannot be counted as a hall since it is only a covered entrance which is actually the transitional space between the ancestral hall and the outside.

The porch leads to a courtyard which usually measured about three metres wide and four metres long. Both aisles of the courtyard are covered with slanted roofs. The main hall is the most important part of the ancestral hall. It is higher than the porch and is the most dignified space of the entire



building. It is where the spirit is. There is usually a high altar in the main hall on which to place soul tablets of ancestors. Guanyin is worshipped on the left of the altar, while the Earth God is worshipped under the altar. The height of the main hall is usually larger than the width and depth. The roofs of the main hall were constructed with purlins, rafters and tiles. Purlins were laid on both sides and in parallel to the roof ridge down to the eaves. On top of the purlins, rafters were laid, which were then covered by tiles. A piece of red cloth, together with rice bags (or rice dumplings), a lantern and five grains were hung on the principal beam before it was raised. This was to signify good fortune, fertility and abundant harvest. There are also examples of hanging lanterns, rice bags and chopsticks on lantern beams which imply the same meaning. Purlins rest directly on the walls using the walls to support the roofs. Hakka artisans said that positions of the purlins have different meanings. The order from the first purlin denotes "heaven," "earth," "man," "wealth," "affluence" and "poverty" respectively. Artisans believe that it would bring bad luck if the positions of "man" and "poverty" are nailed down. As such, they would not nail the purlins in these two positions.¹³

Beneath the main beam of the main hall, there is the secondary beam decorated with auspicious motifs. This secondary beam does not have any structural function. It is only used to denote that it shares the burden, i.e. load-bearing with the main beam. Between the main beam and the entrance of the main hall, there is a lantern beam for hanging lineage lanterns, descendant lanterns and incense burners. Like the secondary beam, it has no structural function. The lantern beam is usually engraved with auspicious proverbs like "hundreds of children and thousands of grandchildren," "prosperity forever," and "lan gui teng fong" (descendants to be prosperous and wealthy)¹⁴. To pray for fertility, sometimes pebbles were placed inside altars as well as inscriptions of auspicious proverbs on lantern beams. The timber altar in the main hall is used to worship the highest ancestral order. In the altar or the high terrace at the main hall there are collective soul tablets of all the ancestors. Sometimes, tablets for individual ancestors who could be traced are placed in front of the collective tablet. Adhered to the wall behind the

soul tablets, there is usually calligraphy of "shou" (longevity) on a piece of red paper, denoting long life of the descendants. On both sides of the calligraphy, there are couplets that tell of the origin of the clan, or present edifying messages.

Decorations of Ancestral Halls

Since ancestral hall is a ritual architecture, its decorations are usually simple but carry strong edifying messages. Decorations at Punti ancestral halls concentrate on the roof ridges, eaves and altars. Both sides of the straight roof ridges would be decorated with plaster mouldings and porcelain which signify good fortune. Some common motifs are "ao yu" (a legendary hybrid of dragon and carp that protects the hall against fire because it likes to swallow fire), antique shelves (for affluence), vases (for safety), bats (for blessings), long-life peaches (for longevity), dragons (usually in the imagery of a dragon descending from heaven in the midst of clouds, to signify gracefulness and good fortune. Dragons are also believed to be capable of bringing rain, thus implying abundant harvest and well-being), phoenix (for peace, elegance and respectability), "kylin" (a Chinese unicorn that signifies propitiousness and long life), deer (for official salary), etc. These decorations enrich the outline of the roof ridge and make the façade very attractive. There are Punti ancestral halls using antique shelves to decorate roof ridges. For instance, King Law Ka Shuk uses the motif of antique shelves to decorate the ends of the vertical ridges. This was a typical roof decoration of mid-Qing. Façades of Punti ancestral halls are usually elaborately decorated to imply prosperity, longevity and fertility. At the eave board of King Law Ka Shuk, there is a rare decoration which depicts a big lion and a small lion. This motif denotes high officials since "lion" in Cantonese rhymed with a senior government post in ancient times. The roof ridges of Hakka ancestral halls, on the other hand, are relatively plain. Most of them were only decorated with the motif of antique shelves, such as those in the Chan Ancestral Hall in She Shan Village, or the ends of the ridges were simply curved as decoration. Such simple decoration brings out a flavour of elegance in the midst of the solemn ambiance of the ancestral hall.



