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PENG CHAU BETWEEN 1798-1899

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I

The object of this and previous articles[1] is to recover as much of the pre-1899 past of the Hong Kong region as possible, with special reference to the nineteenth century.

What materials for a history of the life and times of the people still exist? Locally there are occasional stone tablets commemorating the repair of temples or the settlement of an important local dispute. They mostly belong to the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some eighteenth century ones have survived but early tablets are generally rare because local people have a habit of getting rid of them when the temple is repaired once more. If not actually thrown out, they are taken into the yard and eventually broken up by children, or taken away to serve as impromptu table tops and seats or as chopping boards for vegetables. Then there are the numerous horse-shoe shaped graves which stud the countryside, practically all of which have dated tablets. Many of those still legible date from the late CHING period (1644-1912), but time and exposure to the elements have often done their worst, especially where a family has died out and the grave is no longer visited every year. There is the mute evidence of the countryside itself, where land long fallow and houses mouldering into the ground testify to a more populated past, often at a considerable distance of time from the present.

Written records include clan genealogies. These seem to be fairly widespread, though fewer in number than before the Japanese war. In the remoter and poorer areas, where the clans 族 are small and poorly educated, they often amount to no more than a list of names without even dates of birth and death; but those of the larger clans are often printed and include all kinds of interesting information, such as lists of property, honours and posts held by ancestors, clan rules, etc. A few land-deeds from the CHING period also turn up from time to time, but, like the genealogies, they have suffered from damp and the consuming desire of white ants to know more of their local history. It has also to be remembered that land-deeds had to

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be shown for inspection to prove ownership at the land settlement which followed the British lease and, though opinions differ on this point, many old villagers have said that their deeds were handed in to the Government and not returned. This would, in part, account for their being in very short supply today, at any rate throughout the area with which I am familiar; that is the islands and the Sai Kung and Clear Water Bay districts. Following widespread enquiry over a number of years, I am convinced that another factor of great importance in explaining their scarcity is the Japanese occupation of the Colony in 1941-45. Many villagers say that their papers were destroyed at that time, in many cases by themselves, since they feared the questions which might result if the Japanese authorities got their hands on them. The less they knew the better, was the prevailing view, and therefore many families destroyed their papers, to our present loss.

Fortunately, to set against this background of loss and decay, there are the valuable records of the land settlement carried out within a few years of the lease of the New Territories to Britain in 1898. These consist of records of a ground survey, carried out mainly to a scale of thirty-two inches to the mile, in which individual lots are set down and numbered, and their ownership listed in an accompanying schedule certified as correct by an officer of the Land Court.[2] These constitute a modern "Domesday" of all titles to land in the leased territory. Their usefulness to the historian is obvious and apart from their intrinsic value as a contemporary record they provide many clues to the past and enable detailed checks to be made on some of the persons and organisations whose names appear on commemorative tablets and others dated items such as furniture and fittings, which are to be found in the many temples which dot the countryside.

There are also the recollections of elders, particularly those over eighty years of age, who were young men at the time the territory changed hands. The memories of the oldest men are sometimes good and when this is the case they can do a great deal to fill in the bare bones of the land records and the genealogical trees. Since certain changes overtook the region within the first decade of British rule,[3] their testimony is of the greatest importance to a realisation of manners and attitudes and an understanding of the system of civil and military administration which obtained

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in this region in the late CHING. Their time is obviously short, and as much use should be made of their evidence as is still possible.

In this article I have attempted an outline study of an island community which, despite its small size and population at the time of the British lease, included groups of the various sea and land peoples who are common to this region. It is, for this reason, of particular interest, though by no means unique.

II

Peng Chau 坪洲 is a small island lying off the south-east coast of Lantau, about four miles from the west end of Hong Kong harbour. Its land area is 213 acres (·328 square mile),[4] of which 23·13 acres were cultivated and 4·35 built over when, together with the rest of the New Territories, the island passed under British rule in 1899.[6] At the 1911 census of the Colony of Hong Kong, the first accurate count of the population of the New Territories, the land population of Peng Chau totalled 642 persons.[7]

This article attempts to tell something of its history before 1899, for which purpose it is material to its theme to state that it was one of many islands, large and small, inhabited or deserted, which lay off the coast of the Kwangtung province, in this case within the boundaries of the San On district 新安縣 of which the island of Hong Kong itself was formerly an insignificant part.[8]

Peng Chau's past is shrouded in mystery.[9] It is likely that its first, and for most of its history, its only users were the fishermen whose boats sheltered in its bays whilst their owners dried and mended their nets on shore or breamed their boats at the water's edge with grass cut from the hillsides. Pirates and other lawless men may have visited it from time to time because of its remoteness. Eventually its regular use by the sea people must have attracted land dwellers, mainly Cantonese in the first instance it would seem, who set up shops to deal with the fishermen by supplying them with stores and provisions on credit and acting as middlemen for the disposal of their catch.

