

## The Tangs of Ha Tsuen and their History

**T**he Tang clan of Lung Yeuk Tau, Loi Tung, Tai Po Tau, Ha Tsuen, and Kam Tin was the wealthiest and most prestigious of the New Territories clans. Their family history and legends have been much studied, but almost entirely with respect to the evidence from Kam Tin—to the extent that the Tang clan is often called “of Kam Tin” even though this was only one of the six areas settled by the clan. However, evidence from the other clan settlements as well as Kam Tin should be studied to provide a more balanced picture of the Tang clan’s history. Ha Tsuen is particularly valuable in this regard as it was closely related to Kam Tin, and Ha Tsuen traditions as to the early history of the clan can, therefore, be used as a check on the Kam Tin versions. This chapter considers the Tang clan from the Ha Tsuen perspective, clarifying some of the Kam Tin legends and calling others into question.

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Ha Tsuen was a rich cluster of villages, enjoying a broad and fertile area of arable land. It had a complex political history, particularly with regard to its relations with its cousin clan at Ping Shan and with the smaller villages nearby.<sup>1</sup> Ha Tsuen is, therefore, an area well worth studying in its own right, and this chapter also discusses the political, economic, and social history of the area, as well as the family history of its resident clan.

## **The Natural Setting**

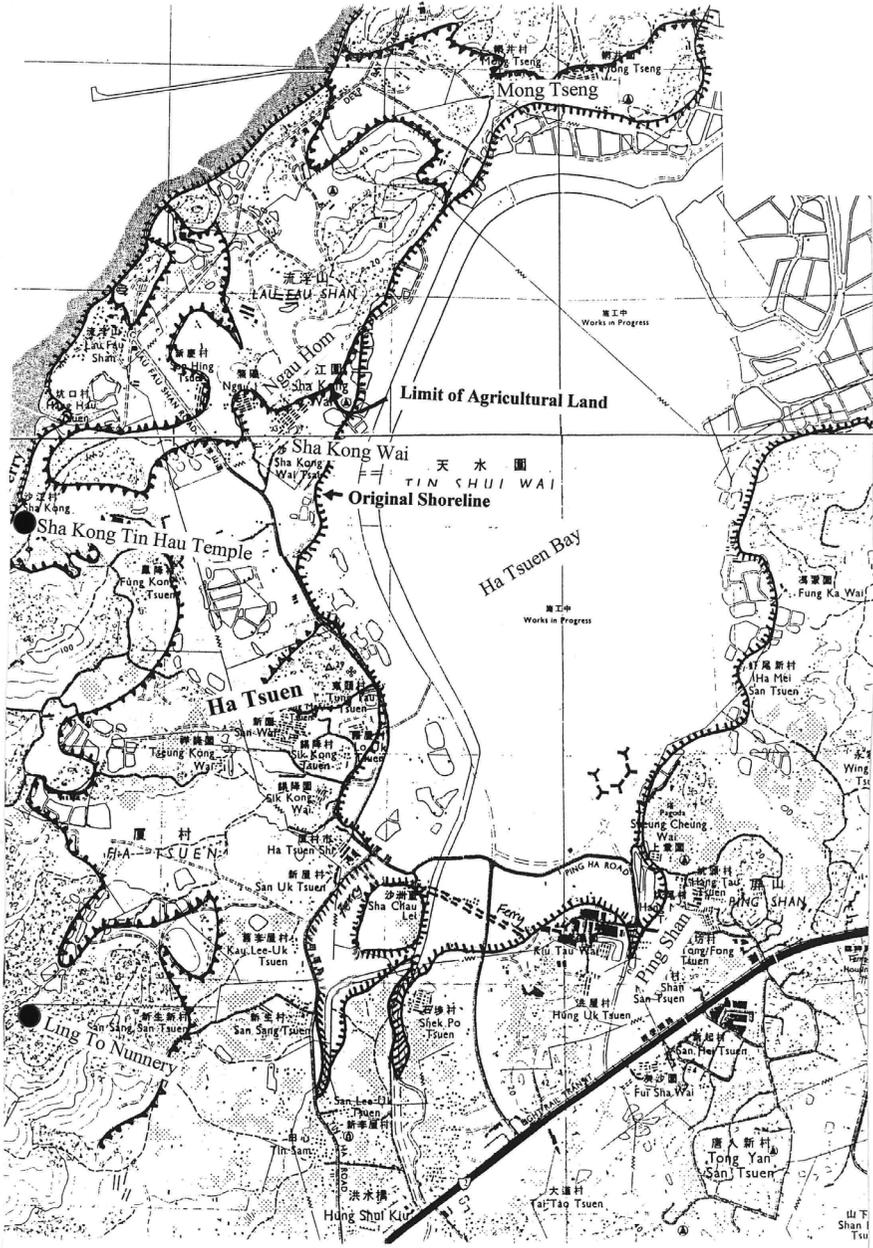
The land of the Ha Tsuen area at the beginning of the fifteenth century consisted of a flat plain sloping down to the waters of a shallow and almost land-locked bay, Ha Tsuen Bay, which was reclaimed a few decades ago and is now the site of the Tin Shui Wai New Town. A range of well-wooded hills edges the plain to the southwest and west, extending northwards into the Mong Tseng Peninsula (see Map 2). The highest peak is Yuen Tau Shan, which reaches 1,500 feet. This mountain was also called Ling To Shan, from the ancient nunnery at its foot, and is mentioned under that name in both the 1688 and 1819 County Gazetteers.