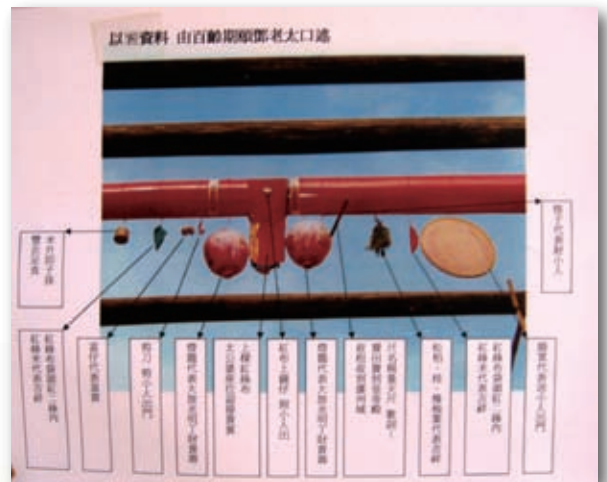
Decorations beneath the eave board, King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Screen door (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Antique shelves motif at the ends of the roof ridge and vertical ridges, King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



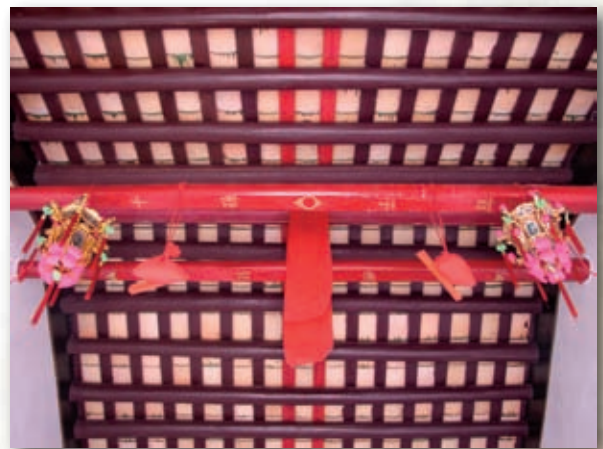
Auspicious objects hung on the principal beam of King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Decorations on the main roof ridge of Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Main hall of King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Roof of main hall of Kong Ancestral Hall, Cheung Shue Tan (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Main hall of Tsang Ancestral Hall, San Tau Kok Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Roof ridge decoration of Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



The porch of Tsang Ancestral Hall, San Tau Kok Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Roof of main hall, Chan Ancestral Hall, She Shan Village (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Lantern beam, Leung Ancestral Hall, Ma Po Mei Village (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Altar of Shum Ancestral Hall, Shui Wo Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