When this first occurred is not certain. The first dated information now available comes from the local temple dedicated to Tin Hau 天后 the Queen of Heaven, a popular goddess with

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fishermen and with all those who live close to the sea in South China. A commemorative tablet let into the wall is dated 1798.[10] It may record the actual foundation of the temple, though this is not certain as the temple bell is dated six years earlier.[11] The tablet has no introductory preamble, as is usual,[12] and simply states that persons from the two districts of Tung Kwun 東莞 and San On, described as 東新二邑衆信士 subscribed money for the work. A list of 218 names follows, of which 26 appear to be those of shops or businesses, and the other 192 those of private individuals. No indication is given as to the addresses of subscribers, and it is therefore impossible to state with certainty that they were all Peng Chau people, though some of them must have been, or to say which of them were land people and which of them fishermen. It is more than likely that both groups participated in the project. This was certainly the case with the next full-scale repair in 1878[13] where the fact of co-operation is established beyond any doubt, because the entries on this second tablet are more precise and it is still possible to check names with old inhabitants.

With the establishment of the temple, Peng Chau's place as a permanent base for fishermen was probably assured, since this would have set the seal on its popularity. Religion has always played an important part in the lives of the boat people and it was probably as much a long-term attachment to the temple as economic ties with local shopkeepers which kept the fishermen there. There was another popular Tin Hau temple at nearby Nim Shu Wan, now in ruins. Throughout the nineteenth century therefore, and into the twentieth, the island continued to be a base for many sea-going and local fishermen. As such, it was important enough to be one of the places where, by order of the San On magistrate, tablets were set up in the middle of the Tao Kwang period (1834) for the information of the fishing population.[14] The Peng Chau tablet, which is situated just outside the Tin Hau temple, records a petition which went as high as the Viceroy of the two Kwang provinces of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, and eventually resulted in a directive that no more fishing boats should be commandeered in order to capture pirates. Special craft were ordered to be built for the purpose instead.

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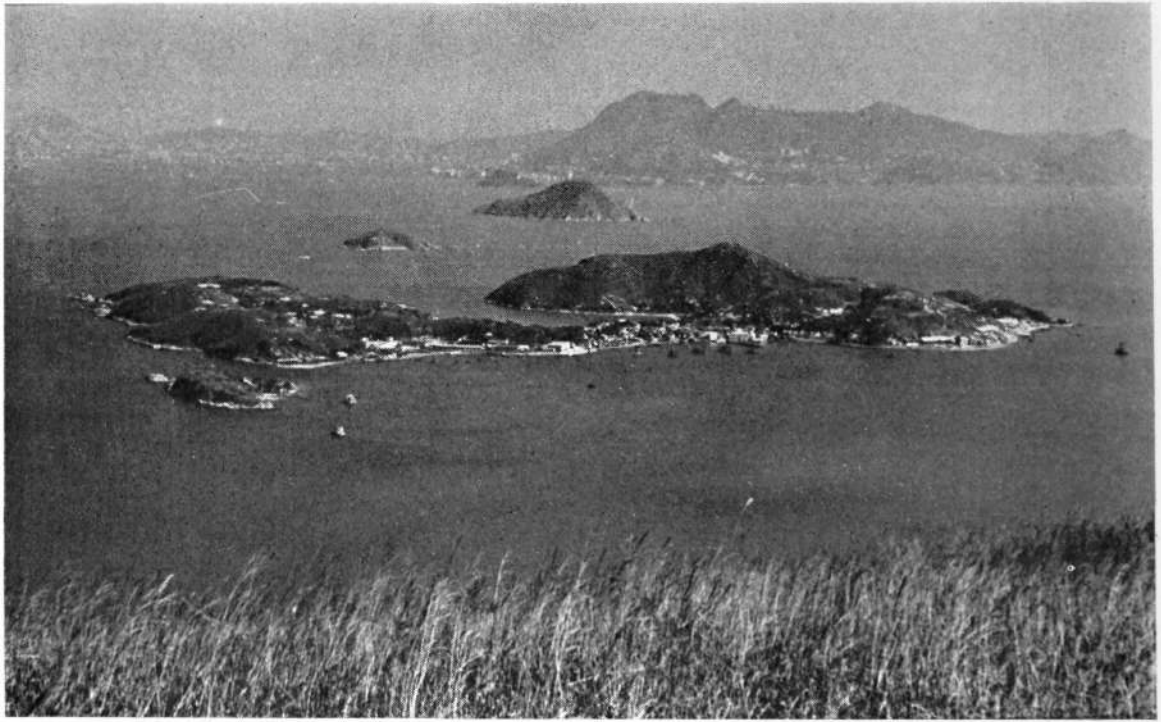

