

**Heritage Appraisal of Yeung Hau Temple,
Po Chue Tam, Tai O, Lantau Island**

Yeung Hau Temple (the “Temple”) (楊侯古廟) at Po Chue Tam, Tai O was probably built in 1699 or earlier with reference to the oldest relic at the Temple, an iron bell cast in the 38th year of Kangxi (康熙) reign (1699) of the Qing dynasty (清朝) dedicated to the deity of Hau Wong (侯王)¹. The management of the Temple was taken over by the Chinese Temples Committee in 1932. *Historical Interest*

The Temple is situated at Po Chue Tam which literally means a pool of precious pearl. Legend has it that the Temple is intentionally located at Po Chue Tam to help protect residents against the strife between Sze Shan (獅山) (Lion Hill) and Fu Shan (虎山) (Tiger Hill) in competition for the precious pearl.

Located on the west coast of Lantau Island, Tai O is one of the oldest existing fishing villages in Hong Kong. Residents were mainly engaged in fishing, salt making, provisioning and selling of dried seafood. The geographical proximity to the Pearl River Delta also made Tai O a major trading centre as well as one of the maritime strategic sites during the Qing dynasty. The Temple has long been patronised not only by fishing folks and fisheries merchants in Tai O, but also by merchants from the neighbouring places and the Qing soldiers along the coast. There are a number of timber plaques dedicated by the worshippers, with the one engraved in the 7th year of Guangxu (光緒) reign (1881) from the military officer Qianzong (千總) of the Left Battalion of Xiangshan Brigade (香山協左營).

The Temple is the oldest temple in Tai O since its establishment. Hau Wong Festival (侯王誕), which is on the 6th day of the sixth lunar month, is still widely celebrated by both the

¹ The origin of Yeung Hau cannot be ascertained. Some believe that Yeung Hau (楊侯) was Yang Liangjie (楊亮節), a loyal follower and a marquis of the last emperors of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) who fled with the royal family to Kowloon, after being driven by the Mongols. It was said that the temple was built to commemorate his bravery and loyalty. Others believe that the Temple, like other temples dedicated to Yeung Hau in Hong Kong and around the Pearl River, was built to commemorate the bravery and loyalty of a marquis, but not particular Yang Liangjie.

land and boat population in the area every year with performance of lion and dragon dances and Cantonese opera, in addition to other ritual activities. In the past, a temporary bamboo bridge was built connecting the Temple and the bamboo theatre in front, in order to facilitate worshippers to cross the watercourses during the festival. However, the bamboo theatre is erected at the open spaces in the neighbourhood of the public housing estate in recent years and the deity statue of Yeung Hau is moved to the new theatre location during the festival.

The Temple is also popular for its strong association with the Tai O Dragon Boat Water Parade, which is a traditional event with a history of over one hundred years and was inscribed onto the third national list of intangible cultural heritage of China in 2011. The Water Parade is held every year during the Dragon Boat Festival (端午節) on the 5th day of the fifth lunar month by three fishermen's associations, namely Pa Teng Hong (扒艇行), Sin Yu Hong (鮮魚行) and Hop Sum Tong (合心堂). The deity statues from four temples in Tai O (including Yeung Hau, Tin Hau, Kwai Tai and Hung Shing) are put on sacred sampans towed by the dragon boats to parade through Tai O waters to pacify the wandering water ghosts. Residents of the stilt houses along the watercourses burn paper offerings as the dragon boats pass by. The deity statues are then returned to their respective temples after the event.

The Temple compound consists of the main temple building and side halls constructed of grey brick, granite and timber. The main temple building is a Qing vernacular two-hall-three-bay building, with a courtyard covered with a pavilion in-between the two halls. The recessed façade is supported by granite columns. Exquisite historic Shiwan (石灣) ceramic figurines can also be found on the roof ridge of the entrance hall and the two parapet walls of the covered courtyard. The front ridge made by Qiaoruzhang (巧如璋) in 1888 presents the stories of Zhao Kuangyin (趙匡胤), Emperor Taizu of Song (宋太祖) while those at the parapet walls of the covered courtyard made by Xinyizhang (新怡璋) are the stories relating to Fengshen Bang (封神榜) and Zhong Lichun (鍾離春) (also known as Zhong

*Architectural
Merit*

Wuyen (鍾無艷). It is also worth mentioning that there is a pair of historic couplets of 1877 and a plaque of 1881 made in lead-tin alloy hanging inside the main hall, which are unique artefacts in Hong Kong. Finely-carved fascia boards, camel's humps and tie beams with auspicious motifs are preserved in the Temple.

Altars are placed at the rear hall of the main temple building where Yeung Hau and other deities including Pak Tai and Hung Shing are worshipped. Two impressive pairs of timber banners of 1887 and 1903 are hanged on both sides of the altar. The floors of the main hall are of cement tiles which are believed to be paved during the renovation in 1932. There are side halls on left and right of the main temple building, separated by two alleys, housing the keeper's quarters, kitchen and other facilities.

The Temple underwent major renovations in 1877, 1932 and 1988 respectively. Although internal refurbishment and alterations have been carried out over the years, the Temple generally retains much of its authentic appearance, and most of the relics, decorative features and historic ceramic figurines are still visible. In addition, its original sea-front setting and the surrounding cultural landscape are basically retained. ***Authenticity***

The Temple in Tai O is the oldest and the best-preserved example of its kind on Lantau Island. Furthermore, it is one of very few traditional temples that still retains its original physical setting and maintains close association with the local community. ***Rarity***

The Hau Wong Festival is one of the most important ceremonial events in Tai O and the Temple also forms an integral component of the Tai O Dragon Boat Water Parade, an intangible cultural heritage inscribed onto the third national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2011. The Temple also serves as an important historic landmark and identity marker for the local community. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

The Temple is physically separated from other historic buildings in the area, but it is still part of an integral fishing village. The other historic buildings within the walking distance from the Temple include Kwan Tai Temple (關帝古廟) at Kat ***Group Value***

Hing Street (Grade 2), Tin Hau Temple (天后古廟) at Kat Hing Back Street (Grade 3), Old Tai O Police Station (舊大澳警署) at Shek Tsai Po (Grade 2) and Fong Bin Yuen (慈善方便院) (Grade 3), etc., depicting the historical and socio-cultural development of the local community in Tai O.

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