Both Punti and Hakka ancestral halls are richly decorated by couplets which include door couplets, altar couplets and beam couplets. The contents of the couplets are very rich. They range from clan regulations to the origin of the clan or even folklores. The couplets are to remind descendants not to forget their ancestors. They represent respect to tradition, origin, familial ties and moral values. The couplets contain rich human meanings and are in fact an important first-hand material for research into clan culture and history, as well as important artistic decorations for ancestral halls. The couplets at the main entrance of the ancestral halls usually describe the origins of the clans or their glorious past. For instance, the first line of the couplet at the main entrance of King Law Ka Shuk reads, "the roots lie far in the west in Jishui," meaning that the clan originated from Jishui in Jiangxi Province. The second line of the couplet at the main entrance of Man Ancestral Hall says, "to raise the family's reputation with righteousness and integrity," referring to the clan and historical hero, Wen Tian Chang. The first and second lines of the couplets of Hakka ancestral halls usually end with the terms denoting "blessing to the whole world" and "manifestation of the family reputation" respectively. Those couplets tell the origin and lineage of the clan, as well as the glorious past of the clan or line. For instance, the couplets at the three Wan Ancestral Halls in San Tong Village, Siu Om Village and Cheung Shue Tan Village all say, "The world is blessed by the six dragons; glory to the three noble sons named Yan." Here the "six dragons" and the "three noble sons" are allusions to the clan. General Wan Kai and his son Wan Tsui helped found the Han dynasty. They were the favourite generals of Han Emperor Guangwu. Wan Qi, the descendant of Wan Tsui (alias Tai Tsan) helped Jin Emperor Yuan flee to the south. During the Jin dynasty, there were six brothers of the Wan clan who became generals of the empire. Later the title "the Six Dragons of Jin," was bestowed on them, and thus there were couplets saying "Six Dragons blessing the whole world." As for the "three noble sons," this refers to the three brothers named Wan Tai Ngai (eldest brother alias Yan Wan), Wan Tai Lam (second brother alias Yan Buo) and Wan Tai Yau (youngest brother alias Yan Cheung). Yan Wan, the eldest brother was named Minister of Civil Service and was made the head of the Li region. Yan



Buo, the second brother was the Head of the Court Archives which kept the official documents of the Emperor during the Zhenguan reign and was made the head of the Yu region. Yan Cheung, the youngest brother was made Taiyuan Ling by Tang Emperor Gaozu and was later made the head of Qinghe County. The three brothers, who were also reputedly known as the three Yans, were favoured by Emperor Taizong and were bestowed with the title "the three noble sons named Yan."¹⁵ The term "jiu mu" (nine mu) often appears in the

Lam Ancestral Halls in Lam Tsuen. The term refers to the legend that the nine sons of Lam Pi attained high-ranking government posts up to "Cishi" (Regional Inspector). The phrase "shuang gui" (double cassia) refers to the clan where fathers, sons, brothers, uncles and nephews had good results at the Imperial Examination all at the same time. Since the ancestral halls were built to educate descendants as well as for ancestor worship, phrases like "shuang gui" and "gong sheng" are often seen in ancestral halls.¹⁶



Sheung Kwai Tong (Double Cassia Tong), the name of the clan organization which built the ancestral hall was inscribed on the main altar, Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen (Photography by Tsui Yuen Ling)



Decoration of big lions and small lions on the eave board of King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Decorations in the motif of antique shelves at the roof ridge of Chan Ancestral Hall, She Shan Village (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Couplets on "Six Dragons" and "Three Noble Brothers" at the façade of Wan Ancestral Hall, Cheung Shue Tan (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



Curved roof ridge, Chung Ancestral Hall, Tin Liu Ha (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Proverb "jiu mu liu feng" (the good name of the nine mu will pass on) at Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



The Rehabilitation Ceremony of Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang, 2005 (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

The Use and Conservation of Ancestral Halls

Most of the ancestral halls in Tai Po are still being used for their original purposes, i.e. a venue for ancestral worship, clan meetings and traditional ceremonies. Ancestral halls were frequently repaired, conserved and even rebuilt by clansmen to show their respect for their ancestors. Some major ancestral halls in the Tai Po district had undergone restoration or rebuilding. Examples include the Man Ancestral Hall in Tai Hang Heung, the Lam Ancestral Hall in Hang Ha Po and King Law Ka Shuk in Tai Po Tau. The Man Ancestral Hall in Tai Hang Heung had been abandoned and left in ruins for many years. Driven by the traditional teaching of remembrance of ancestors, the Man clan decided to rebuild the dilapidated ancestral hall. The reconstructed