Peng Chau from Lantau, with Hong Kong Island in the background

Photograph by D. Akers Jones, 1961

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It is not certain whether the fishermen who petitioned the Viceroy were local men, but, if so, their initiative on that occasion showed itself again some twenty years later when in 1857 an association called the Peng Wo Tong 平和堂 was formed among the trawlers 拖艚 based on Peng Chau.[15] These are said to have numbered about 200 at that time. Though this may be an exaggeration, the Tong was undoubtedly a large organisation. Its name appears on the Tin Hau temple repair tablet of 1878 where its joint contribution of 140 taels of silver, out of a total of about 640 taels subscribed for the work, heads the list and its leaders were among the twelve principal organisers. Little is now remembered locally of its work and objects, or of its origin, but perhaps it was formed to retain more of the profits of fishing for the fishermen themselves, instead of letting them go to the Cantonese shopkeepers who might have become demanding and oppressive at the time. I do not know whether fishermen in other ports organised themselves into such groups, and it would be interesting to have further information on this point.[16] This particular Tong concerned itself with more than business. As we have seen, it helped with temple repairs and it is known to have taken a hand in organising festival matters. One elder remembers attending an opera show organised by the Tong when he was about ten years old (1905) and he can even remember the name of the opera! It is certainly an organisation which would repay such detailed study as is still possible.

The number of fishing boats based on Peng Chau during this period was considerable, and an interesting variety of persons were engaged in fishing. At the end of the century there were said to have been still nearly 200 trawling junks there and a similar number, more or less equally divided, of two smaller types of sailing craft. Whilst this is perhaps an exaggeration it is certain that there were many more than can be seen there today. These were all operated by Tanka 蜑家 fishermen, the true boat people of South China, who lived and died on their craft.[17] There were also a hundred Hoklo boats, long narrow craft with two or three standing rowers of a type still to be seen round Peng Chau and Cheung Chau. The Hoklos themselves spent their life between their boats and their matshed homes near the beaches. There were also lesser numbers of Hakka and Cantonese fishermen.[18]

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Of these various groups or fishermen the trawlers were by far the most important. As has been said above, the Peng Wo Tong was organised from among them and does not appear to have included the fishermen from the smaller Tanka craft. This group seems to have based itself on Peng Chau for at least fifty years, and in all probability for a much longer period, between the formation of the Tong in 1857 and the destructive typhoon of 18th September 1906 which is said to have hit them very hard as many boats were at sea during the sudden storm and were lost.[19] They were tied to the island by their links with the shopkeepers and wholesale fish dealers, or *laans* 欄 as they are known locally.[20] The trawlers caught all kinds of fish and salted them in brine[21] pending a return to harbour. There was a comparative lull in their fishing season between the Tin Hau festival in the third moon and the end of the seventh moon, when they returned to Peng Chau, gave their boats and tackle a thorough overhaul, allowed themselves the luxury of a holiday on land, and participated in religious activities which included the inevitable season of Chinese opera. The opera performances lasted for about five weeks, by tradition overlapping the end of the third moon and the beginning of the fifth. There is no doubt that these trawlers and their crews added considerably to the bustle and prosperity of the island.

Besides the Tanka there were also Cantonese families who made their principal livelihood from fishing. I spoke to one old man of seventy-three (born 1891) whose whole life had been spent, as was his father's before him, "on the surface of the sea" 海面 as he put it. This family were Puntis from Tung Kwun and my informant said he was the fifth generation on Peng Chau. There is no doubt that they were land people, but they earned their living from the sea using small boats called 三板頭 and operating several stake nets 罾棚 at various points round the island's coast. They fished mostly by day in the waters round Peng Chau, to which they returned at night-fall. There were over twenty of these boats when my informant was a boy.