## **Early History and Settlement**

The Tang clan of Ha Tsuen has a clearly worded statement regarding their early history: a long inscription detailing this history was produced in 1751 and placed in the ancestral hall at Ha Tsuen. This inscription is a summary of the clan history as detailed in the clan tsuk po.<sup>2</sup> It states:

Just as the mountains have Kun Lun and the rivers have the Milky Way, so a clan has an ancestral hall. To pay respect to our ancestors, an ancestral hall was built here a long time ago.

Map 2: Original Shoreline and Agricultural Land



Our Nam Yeung Tang clan has two ancestors, Wai and Chi. In the beginning, the clan descended from the first ancestor Mat-hau, and then later there was ancestor Chung-wa. Today we honour as the first ancestor, the Shing Mo Long,<sup>3</sup> the ancestor Hon-fat, a man of Pak Sha Lei, in Kat Shui County, Kat On Prefecture, Jiangxi Province. He married the Lady Tsun. They had one son, the Honourable Kwun. Kwun had a son Huk.

Huk had a son Fu, whose alternative name was Fu-hip. Fu was a Song Tsun-sz. He entered Guangdong, taking up office there as Prefect of Yeung Chun. On retirement he went to live in obscurity. He came to San On County on a visit. He liked the customs of Guangdong and its pure traditions as well as the majesty of its scenery, and he decided to settle at Sham Tin, that is, in Kwai Kok, today known as Kam Tin Heung. He built a house there, large but restrained in its decoration, and gathered a group of friends and taught them.<sup>4</sup> He chose a site for a fine tomb. He established the Kwai Kok Educational Trust.

Fu had two sons, Yeung and Po. Yeung had a son Kwai, and Kwai had sons Yuen-ying and Yuen-hei. Po had a son Shui, and Shui had sons Yuen-ching, Yuen-leung, and Yuen-wo. From these five are descended the Five Great Branches of the clan, and in their name the great ancestral hall was built in the southern part of Tung Kwun City. People came from far and near to take part in the rituals.

From then to the present there have been twenty-eight generations. These descendants flourished. Many became officials. They lived all about, huge numbers of them, like the stars. Truly flourishing! This all came about not only because of the brilliant landed estate left by the ancestors but also because of their glorious piled-up filial piety.

From what has been handed down, when the clan first began to live separately, there was the Shing Jik Long, the ancestor Yuen-leung.

He held an official post as Prefect of Kan County at the time of the Song Gaozong Emperor's Journey to the South [1127], a time of great difficulty for the country. Now, the Emperor's supporters received an imperial order to raise soldiers and form a camp. Some young ladies of the imperial court, when they came upon the chaos of the military action turned back and fled, one by one. Ancestor Tsz-ming [son of Yuen-leung] came across the Lady Chiu of the imperial house, the daughter of the Gaozong Emperor [1127–1162], the aunt of the Guangzong Emperor [1190–1194]. He was given permission to marry her and to assume the responsibilities of an imperial son-in-law. Ancestor Tsz-ming received the rank of Kwan Ma in the Board of Finance. He went to live in Tung Kwun City. He is the ancestor of our lineage.

[Tsz-]ming's fourth son was Wai-tsz, who was the Emperor's cousin. [Wai-]tsz had a son Wing-sau. Wing[-sau] had a son San-yung, and [San-]yung had a son, Shau-tso.

In the disturbances at the changeover from the Song to the Yuan dynasty, the clan's descendants hid themselves away. At that time, Shau-tso was appointed as an official. He rose to become a captain.<sup>5</sup> He then retired to live at Kam Tin. He had two sons, Chue-on and King-on. Chue-on had a son Kang-yan. [Kang-]yan had Hung-sang and Hung-wai as sons. King-on had a son Tak-ho. [Tak-]ho had Hung-yi and Hung-chi as sons. These form the Four Branches of the lineage.

