

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

Location: Ancestral Hall

Theme: Auspicious woodcarving motifs

This is the Ancestral Hall of Sam Tung Uk, where the wooden ancestral tablets of the Chan clan’s ancestors are honoured. Compared with the ancestral halls of other Hakka clans which are similar to that of Sam Tung Uk in the New Territories, only one ancestral tablet is used here to represent all of the ancestors. This contrasts with the ancestral halls of Punti walled villages in the New Territories, which have a large number of ancestral tablets, each representing one ancestor.

In front of you is the wooden ancestral shrine, which is colourful and exquisitely carved. Actually each motif depicting plants, fruits and animals carries an auspicious meaning and conveys blessings to their descendants.

If you look up, you’ll see the woodcarving depicting “Two Phoenixes Facing the Sun” at the top of the ancestral shrine. The golden disc in the middle represents the sun, with one phoenix on either side. The phoenix conveys multiple auspicious meanings, such as flourishing talents in a golden age and great success.

On both sides under the woodcarving of the “Two Phoenixes Facing the Sun”, you can see a gourd on a continuous vine. This pattern is commonly found in ancestral halls, which confers an auspicious meaning of many long and unbroken lines of offspring and progeny.

The woodcarvings in the lower part of the shrine comprise the motifs of auspicious clouds for good fortune, a pair of bats for the Chinese word *fu* related to blessings and *shou*-character roundels in the middle for longevity.

As the saying goes, “every picture has a meaning and that meaning is bound to be auspicious”: diverse decorative patterns incorporating blessings are widely used in woodcarvings and murals in traditional Chinese architecture. If you wish to learn more about the cultural implications of auspicious motifs, please visit the exhibition in Dwelling 2 later.

Shall we proceed to the interpretation stand located on the left? Let's go to the open courtyard. We'll explain the tradition of lantern lighting which took place in ancestral halls.