Beside the Cantonese fishermen, there were also some Hakkas with, at that period, as much interest in the sea as the land. The first ancestors of the CHUNG 鍾 family came to Peng Chau at the beginning of the nineteenth century. An account of their

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settlement is given below and it is sufficient to say that at first they owned little beyond their houses[22] and seem to have been closely involved in fishing, at any rate in the second half of the century. When their senior elder Mr. CHUNG Fat 鍾發 (born 1876) was a boy of fifteen years old, his grandfather owned nine fishing boats of the Hoklo type. These rowing boats were manned with the help of other Hakkas, their friends and clansmen from the Tsuen Wan—Shing Mun—Pat Heung area of the present New Territories. They fished by day or night according to the season, using thread nets made in the shape of a basket and sold to them by Hoklo people. The boats were often out overnight, depending on the distance to which they went to fish and the nature of the catch. They often fished all round the Lantau coast and into Deep Bay, which is a long way for a rowing boat, though anyone who has seen the speed with which the rowers propel these craft off Cheung Chau will not be surprised at this. In 1896 Mr. CHUNG's uncle returned from Sandakan in Borneo, and took him there to work for three years, after which he came back, was married, and together with his uncles and cousins again made the sea his business. This time he did not do the fishing, but with two small sailing boats operated as a fish collector. On behalf of a shop, which was owned by a Punti of San Wui 新會 extraction then resident on Peng Chau, he went out to the Tanka boats fishing the neighbouring waters and bought their catch, for which he received a commission. At a later stage (1916-46) he worked two boats with which, in the summer months, he collected grass bought from the Lantau villagers opposite Peng Chau. He dried the grass and sold it the following year to fishermen for breaming their boats on a piece of land which he had bought for the purpose. By 1899 the CHUNGs had taken a lot of mortgaged land from the LUI family,[23] and all this activity connected with the sea was in addition to farming paddy and vegetable fields, which was mainly carried on by the womenfolk.

These paragraphs illustrate the diversity of activities in a small coastal settlement like Peng Chau and the danger of assigning one group to its traditional role and no other. It exemplifies what, in 1840, the famous Commissioner LIN of Opium War fame reported as being a local Kwangtung saying, "Seven go to fishing, three go to the plough", and again "Three parts mountain,

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six parts sea", an exaggeration which none the less makes its point.[24]

Hardly part of the fishing fleet as such, but a contribution to Peng Chau's sea-faring activity was the recovery of coral from the sea bed. The coral was used in the production of lime which was required in the building trade for making mortar. This was a major undertaking by the end of the century; it was, in fact, the largest in the New Territories at the time its numbers were reported in 1901.[25] Twenty junks each carrying eighteen men and sixty boats each carrying six men, that is 720 men between them, were said to have been engaged in this work which took place within three square miles of sea between Peng Chau and Nei Kwu Chau, the present Hei Ling Chau leprosarium. Fishing, and the recovery of coral for the lime kilns, was such a large scale enterprise in Peng Chau waters at this time that, as two elders have put it to me on different occasions, you could walk on boats as far as the adjacent shore of Lantau, a distance of almost a mile.

The land dwellers on Peng Chau were of two kinds: Cantonese, whose principal outlet was business, and Hakkas who had settled down to farm there in the decades before and after 1800. The history and origins of the latter are well-defined by family graves and the recollections of their present descendants but the influx of the Cantonese, and the time and manner of their coming — because in many cases they probably came and went without making a permanent settlement — is more of a mystery.

Chinese land deeds of the Ching period are often useful since they sometimes uncover facts not recorded in the earliest land records of the British administration. I have seen such a deed dated 1882[26] which records the transfer of a shop from one party to another. Naturally this is a common enough transaction, but this particular deed provides interesting information about land ownership on Peng Chau at an earlier date. It relates how the CHAN Yan Hop Tong 陳仁洽堂 of San On district had, at a prior but unknown date, leased land sufficient to build ten houses to the CHAN Yee Ka Tong 陳貽嘉堂 of Tung Kwun district, who in turn sold one shop built on this land to another person. There are actually two differently worded deeds of the same date relating to the same shop and the same transaction, and they

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provide complementary information which makes it clear that this is the position.

Though this is not stated in the deeds, it is very likely that these two Tongs were related and formed part of one large clan. Of the two, the CHAN Yan Hop Tong is evidently the principal and probably owned more land on Peng Chau than the portion it leased to the other Tong. It is interesting that it still owned land on the Lantau coast after 1898 when the land registers give its address as Nam Tau 南頭, the district city of San On. However, on the scanty information at present available, this Tong is rather a shadowy body, though we have a little more information about its lessee, the CHAN Yee Ka Tong, which itself may have been quite wealthy. On one of the 1882 deeds the seller CHAN Kai-sin describes himself as Chung Tong Shi 中堂司 of this Tong. This must have been a clan office and the seller and other members of his Tong were almost certainly resident in Tung Kwun and not in Peng Chau. A few years before (1878) the commemorative tablet in the Tin Hau temple lists the CHAN Kai-sin Tong 陳繼先堂 as having contributed six taels of silver to the repair fund. In the light of the deed, the inscription on the tablet is probably a mistake and should have read CHAN Yee Ka Tong, of which CHAN Kai-sin was a leading member. This gift put this Tong among the main subscribers, thereby attesting its importance on the island. The other is not mentioned on the tablet.