ancestral hall was inaugurated in 2005. The Lams in Hang Ha Po saw that their ancestral hall was showing signs of decay and thus decided to raise funds to rebuild it. The reconstruction was based on the original design of the ancestral hall except that the foundation was raised. Apart from the old stone plaque engraved "Lam Ancestral Hall" at the main entrance which was original, all the other parts of the building were newly made using traditional methods. For example, the green bricks were fired by a kiln in Kaiping which used firewood and charcoal to heat. The wood carvings were carved based on the designs of the original carvings. The purlins and the beams were nailed using bamboo nails treated by being soaked in oil and heated to a high temperature. The reason traditional methods of construction were used was to make the reconstruction look as original as possible.¹⁷ The Lam Ancestral Hall was re-opened in 2006. Although the reasons for the reconstruction of the two



ancestral halls are different, the spirit of collaboration and respect for their ancestors expressed during the rebuilding process, was the same. The two clans also aimed to make their ancestral halls perfect. The plaque to commemorate the completion of the rebuilding, installed at the Man Ancestral Hall, states that the reconstruction of the ancestral hall had aroused the spirit of unity amongst clansmen. This was very meaningful to the clan. The names and donations of the clansmen were printed on the publication which commemorated the reconstruction of the ancestral hall. The reconstruction of the Lam Ancestral Hall, on the other hand, had united the villages of Hang Ha Po, Kau Liu Ha and Nam Wah Po. They formed the Committee for Reconstruction of the Lam Ancestral Hall in 2004. Through the process to secure donations, internal cohesion was developed in the clan. The reconstruction of the ancestral hall prompted the clansmen to spend time tracing their roots. The clansmen went as far as Fujian to verify the route their ancestors took to move to Lam Tsuen. A local television broadcaster filmed the clansmen on their journey to search for their roots. This was edited and broadcast as a documentary.

King Law Ka Shuk underwent a major restoration in 2000. A working group on the restoration of the ancestral hall, which comprised representatives of the Government and the elders of Tai Po Tau, was set up to carefully examine the historical and cultural significance of the ancestral hall, and to repeatedly debate the most appropriate conservation plan. The final decision was made to take down the additions added in the 1930s and recent reconstructions. This included the removal of the walls built of concrete and steel bars so as to transfer the loading back to the beam and column systems. The parts which were badly infested were replaced. The relics which survived, such as wood carvings, stone carvings and plaster mouldings were cleaned and restored, so as to reinstate the original look of the ancestral hall. The rationale to remove the additions of the 1930s was that the cultural significance of the ancestral hall lay in its role as a branch ancestral hall in the late Qing. The ancestral hall at that time was in the traditional style. Furthermore, the additions or reconstructions of the 1930s had added unnecessary loading to the original structure, causing it



Raising the terrace of Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen
(Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Raising the principal beam, Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen
(Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



New wood carving was made based on the old design
(Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Making bricks (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Drying bricks under the sun (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Basin meal feast held in front of Lam Ancestral Hall, Hang Ha Po, Lam Tsuen to celebrate the completion of the reconstruction of the ancestral hall (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Clan members of Lam Ancestral Hall taking group photograph after the completion of the restoration (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Firing bricks using traditional methods (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



Members of the Lam clan went to Fujian to trace the route their ancestors took to move to Lam Tsuen (Provided by Lam Ancestral Hall)



severe structural problem. As such, the decision to reinstate the original look of the ancestral hall could serve as a testimony to the history of the building on the one hand, and to better conserve the structure of the building on the other. Before the reconstruction work commenced, the Guangdong Archaeological Team was commissioned to conduct a detailed and accurate survey and cartographic recording of the hall. During the renovation process, the working group considered that the plaster mouldings of two dwarf walls on both sides of the courtyard, which were added in the 1930s, were of special artistic merit. However, owing to the conservation plan to restore the ancestral hall, the two dwarf walls could not be preserved insitu. The group thus decided to take down the dwarf walls carefully and embed them into the two walls of the side chambers for viewing by visitors. King Law Ka Shuk, after being restored, had regained its former splendour. Furthermore, the clan activities were also resumed. Thousands of clansmen and villagers from nearby

