

Historic Building Appraisal

Former Peng Chau Theatre, Peng Chau, N.T.

Peng Chau Theatre (坪洲戲院) has ceased operation since the late 1980s. It was founded by Far East Consortium International Limited (遠東發展有限公司) owned by famous tycoon Mr Chiu Te Ken, Deacon (邱德根) (1924–2015) who himself took considerable pride in having had a finger in Hong Kong's entertainment business. The Theatre was the only motion picture theatre on the island of Peng Chau during the time of its operation from the 1970s to the late 1980s. A local resident recalls that the Theatre had a seating capacity of nearly 500 shortly before its closure, playing one or two shows daily in the evening. **Historical Interest**

The modern history of Peng Chau dates back to about 300 years. Having a natural typhoon shelter for boats and junks, Peng Chau was first mainly inhabited by fisherfolk. Farmers moved in later to set up village settlement. After the onset of Japan's all-out attack on China in July 1937, industrialists poured in to set up factories for the production of match (火柴), leather (皮革) and lime (石灰), making industry an important part of the economy of the island. There emerged salaried employees who took up factory jobs for their living as different from the local fisherfolk who depended on the sea.

Against the background of industrial development and population growth in the early post-World War II period, there was a rising need of entertainment. In the early 1950s, before the subject theatre went into operation, another small unlicensed theatre (which no longer exists) had once stood at No. 3 Chi Yuen Lane (志園巷). In the 1960s, there was yet another small theatre (which also no longer exists) near the southern end of Wing On Street (永安街) (currently the location of CLP Peng Chau Quarters & Sub-station) which was an open-air theatre giving two evening shows each day and accommodate several dozens of movie goers each time, but this 1960s theatre was rather short-lived.

The Peng Chau Theatre set up by Mr Chiu Te Ken, Deacon (邱德根) emerged in 1978 as a kind of amusement to entertain the public. Its inaugural day on the eve of Lunar New Year (on 6 February 1978) was officiated by Acting Secretary for the New Territories, Mr J. R. Todd (杜迪), accompanied by personnel of the movie industry such as screenwriter Chung Kuo-jen (鍾國仁) and artists Chow Lai-kuen (周麗娟), Hon Kwok-choi (韓國才), Lau Dan (劉丹), Cheng Chi-ying (鄭麒膺) and Cheng Lei (鄭雷). The film which debuted in the Peng Chau Theatre on the day was "Gang of Four" (四二八) cast by these artists.

Over the years, Peng Chau Theatre targeted at the local community mainly consisted of farmers, fisherfolk and workers on the island. It was opened for the public in the 1970s when the Hong Kong film industry advanced in a spirit of optimism, before the pervasive spread of in-home visual entertainment. The decline of Peng Chau's industry led to the dropping of movie-goers and box office receipts. The Theatre was finally closed in the late 1980s. Nowadays part of G/F and 1/F are used as a warehouse, a karaoke bar and several residential flats, but the auditorium and the lobby have been left vacant since its closure.

Peng Chau Theatre is a reinforced concrete block type building of the 1970s. It was built together with the adjacent Far East Consortium Peng Chau Building (遠東發展坪洲大廈) at its east which accommodated shops at G/F and eight flats at each of the 1/F to 5/F. The front façade of the theatre faces south. For the Theatre, the G/F is the lobby which has two booking offices. Two staircases lead up to the rear part of the auditorium, one at eastern side and another at western side, with restrooms at the middle of the staircases. There are another staircase at the front of the auditorium leading to the G/F.

**Architectural
Merit**

The Theatre is basically a rectangular box and rather Spartan in appearance. The design is obviously modern. The architectural features on the main front façade consist of a wide horizontal cornice or fascia above the G/F shops, and an inverted L-shaped window feature which partially frames a large rectangular wall space for advertising. There is a wide horizontal space above the windows for the cinema's name in English lettering, and a long vertical space at the side of the windows for the cinema's name in Chinese characters. The façade appears to be rendered and painted. The other facades are basically plain walls punctuated with doors and windows at G/F level.

Internally, the foyer or booking hall has a screed floor, mosaic tile clad walls and columns, and painted beams and ceiling. The auditorium is rather dingy with rows of plastic seats facing the raised stage and screen. The toilets are just basic facilities with white glazed tiled walls. The projection room still has the old projectors and other equipments in place but nothing further of interest. The shop spaces on the G/F are fitted with metal roller shutters and grilles but do not appear to be occupied. A tatty notice board and a jumble of bicycles adds to the depressing scene.

There is no denying that post-war public cinemas of this kind are becoming rare in Hong Kong, due to macroeconomic structural changes in the market. As the 1990s progressed, the boom in property prices spelt the end of big cinema

**Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &**

halls; the exhibitions sector began to streamline its operations by demolishing old-fashioned cinema halls and replacing them with mini-theatres in multiplexes. Peng Chau Theatre, then, is a thing of the past. It is also a reminder that theatre entertainment was once a thriving business. **Authenticity**

The construction style of Peng Chau Theatre was that of a common one for theatre for that period, and its scale cannot be comparable with the other early post-war cinemas in the urban areas, such as Paris Theatre (麗宮戲院) in San Po Kong which could accommodate 3,000 people. However, it had recreational, cultural and leisure significance to the local community. As it has been left vacant since its closure, no major renovation was done and its architectural authenticity is largely kept.

Peng Chau Theatre is not an architecturally aesthetic building and not of high architectural merits, but it has social value and local interest as a place of entertainment for the local community on the island. It operated for about one decade from late 1970s to late 1980s when Hong Kong cinema was at the last phase of a golden peak. At a time when there was not much choice of leisure activities on the island, it provided the islanders with a means of entertainment. **Social Value & Local Interest**

This building is within a walking distance with a number of other historic buildings, such as the Tin Hau Temple at Peng Chau Wing On Street (天后宮) (Grade 2), Peng Chau Chi Yan Public School (坪洲志仁公立學校) (Grade 2) and the Stone House at Peng Chau Wing On Street (坪洲永安街石屋) (Grade 3) **Group Value**

References

- Chu Shiu Leung, Foster. "Ping Chau: A Regional Study". Unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Hong Kong, 1964.
- Nieukey, Bendict A. "A Regional Study of Ping Chau Island". Unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Hong Kong, 1963.
- Wei Kit Ling, Minnie. "Ping Chau". Unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Hong Kong, 1959.
- Wong Wai Tuen, Miranda. "A Survey of the Economic and Social Structure of Ping Chau." Unpublished B.A. thesis, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Hong Kong, 1959.
- 香港《工商日報》
- 香港《大公報》
- 香港《華僑日報》