These Tongs were almost certainly absentee landlords, and the first of them may perhaps have had tax-lord privileges for the whole island which may have been granted to it at an earlier and unknown date, in the eighteenth century or even before, in return for services rendered to the imperial government.[27] They most likely belonged to a family of scholar gentry of some importance in its own locality, and the rents from its Peng Chau property would help to support its members and provide funds to enable them to study for the examinations and so continue to obtain official posts.

Whilst the 1798 tablet in the Tin Hau temple gives no direct evidence of these Tongs' ownership of land on Peng Chau in the eighteenth century, it does gives a few good hints. Two CHANs appear as the principal donors, and it is interesting that the names

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of these persons also appear on the large temple bell presented in 1792. All six donors of this bell were CHANs, all related, and these two are listed as the sons of two elder CHANs. One would expect the members of a tax-lord Tong to subscribe liberally to local projects. Indeed, they could hardly avoid doing so, since they would certainly be asked and could not refuse without loss of face. Therefore it is possible that these CHANs did belong to either the Tung Kwun family or the Nam Tau family which, as I have surmised, may well have been different branches of the same powerful clan. Some of its poorer members may even have settled as shopkeepers on Peng Chau, since when the British took over the New Territories in 1899 persons of this name were prominent among owners of shops and houses in the main street left and right of the one which had been sold in 1882. Perhaps settlement was the only means of collecting the rents from this remote place, which induced the family to send some of its people to live there. It is difficult to get conclusive proof since no members of this clan appear to be left on Peng Chau today and my last suggestion is more conjecture than anything else.[28]

The CHAN clan were not the only Puntis with an interest in Peng Chau, but with the information at present at my disposal it is impossible to say whether they were the first Cantonese settlers or developers. In 1899 all but one or two shops were run by Cantonese, though Hakkas had been on the island for about a century. Several of the shopkeepers had inherited businesses begun by their grandfathers, which indicates that a measure of stability had been achieved on the island for some time past. However, the merchants and shopkeepers generally may have been less settled and less wedded to Peng Chau than the farming Hakkas.

Turning now to these, the LUIs 呂 are said to be the oldest, but whether they were actually the first Hakka settlers is an open question. They have fallen on hard times and there are only two separate families left. A man of sixty-four is of the fifth generation, which on the twenty-five year basis of reckoning would give the first ancestor's birth-date as 1800, whilst a thirty year period, which is perhaps more likely, would give 1780. At any rate the family must have come to Peng Chau about 1800.

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The first ancestor came from Po Kat 布吉 in Po On, then San On, district. He settled not far from the anchorage and the shops nearby, and the family flourished there for several generations, farming most of the cultivable land and planting an extensive forestry lot.[29] But the position had changed for the worse by 1899. At the land settlement which followed the British lease, though the LUIs were credited with owning house land, four and a half acres of paddy fields, and nine and a half acres of dry cultivation and vegetable land on Peng Chau, all except their houses were mortgaged to different persons without hope of return.[30] When my informant was a boy the LUI houses were in a broken-down condition. They also owned a lot of land on the Lantau coast opposite Peng Chau but much of this too was mortgaged by the end of the century.[31]

The CHUNG family 鍾 are said to have been the next arrivals. According to old Mr. CHUNG his great grandfather, who was the family's first ancestor to live on the island, came together with his son, a boy of ten. Consultation of the grave tablet, which is dated 1834,[32] shows that he probably arrived in Peng Chau in the the first quarter of the nineteenth century, not long after the LUIs. He came from his parent village of Tin Liu Ha in the Lam Tsuen Valley near Tai Po in the present New Territories. In 1899 the family still owned very little land of its own on Peng Chau having, besides houses, only one-third of an acre of dry cultivation, but they held the mortgages of nearly nine acres of the LUI land, including most of their paddy fields.[33] The family farmed their own and the mortgaged land but, as I have said above, fishing was their chief concern about ten years before the British lease, another seeming "irregularity" which warns against the assumption that our local communities have separate characteristics and perform distinct functions which do not overlap. It was very likely Mr. CHUNG's grandfather's success at sea which enabled him to loan money to the LUI family and so gradually obtain their land; and the lack of land which made this family concentrate on the sea in the first place.

