

“Historical and Architectural Traces of Sam Tung Uk” Audio Transcript

Location: Middle Hall

Theme: Chan Kin-sheung and a plaque inscribed with the words “Greatly Respected Patriarch”

We’re now at the central doors of the “Middle Hall”. This pair of doors, also called “screen doors”, serve to avoid a direct sight from the ancestral altar in the Ancestral Hall in the rear. Similar to the “hallway” in our homes, they’re also said to play a *feng shui*-type role in “warding off evil”. The screen doors are usually closed and are only opened on important occasions or when important guests come to visit.

Here you can see the plaque inscribed with the Chinese characters for “Greatly Respected Patriarch” above the central doors. It’s a replica made during the restoration of Sam Tung Uk in the late 1980s. The plaque had close ties to Chan Kin-sheung, the founder of Sam Tung Uk. As mentioned earlier, the Chan clan originated from Fujian. Then, some clansmen migrated south to places such as Boluo, Huiyang and Luofang in Guangdong. Around the mid-18th century, Chan Yam-shing followed his uncle Chan Hau-tak and moved to the area now known as Tai Wo Hau in Tsuen Wan and established Kwan Mun Hau Tsuen. Chan Yam-shing later planned to find another piece of land to establish a family village. His eldest son Chan Kin-sheung, who was well versed in *feng shui*, helped his father identify the current location of Sam Tung Uk, with its good *feng shui*, as the site of the village relocation.

However, the plan did not go smoothly. After Chan Yam-shing passed away, the landlord surnamed Suen was still reluctant to sell this piece of land. Nevertheless, Chan Kin-sheung finally succeeded in acquiring the land from the Suens to build a family village to realise the late wishes of his father. Sam Tung Uk was completed in the 51st year of Qianlong reign in the Qing dynasty (that is 1786).

Taking a keen interest in village affairs, Chan Kin-sheung was highly respected for his contributions to disaster relief and poverty alleviation. In the 22nd year of Jiaqing reign in the Qing dynasty (that is 1817), the Qing court presented Chan Kin-sheung with a plaque inscribed with the words for “Greatly Respected Patriarch” to honour him as a respected senior figure with good moral virtues. Chan Kin-sheung was also bestowed with the title “Honourable Guest of Communal Feasts”. Local officials in

the Qing dynasty would confer the title of "honourable guest" on respected figures in the area who demonstrated remarkable experience and virtues. These titles came in different ranks, namely *dabin*, *jiebin* and *zhuanbin*, with *dabin* being considered the most distinguished rank of guest, meaning the holder would be invited to attend the communal feast hosted by the officials in Sun On County. Chan Kin-sheung earned the title "Honourable Guest of Communal Feasts" in recognition of his high social status in the region. The descendants of the Chan clan took an active role in community affairs and served on the Heung Yee Kuk New Territories and Tsuen Wan Rural Committee. They also provided advice and medication to villagers free of charge, contributing a lot to the development of the community.

This is the story of how Sam Tung Uk was established. You may now leave the Middle Hall via the exits adjacent to the central doors. Proceed across the open courtyard and go up the stairs to the "Ancestral Hall", which is the most important area of Sam Tung Uk. You may wish to take a look at the next interpretation stand located in front of the ancestral altar first, which provides information about the intricately carved altar.