The descendants of Hung-sang live in Tung Kwun, Heung Shan, Siu Hang, and elsewhere. The ancestor Hung-yi originally lived at Fung Yuen Long at Kam Tin. The descendants of these two ancestors have built ancestral halls to worship them.

As for the ancestors Wai and Chi, the fifteenth generation descendants from Hon-fat, that is, the ninth generation

descendants from Yuen-leung, they lived separately from that time. Ancestor Chi had another name: Pak-ma. Chi was born in the Yichou year of Hongwu [1385]. Ancestor Wai was the son of the older uncle. He had three sons, Lei-tai, Lei-kong, and Lei-yau. Ancestor Wai had another name: Sai-yuen. Wai was born in the Xinwei year of Hongwu [1391]. Ancestor Chi was the son of the younger uncle. He had three sons, Ying-fu, Ying-pat, and Ying-tso.

Remembering these two ancestors, their natural temperament was retiring, and they preferred to live in obscurity and tranquility amidst the beauties of the mountains and the sea, particularly since they were scholars of fung shui. Seeing that the plain of Ha Tsuen was broad, with opportunities for fishing and salt-making, an unequalled sea-shore site, they decided to move from Kam Tin and settle at Ha Tsuen. They initially set up their homes at Tung Tau and Sai Tau. They are the apical ancestors of our two branches.

Many years ago, to commemorate how our two ancestors [Hung-chi and Hung-wai] opened the soil and started to work the land, a single ancestral hall was built, at the place called “The Big Village”, in our heung.<sup>6</sup> The annual sacrifices were held there for many years. Because of the length of time, this ancestral hall became dilapidated. The elders of the clan decided to donate the funds for a restoration. Unfortunately, the site was narrow, and space there was restricted. This was discussed by the elders and gentry of the clan. All, old and young, gathered together and agreed to move the ancestral hall to a place called Yeung Po. The site faces beautiful hills and is encircled by the great bay, in the best possible fung shui configuration. It would be excellent for the ancestral spirits, and, as for those who come after, it will be beneficial for them, too.

The descendants gathered together in a public meeting, agreed on the rules, and set out regulations. They took on the debt,

appointed managers, and started the work. As for the trust property in the name of the two ancestors, there was land at Sai Shan Lung Kong Tau, bringing in eight shek and four tau in rent.<sup>7</sup> This was originally dedicated towards the education of the young but was diverted to the ancestral hall.

In the winter of the Jichen year [1749], at a propitious time, the main roof-beam was put in place, and they worked diligently to build the three halls of the ancestral hall and the two kitchens. In the winter of the Gengwu year [1750], the work was finished. In the spring of the Xinwei year [1751], the rituals began. On that day, the glorious ancestors were nourished, made secure, and entertained: they were all happy.

As for the expenses, the wood and stone were paid for by a rate on all the houses, as was the cash for the expenses, totaling more than two thousand nine hundred taels.<sup>8</sup> Most of the trust property of the two ancestors was spent. The deficit came to over a thousand taels. It seemed a difficult thing to raise the money. Many different ways of raising the sum were considered. When the descendants came into the ancestral hall to conduct the rituals, every leader donated twenty taels. The two fong<sup>9</sup> donated eagerly. Forty-eight spaces for tablets were allocated, and nine hundred and sixty taels were donated for these tablets. These sums were to be used by the managers for the expenses of the hall as well as the spring and autumn rituals. The spirit tablets were arranged properly, righteousness was put firmly in place, filial piety was secured, and the clan rituals were properly established. Everything was done to please our honoured ancestors.

These are the regulations for the ancestral hall: they must be understood and enforced, to reinforce filial piety, for the benefit of the lineage, and thus the ancestors will grant us everything good. The trust income can be shared by the descendants, but

the fields, the capital, must never be distributed. The descendants must understand the reason for these rules. The spring and autumn rituals must be performed appropriately. In this way, trust property will be handled without any confusion. Thus, the two ancestors will remain brightly glorious. So these rules are set down, and are to be inscribed in stone and placed to the right of the ancestral altar, as a perpetual reminder to the descendants.

The names of those present are written below ...

Qianlong sixteenth year, Xinwei year, autumn [1751]: the whole of the descendants with Hon-ping and Kai-yuk erected this inscription at day-break.