Another family of Hakka settlers are the LAM 林 clan who came in the mid-nineteenth century. According to family tradition, three brothers who were operating a pawn-shop in Shum Chun Market 深圳墟 were "squeezed" by yamen runners when a murder

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was committed outside their shop. Fearing further complications, the brothers left their native village of Nam Ling Wai 南嶺圍 nearby, two of them going to Jamaica and the third to Peng Chau. The reason for his selecting Peng Chau is an interesting one. There had been difficulty in finding a bride with a suitable horoscope and a go-between in Yuen Long Market with contacts on Peng Chau had arranged his marriage with a girl of the LUI family. The family were not poor, and by the end of the century had secured a considerable area of fields on the Lantau coast opposite Peng Chau by giving mortgages to incautious or unlucky farmers.

Some light on Peng Chau's development in the nineteenth century is given in the tablet commemorating the repairs made to the temple in 1878. Though the total number of subscribers is less than in the 1798 tablet — 181 instead of 218 — the number of shops is greater, and their locations specified. Fifty Peng Chau undertakings were listed, including one factory 廠, though what manufacture it carried out is unknown. Some of the local shops listed on the tablet were quite large concerns by the end of the century. Among their number the San Tai Li 新泰利 business owned six or seven adjoining shops[34] on the east side of Wing On Street, near the present ferry pier. It is said to have handled several lines of business including ship-chandlering and the production of sails and tackle, fishmongering and general dealings with fishermen, grocery and general goods and Chinese medicine. It also owned several junks for cargo and ferry purposes. A WONG 黃 of the third generation was managing its affairs in 1899, the business having been started by his grandfather, who was a Cantonese from Shun Tak 順德 district. Besides the shops, and the lime kilns, of which there were almost a dozen by 1904,[35] there were at least two boat building and repair yards, and a business which specialised in breaming boats.

The repair tablet lists numerous outside subscribers, which indicates the business and social contacts which the island had with neighbouring areas. Eighteen Hong Kong businesses, including seven fish *laans*, and another seven shops from Shaukiwan, contributed to the fund, and so did shops from Tai Ping 太平, Shek Wan 石灣 and Kong Moon 江門 in the Pearl River Delta. A ferry boat business from Heung Shan 香山 had

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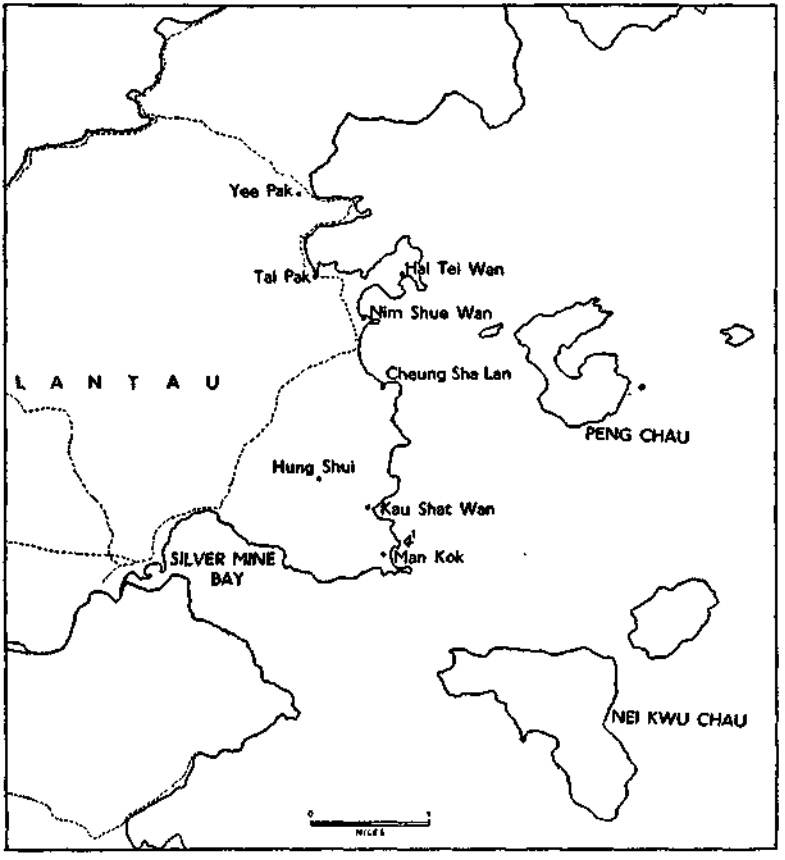
contributed a joss-stand table to the temple in the first year of the Tao Kwang period 1821) and a ferry from Shek Lung 石龍 was one of the donors in 1878. Three local ferries are also listed on the tablet. According to local information[36] two of them, each capable of taking a load of 40-50,000 catties (approximately 24-30 tons), sailed between Peng Chau and Chan Tsuen 陳村 in



Peng Chau and Surrounding Area

the Delta, whilst the third, which was smaller with a load capacity of 10,000 catties (about 6 tons), plied at need between Peng Chau and the local ports of Hong Kong, Kowloon, Cheung Chau and Tsuen Wan. The goods carried from the Delta towns were

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probably building materials and general goods, including clothing, luxury items and foodstuffs, since Peng Chau produced little more than sufficed for the Hakka farmers who had settled there. In the other direction the boats may have taken salt fish and shrimp paste, and lime for the building trade from Peng Chau's kilns.

