

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

Location: Ancestral Hall

Theme: Architectural layout of Sam Tung Uk

Taking a glance at the floor plan of Sam Tung Uk on the interpretation stand, you'll find that Sam Tung Uk is a typical Hakka walled house in Hong Kong. The traditional Chinese concept of showing respect to the senior is fully exemplified through the architectural layout of Sam Tung Uk.

The Chan Ancestral Hall on the central axis is situated at the centre of Sam Tung Uk, with four dwellings on both sides. They were originally the homes of the four sons of Chan Yam-shing. Order of precedence is a key to understand the spatial layout of traditional Chinese architecture, with the left side ranking higher. As the Ancestral Hall was the most respectable space in the premises, the dwelling on its left was for the eldest branch of the family, while that on the right was for the second-eldest. According to the same rule, the dwelling on the left of the Middle Hall was for the third-eldest branch, and that on its right was for the fourth-eldest. Thus, the layout of the dwellings of the four branches of the family followed the rule of seniority.

Later, for the extended family of the Chans, a row of four houses was built on either side, and a row of terraced houses was built at the rear. The resulting layout forms the walled structure we see in Sam Tung Uk today. This kind of walled-house architecture was very common in Hakka communities in southern China. Tsang Tai Uk, in Shatin, another famous example of a Hakka walled village, features a similar architectural layout.

Now you may wish to leave the Ancestral Hall and proceed to visit the previous dwelling of the eldest branch of the family. Cross the open courtyard and turn left into Middle Lane. The dwelling of the eldest branch is on your left. Here, you can learn more about the architectural features of the dwellings in Sam Tung Uk.