From sources other than this inscription we know that the joint great ancestral hall at the south gate of the city of Tung Kwun was founded in the very late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (shortly after 1598). Hon-fat and the Five Yuan were the principal ancestors worshipped there. This hall, known as the To Hing Tong,<sup>10</sup> was in ruins in the early eighteenth century but was restored in 1708.

The Ha Tsuen inscription seems to shade the truth as to the activities of San-yung and Shau-tso at the time of the Song/Yuan overlap.<sup>11</sup> The Ha Tsuen tsuk po gives no details of San-yung's career: if he was an official, the tsuk po does not record this. The inscription seems to invite readers to understand that San-yung and Shau-tso supported the doomed Song, but the truth was, according to the tsuk po, that Shau-tso at least was a military officer of the Yuan.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it is unlikely that Shau-tso lead soldiers in the middle 1270s as he was probably not born until about 1290. The tsuk po records that he left his home in Tung Kwun City and came to live at Kam Tin during the Tsz Yuen years (1335–1340), perhaps when he retired from the army.

Very little needs to be added to this authoritative statement as to the clan's view of its early history. However, historians have

shown considerable scepticism towards these Tang clan legends. This is in part because of the insidious influence of Tang Man-wai on them. Man-wai, a descendant of Hung-yi and, thus, a villager of Kam Tin, was almost the only Civil Tsun Sz<sup>13</sup> produced by a New Territories clan in recent centuries, and his influence in his day (he was active in the second half of the seventeenth century) was immense, especially within his own clan. He was involved in the re-writing of the Tang clan tsuk po (older tsuk po, dating from before Man-wai, have not survived, except for their prologues). He edited the County Gazetteer of 1688 and included in it several statements about his clan legends. Several of these stories made their way into the Prefectural and Provincial Gazetteers. He was also involved in the repair of the graves of the Song Princess and her husband, which may have included writing or editing the text of the gravestones that were then placed there. Man-wai was also involved in the restoration of the To Hing Tong in the early eighteenth century, and this also may well have involved editing the texts and documents on the clan history held by the hall. Almost every text on the Tang clan's early history that we have today thus reflects Man-wai's editorial work. It is Man-wai's version of the early clan history that is, for instance, given on the Ha Tsuen inscription and in Sung Hok-pang's work.<sup>14</sup> It is, therefore, difficult today to get past Man-wai's work and discover what of the clan legends date from before his time and which are elaborations or guesses by Man-wai. If the clan legends, as recorded in the Ha Tsuen inscription or the Tang clan tsuk po, can be shown to be faulty, one question cannot be avoided: are we, in such instances, looking at attempts by Man-wai to plug gaps in the information he had received (attempts that we can now see were inadvertantly misleading), or should we assume the entire legend is false and untrustworthy? Although difficult, it is possible to make some educated guesses as to what in the legends dates from before Man-wai's time and what he added to them. In assessing the legends this way, it is apparent that some at least of

them are generally trustworthy, but that the dates added by Man-wai, and the romantic stories he wove around the dates he fixed on, are in most cases inaccurate.

### **Tang Fu and the Settlement of Kam Tin**

The Ha Tsuen tsuk po states that the clan's first ancestor, Hon-fu, was the first to settle at Kam Tin, a few years before his death in 984–987. Later, however, the tsuk po also states that the fourth ancestor, Fu, was the first to settle at Kam Tin, and it is this version which is given on the 1751 inscription at Ha Tsuen. A later source, not dependent on Man-wai, suggests that ancestor Fu was the first to settle in Guangdong, but that he brought the bones of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather with him when he settled at Kam Tin, burying them near his new home. This then resulted in Hon-fat, the great-grandfather, being treated as the first ancestor of the Tangs of the New Territories, although he did not actually ever live there.<sup>15</sup> This suggestion is attractive. The tsuk po also states that Hon-fat was made Shing Mo Long in 973, when he must have been an adult. The tsuk po also states that he died at an advanced age. Thus, dates for the first ancestor of about 925 to about 985 seem the most likely.

The Ha Tsuen tsuk po gives no dateable details as to the careers of the second and third ancestors. They must have been born around 955 and 985, respectively. The tomb of the third ancestor at Tsuen Wan gives his date of death as 1056.

The fourth ancestor, Fu, is, as noted above, likely to be the first of the Tangs to settle at Kam Tin. The Ha Tsuen tsuk po gives various details of his career further to those provided in the 1751 inscription. It states that he died at a great age, over eighty, after a full official career and enjoyed a long retirement. It also states that he became a Tsun Sz in the Bing Xu year of the Chongning period. This refers to 1106, but this date is unlikely to be correct. It is far too late, given that his father, Huk, is unlikely