

## **Heritage Appraisal of Hung Shing Temple, Ap Lei Chau**

Hung Shing Temple 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, 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, the local community of Ap Lei Chau mainly comprised six dialect groups, namely Bao'an, Fujian, Chaozhou, Dongguan, Huizhou and Hakka and they were mainly engaged in fishing, ship-building and repairing, provisioning and selling of daily necessities and dried seafood. It is still one of the most 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, which is on the thirteenth day of the second lunar month, is still widely celebrated by both the land and boat population in the area every year with offerings, procession of the statues of Hung Shing and other deities, performance of lion and dragon dances 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 Hungry Ghost Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day

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<sup>1</sup> Hung Shing (Hongsheng), also known as "King of Kwong Lee, Hung Shing of South Sea", is a popular deity in Southern China, particular in Guangzhou and Pearl River Delta areas. Hung Shing is one of the popular deities in Southern China mainly worshipped by 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.

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 and Aberdeen. There is a pair of approximately twenty-foot high timber poles painted with dragon pattern in front of the temple. Locals call them as “dragon poles” and believe they were erected for fung shui reasons, hoping that the dragons can protect the area against the ferocious spirits from the “tiger land” (a hill at Aberdeen where the Old Aberdeen Police Station (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 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 and Goddess of the Moon are at the end of the gable ridges of the entrance hall.

The Hung Shing Temple on Ap Lei Chau is one of the thirteen existing declared or graded historic temple buildings for worshipping Hung Shing as the main deity<sup>5</sup>. It is also one of very

***Rarity & Built  
Heritage Value***

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<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 a pair of 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 thirty seventh Republican Year (i.e. 1948).

<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 in Kau Sai Chau, Sai Kung and I Shing Kung for Hung Shing and Che Kung (Chegong) in Wang Chau, Yuen Long. Other ten graded temples concerned are Hung Shing Temple (Grade 1) in Wan Chai; Tai Wong Temple (Grade 1) for Hung Shing and Yeung Hau (Yanghou) in Yuen Long Kau Hui; Hung Shing Temple (Grade 2) in Cheung Chau;

few traditional temples with exquisite craftsmanship that still keeps its original physical setting (sea-oriented) and close association with the local community. The two timber poles at its forecourt are also rare in Hong Kong.

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 retain. *Authenticity*

The local residents' association, namely Ap Lei Chau Kaifong Tung Hing Association organises traditional ritual activities for celebrating Hung Shing Festival 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 communities 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 at 181 Main Street, Ap Lei Chau (Grade 3) and Tin Hau Temple at 182 Aberdeen Main Road (Grade 3). *Group Value*

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Hung Shing Temple (Grade 2) in Ping Shan, Yuen Long; Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Ho Sheung Heung, Sheung Shui; Main Shrine (Grade 3) at No. 73 Tin Liu Tsuen, Shap Pat Heung, Yuen Long; Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon; Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Hung Leng, Fanling; Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Shui Tau Tsuen, Kam Tin, Yuen Long; and Hung Shing Temple (Grade 3) in Po Toi O, Sai Kung.