

**Heritage Appraisal of Hung Shing Temple**  
**Hung Shing Street, Ap Lei Chau, Hong Kong**

Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟) on Hung Shing Street, Ap Lei Chau was probably built by the local community of Ap Lei Chau in 1773 for the worship of Hung Shing (洪聖), a popular deity for protecting fishermen and marine traders<sup>1</sup>.

***Historical  
Interest***

Ap Lei Chau, which literally means an island of duck's tongue, was once renamed as Aberdeen Island by the then colonial government in 1845. According to the senior committee members of Ap Lei Chau Kaifong Tung Hing Association (鴨脷洲街坊同慶公社), the local community of Ap Lei Chau mainly comprised six dialect groups, namely Bao'an (寶安), Fujian (福建), Chaozhou (潮州), Dongguan (東莞), Huizhou (惠州) and Hakka (客家) and they were mainly engaged in fishing, ship-building and repairing, provisioning and selling of dried seafood. It is still one of the important historic fishing anchorages in Hong Kong at present. This may explain the presence of three historic temples (including Hung Shing Temple) for the patronage of sea gods in the area<sup>2</sup>. The management of Hung Shing Temple has been taken over by the Chinese Temples Committee since 1930.

Hung Shing Temple is the main temple on Ap Lei Chau since its establishment. Hung Shing Festival (洪聖誕), which is on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the second lunar month, is still widely celebrated by both the land

---

<sup>1</sup> Hung Shing (Hongsheng) is a popular deity in Southern China, particular in Guangzhou and Pearl River Delta areas. The origin of Hung Shing is uncertain but the local communities widely believe that Hung Shing was a district magistrate of Kwong Lee (Guangli) (廣利刺史) in the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907) and named Hung Hei (洪熙) who was reputed for his accurate prediction of the weather and expertise in geography and astronomy. He became a sea patron of the fishermen and sea-traders. After his death, the emperor conferred him with the spiritual title of "King Hung Shing of Kwong Lee" (廣利洪聖大王). In another version, Hung Shing was the God of South Sea. It is believed that a temple for the God of South Sea (南海神廟) was erected in Guangzhou in the 14th year of Kaihuang reign (開皇十四年) (A.D. 594) of the Sui (隋) Dynasty. The God of South Sea was ennobled as "King of Kwong Lee" (廣利王) in the Tang Dynasty and "King of Kwong Lee, Hung Shing of South Sea (南海洪聖廣利王) in the Song Dynasty. Hung Shing eventually became one of the popular deities in Southern China for protecting the fishermen and marine traders.

<sup>2</sup> Other two temples are Shui Yuet Temple at 181 Main Street, Ap Lei Chau and Tin Hau Temple at 182 Aberdeen Main Road.

and boat population in the area every year with offerings, procession (巡遊) of the statues of Hung Shing and other deities, performance of lion and dragon dances, traditional Chaozhou music (潮州大鑼鼓) and Cantonese opera, as well as other ritual activities. It now becomes one of the major annual local events on Ap Lei Chau. The locals also carry out rituals in the temple and its forecourt during other traditional festivals like the rituals of the Ghost Festival (鬼節) on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of the seventh lunar month and the Dragon Boat Festival (端午節) on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the fifth lunar month<sup>3</sup>.

Hung Shing Temple was erected on the north shore of Ap Lei Chau overlooking Shek Pai Wan (石排灣) and Aberdeen. There are two 20-foot high timber poles painted with dragon pattern in front of the temple. Locals call them as “dragon poles” (龍柱) and believe they were erected for *fung shui* reasons, hoping that the dragons can protect the area against the ferocious spirits (煞氣) from the “tiger land” (虎地) (a hill at Aberdeen where the Old Aberdeen Police Station (舊香港仔警署) (1891) is now situated)<sup>4</sup>.