attended the ceremony to commemorate the completion of the restoration and celebrated the event by having basin meals. The occasion was very well-received. The restoration of King Law Ka Shuk won an Outstanding Award of UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation in 2002. The reasons for winning the award included compliance with the international heritage conservation principles, the active participation of villagers in the restoration process, the cohesion of the clan and the revitalisation of the traditional functions of the ancestral hall after its restoration. The restoration of King Law Ka Shuk was the first international award-winning ancestral hall conservation project. Dr. Richard Engelhardt, the Regional Advisor for Asia-Pacific of UNESCO, came to Hong Kong to officiate the award presentation ceremony held at King Law Ka Shuk. The Tang clan hosted more than one hundred tables of basin meals for the guests on that day. The occasion was exceptionally exuberant.



One of the dwarf walls, carefully repaired and conserved, is now displayed at the aisle of King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau (Photography by Lo Wai Ling)



This pair of historic couplets of King Law Ka Shuk were thoroughly cleaned and repaired before they are displayed again at the ancestral hall (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Offering incense to ancestors before worshipping ancestral tombs, Chung Man Choi Ancestral Hall, Tin Liu Ha (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Basin meal feast to celebrate the election as Chairman of Tai Po Rural Committee and appointment as a member of the Political Consultative Conference of Guangzhou's Shaoguan City of Mr. Man Chen-fai, in front of Man Ancestral Hall, Tai Hang, 2007 (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



Although different clans adopted different methods based on their own reasons to conserve their ancestral halls, the halls conserved or rebuilt could greatly promote the cohesion of the clan during the restoration or reconstruction period or after the completion of the projects. For instance, clan members hold celebrations at the ancestral halls or in the open space in front of the ancestral halls. It is not uncommon for several clans to co-host celebrations. Apart from celebrations, clan members offer incense to ancestors daily at the ancestral hall. Special ancestral worshipping would be carried out at the ancestral halls during traditional festivals. The ancestral halls would be thoroughly cleansed before the Chinese New Year. New couplets written in traditional calligraphy with auspicious meanings are appended to the walls. During Chinese New Year, lanterns and colourful bunting will be hung in the hall. Clansmen would offer incense to ancestors, praying for the peace and well being of the descendants. On the 15th day of the first

lunar month, lanterns would be lit and raised at ancestral halls. One lantern is for one new born baby boy in the past year. Clansmen will then have a feast at the ancestral halls to happily celebrate the birth of male members in the past year. At the Spring and Autumn Offerings, clansmen would worship their ancestors at both their ancestral hall and ancestral tombs to pray for blessings from ancestors. For other special and joyful occasions, the clans would first pay respect to their ancestors before holding celebrations at ancestral halls. For instance, the villages of Hang Ha Po, Kau Liu Ha and Nam Wah Po in Lam Tsuen jointly held a traditional basin meal feast on 3 February 2008 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the villages. District councillor Mr. Man Chen-fai held an elaborate celebration in front of the Man Ancestral Hall in 2007 after he was elected Chairman of the Tai Po Rural Committee and appointed a member of the Political Consultative Conference of Guangzhou's Shaoguan City. King Law Ka Shuk resumed its



Basin meal feast for guests attending the ceremony to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Lam Tsuen, in front of Lam Ancestral Hall, 2008 (Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)



New born baby boy feast held at King Law Ka Shuk, Tai Po Tau, 2008
(Photography by Susanna Lai Kuen Siu)

traditional role as an ancestral hall after its restoration. Many clan members who lived abroad returned to Hong Kong to participate in the inauguration ceremony. At the UNESCO award presentation ceremony in 2002, over one thousand clansmen and guests attended the occasion. The ancestral hall was filled with joy.