Peng Chau's development in the nineteenth century and before was assisted by its proximity to the south-east coast of Lantau. The waters in this area, except in the south-west monsoon, are generally calm and are easily crossed by rowing sampans or wind-driven craft. In 1898 there were some half a dozen small villages and hamlets situated along this coast[37] which, together with a large settlement on Nei Kwu Chau, used Peng Chau as a market centre, selling their produce and livestock there and purchasing goods of all kinds from the island's shopkeepers. The area east of Tai Pak appears to have been well settled in 1899 by Hakka farmers whose descendants still live there today, but from Tai Pak west to Man Kok the land must at one time have supported a larger population than it did in 1899. The land registers show that many fields were abandoned, and no owners came forward to claim them at the Land Settlement after the lease of the New Territories. Even the claimed land, which in this area was in the minority, was in the course of changing hands, largely by way of mortgage to persons from Peng Chau. A WONG Keng 黃庚 of Peng Chau had recently become the registered owner of sixteen acres situated there and east to Yee Pak and was giving mortgages to other owners. The LAMs of Peng Chau were in possession of many fields at Man Kok and Kau Sat Wan, of which they were the mortgagees. They also held the mortgages of other fields there which belonged to the unfortunate LUI clan of Peng Chau. The large amount of empty fields, unclaimed at the lease, is interesting and the conclusion must therefore be that there were more settlers in this part of Lantau fifty or a hundred years before, and that these persons helped in a small but steady way to increase Peng Chau's prosperity.[38] These families had either died or gone away by 1899.

In an island community like Peng Chau where different groups found themselves in the course of time committed to joint settlement, and hence to the need to establish a *modus vivendi*, one of the more interesting relationships is that which subsisted

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between the Tanka fishermen and the land dwellers. The traditional picture is one of the two communities rigidly separated, with the despised fishermen exploited by the land dwellers whenever they came on land at the sheltered anchorages and excluded from a share in the amenities of village life, including the important one of education. It is supposed that the villagers or townsfolk would not let them take essential items like grass and firewood for themselves but insisted on selling everything to them, even charging for the use of the beaches where they breamed their boats on the average once a month, and carried out running repairs.[39]

How far is this assessment borne out in Peng Chau in the period under review? In the first place it has been shown that it was not only the Tanka who owned boats and obtained a living from the sea. Apart from the Hoklo fishermen who maintained an uneasy existance between land and sea and are generally considered to be more sea dwellers than landsmen, a number of land people, Hakka and Cantonese alike, owned and operated boats and sampans. Other land people were accustomed to fish from the rocky coast by line or by means of a stake net. The latter represented fishing for profit and was not just a way of supplementing a livelihood gained by other means since the financial outlay for a stake net was considerable. The fishing community was therefore wider than the group of Tanka who chose to base themselves on the island. Though this is not really surprising when the sea was near at hand and could provide a living for all, it led to a blurring of the sharp lines of differentiation commonly imagined to exist between the traditional boat people and the land dwellers.[40] This must have assisted participation in religious activities, including the repair of temples, in which task both sea and land people were equally concerned because they all in some measure lived by the sea, if not all of them actually on it.[41] Shopkeepers living on an island had as much reason to pray for the gods' blessings on their cargoes and customers as the fishermen for good catches and the safety of their boats and families. In such a small community, too, business connections were probably on a very personal basis and the boat people customers no less well known by the shopmen than their land neighbours.