***Architectural  
Merit***

Hung Shing Temple is a Qing vernacular two-hall-three-bay building, with a courtyard covered with a pavilion in-between the two halls and two side chambers on its left and right. The front eaves of the entrance hall is supported by a system of granite columns and lintels decorated with fine rock and timber carvings. Altars are placed in the end hall, with the main one for Hung Shing in the middle and others for the other deities at the side bays. Exquisite historic Shiwan (石灣) ceramic figurines can also be found on the roof ridges of the entrance hall and the parapet walls of the chambers on both sides of the internal courtyard. The impressive pair of ceramic figurines for the God of the Sun (日神) and Goddess of the Moon (月神) are at the end of the gable ridges of the entrance hall.

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the locals, dragon boats, before the race, should move in and out three times on the sea channel in front of the temple as if they are bowing to the Hung Shing deity for his patronage.

<sup>4</sup> The exact construction year of the two timber poles is not known. With reference to a photo kept in the Hong Kong Museum of History, the timber poles have been erected there in the 1920s. The local residents with the age of 90 years old also claimed that the existing poles have already been there for about 90 years. Repair works to the poles were conducted through subscription in 1948 in accordance with the inscription of the 37<sup>th</sup> Republican Year (民國三十七年) (i.e. 1948).

The Hung Shing Temple on Ap Lei Chau is one of the thirteen existing graded historic temple buildings for worshipping Hung Shing as the main deity<sup>5</sup>. It is also one of very few traditional temples with exquisite craftsmanship that still keeps its original *fung shui* setting (sea-oriented) and close association with the local community. The *fung shui* timber poles at its forecourt are also rare in Hong Kong.

***Rarity & Built  
Heritage Value***

According to the old inscriptions as well as other relics kept in the temple, repair works were carried out in 1888, 1948, 1973, 1988 and 2005. The roofs were re-laid with green glazed tiles in 1988. Most of the original structures and decorative features of the temple still remain.

***Authenticity***

The local residents' association, namely Ap Lei Chau Kaifong Tung Hing Association (鴨脷洲街坊同慶公社) organises traditional ritual activities for celebrating Hung Shing Festival (洪聖誕) and other traditional festivals every year. The temple becomes a landmark of Ap Lei Chau depicting the historical development of both the land and boat population in the area.

***Social Value &  
Local Interest***

Apart from Hung Shing Temple, there are other Chinese temples in the vicinity dedicated to sea goddesses in Ap Lei Chau and Aberdeen, namely Shui Yuet Temple (水月宮) at 181 Main Street, Ap Lei Chau (鴨脷洲大街) (Grade 3) and Tin Hau Temple at 182 Aberdeen Main Road (香港仔大街) (Grade 3).

***Group Value***

---

<sup>5</sup> Among the thirteen graded historic temples dedicated to Hung Shing, two temples have been declared as monuments, i.e. Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟) in Kau Sai Chau (淺水灣), Sai Kung and I Shing Kung (二聖宮) for Hung Shing and Che Kung (*Chegong*)(車公) in Wang Chau (橫洲), Yuen Long. Other ten graded temples concerned are Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟) (Grade 1) in Wan Chai; Tai Wong Temple (大王古廟) (Grade 1) for Hung Shing and Yeung Hau (*Yanghou*)(楊侯) in Yuen Long Kau Hui (元朗舊墟); Hung Shing Temple (洪聖廟) (Grade 2) in Cheung Chau; Hung Shing Temple (洪聖宮) (Grade 2) in Ping Shan, Yuen Long; Hung Shing Temple (洪聖古廟) (Grade 3) in Ho Sheung Heung(河上鄉), Sheung Shui; Main Shrine (神廳) (Grade 3) at No. 73 Tin Liu Tsuen (田寮村), Shap Pat Heung, Yuen Long; Hung Shing Temple (洪聖殿) (Grade 3) in Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon; Hung Shing Temple (洪聖宮) (Grade 3) in Hung Leng (孔嶺), Fanling; Hung Shing Temple (洪聖宮) (Grade 3) in Shui Tau Tsuen (水頭村), Kam Tin, Yuen Long; and Hung Shing Temple (洪聖宮) (Grade 3) in Po Toi O, Sai Kung (西貢布袋澳).