Conclusion

Ancestral halls are a treasure of Chinese traditional architecture. They embrace very rich cultural and human beliefs. Stability in Hong Kong had made the inheritance of traditional culture, including clan and ancestral hall culture possible. Since the architecture and culture of ancestral halls in Hong Kong have not experienced interruptions in the past few centuries, ancestral halls have become a very important cultural asset of Hong Kong. The architecture of the ancestral halls in Tai Po is particularly rich, in both style and quantity. Furthermore, as many traditional activities are still being held in those ancestral halls, they are a really important resource for studying the clans, the development of the regions, as well as the construction of traditional architecture.



Footnotes

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- ⁶ (Qing) Wei Qingjiang, "Ancestral Halls" (宗祠), vol. 4, *Guidelines for Residences* (宅譜指要)(1773).
- ⁷ Guan Huashan, "Spatial Concepts Reflected in Traditional Vernacular Architecture of Taiwan"(台灣傳統民宅所表現的空間觀念), *Academia Sinica* (中研院民研所集刊), 1980, no. 49, p. 189.
- ⁸ Xie Hongyu, *Clan Culture and Ancestral Halls: Studies of Ancestral Halls in the Lingnan Regions* (血緣文化與宗廟——嶺南祠堂建築探討) (Master Thesis, South China University of Technology, 1989, unpublished), pp. 33-35.
- ⁹ Liu Xiumei, *Studies of the Hakka Ancestral Halls of Liu Deo at the Japanese Occupation Period* (日治時期六堆客家祠堂建築之研究) (Master Thesis, Department of Architecture, The National Cheng Kung University, July 2001, unpublished), pp. 3-7.
- ¹⁰ The "minjian" or "main compartment" refers to the middle one of the three bays. A "compartment" means the space partitioned by walls or pillars.
- ¹¹ Lin Xiaoping, "Hakka Ancestral Halls and Hakka Culture" (客家祠堂與客家文化), *Journal of Gannan Normal University* (贛南師範學院學報), 1997, vol. 4, p. 50.
- ¹² Hou Youbin, *Aesthetics of Chinese architecture* (中國建築美學) (Tianjin: Tianjin Science and Technology Publishing, 1997, Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Publishing, 2007), p. 110.
- ¹³ Liu Xiumei, "A Study of the Hakka Ancestral Halls of Liu Dui Under Japanese Occupation" (日治時期六堆客家祠堂建築之研究), pp. 3-34.
- ¹⁴ According to Hakka beliefs, the characters "lan" (orchids) and "gui" (cassia) refer to children and grandchildren, while "fang" (fragrant) means good name and good reputation. There is also a saying that the children of Tse An, an official in Jin dynasty were both capable and virtuous and thus were reputed as "irises and orchids." Some even reputed the five sons as "five cassia." In other words, "lan gui teng fong" implies descendants to be prosperous, prominent and wealth.
- ¹⁵ *The Great Pacification Ceremony of Lam Tsuen in Yuen Mou Year* (乙卯年林村鄉太平清醮) (1999), p. 48.
- ¹⁶ *The Celebrations for the Completion of the Restoration of the Lam Ancestral Hall by Hang Ha Po Village, Kau Liu Ha Village, Nam Wah Po Village of Lam Tsuen in Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong* (香港新界大埔林村坑下莆村、較寮下村、南華莆村林氏宗祠修繕重光慶典) (2006), pp. 10-20.
- ¹⁷ *The Celebrations for the Completion of the Restoration of the Lam Ancestral Hall by Hang Ha Po Village, Kau Liu Ha Village, Nam Wah Po Village of Lam Tsuen in Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong* (香港新界大埔林村坑下莆村、較寮下村、南華莆村林氏宗祠修繕重光慶典) (2006), pp. 14-15.

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