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However, the Cantonese, Hakka and even Hoklo fishermen lived on land and were still landsmen who could live in both worlds. The first two, if not always the third, could cut their own firewood, and grass for breaming, whereas I am led to believe that in the anchorages, which were nearly always in populated places, the Tanka fishermen had usually to buy these necessities from the villagers. The reason usually given for this is that the villagers had planted the trees which supplied the firewood and paid rent to the imperial government or, more often, to some powerful clan.[42] A less striking, but equally practical reason, I was told on Peng Chau, was that fishermen did not wish to carry the grass or poles used in breaming their craft, in order to save valuable space. Breaming facilities were not always charged for, it seems, though on Peng Chau a breaming charge of 20 cents per boat was levied by the personnel of the military post before 1899 — the sort of "squeeze" by which soldiers supplemented their pay. The military post seems to have been a late innovation, prior to which no breaming charges are believed to have been levied by Peng Chau's land dwellers. On nearby Cheung Chau the WONG clan owned the main breaming beaches in the main anchorage and in a secondary one at Sai Wan, also much used by the boat people. They charged a fee for their use, part of the proceeds going to the upkeep and ceremonies connected with the clan's main ancestral grave on the island.[43] Of course the boatmen could go to some deserted beach, but they were hard to find since villagers were well distributed in the coastal areas and islands by the nineteenth century and there were few areas capable of returning crops left undeveloped.[44] In any case, there were no amenities, such as shops and temples, to tempt fishermen to such places; whilst, as Miss Ward remarks in her study of the Kau Sai fishing village in the Port Shelter area of Sai Kung, boat people are not the sea rovers drifting from place to place they are commonly imagined to be, but have been linked to a home base over a long period.[45] This seems certainly to have been true of Peng Chau in the period under review.

In a mixed community of the small size of Peng Chau it is hardly surprising that no district associations similar to those of Cheung Chau and Tai O were established.[46] The Cantonese residents were relatively few in number, whilst the Hakka clans had their own family ties and, at the grave festivals and the

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Chinese New Year, were accustomed to visit their parent villages, which were in any case not far away. However, there seem in mid-century to have been close links with the Tung Kwun association of Cheung Chau. Fifteen Peng Chau shops[47] subscribed to the repair of the association's premises in 1866, and Peng Chau residents may have been members of the association, as is the case with several of the Cheung Chau district and other organisations today. The extent of the help given on that occasion may be attributed either to this, or else to some very energetic canvassing by the Cheung Chau organisers.[48]

However, the gradual expension of the local community did bring with it various manifestations of communal endeavour. There was an interesting building, now in ruins, known as the Yee Chee 義祠, which was a poor house rather on the lines of the Fong Pin Hospital[49] at Cheung Chau. It was a substantial structure constructed from the dark grey-blue bricks of the region, and rather like a temple in appearance. There were three rooms: one for sick persons, one for the dying and one for the caretaker. There were idols inside, the principal one being that of the God of Ghosts 地藏王. The Yee Chee is said to have been constructed by the island Kaifong 街坊 from funds specially raised for the purpose and was maintained by them as occasion required. It was intended for use by destitute persons in poor health and as a place where they could die in peace. No one with relatives able to support him would ever let himself be taken there. Free coffins were provided by the Kaifong. It was available to all, land and sea dwellers alike. The caretaker was supported by collections and was allowed to cultivate land under the control of the Kaifong. The building was not in particularly good repair when Mr. CHUNG was a boy, and its origin can therefore be dated with confidence to 1850 or before.

The Peng Chau Kaifong mentioned in the previous paragraph had premises on each side of the Tin Hau temple. They were renovated in 1876-77 about the same time as the temple. Present elders clearly recall a tablet in the office building to one side of the temple which said it was enlarged 丙子擴建. The annexe on the other side served as a school or guest house as the need arose. It is not certain when the Kaifong began,[50] but it appears to have existed before this office was repaired and it has been

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credited with the construction of the Yee Chee about 1850. What does appear fairly certain is that the Kaifong originated among the Cantonese shopkeepers and house-owners of Wing On Street 永安街, the main, and for long the only, street on the island. The street had a corporate identity which was quite separate from the rest of the island, and this is clearly shown on the 1878 tablet which is at pains to differentiate donors as belonging to either "this street" 本街 or "this island" 本洲. By the turn of the century however, there were one or two Hakka shopkeepers in the main street. One of them, from the CHUNG clan, who in origin was 本洲 rather than 本街, was a leading member of the Kaifong, but this was apparently a recent development. The Kaifong's interests thus became those of the island community at large. It was not necessarily in regular session with meetings once a week or once a month, but is more likely to have been rather sporadic in its activities, active only when it was asked to advise, arbitrate or organise, as the need arose.

There was also an association for religious purposes known as the Hung Man Wui 洪文會. It is mentioned in the 1878 tablet in the Tin Hau temple, when it was among the principal subscribers. One assumes, therefore, that it had many members. It was responsible for the organisation of the various festivals, including the staging of processions and the customary opera or puppet shows, and its directors were chosen by "shaking the sticks" at the temple once a year. Apparently any one could join and, in theory at least, anyone could be chosen by the gods for the chief posts. I am told that it still exists today, for similar objects.

Lest this article should leave the impression of a well-organised and orderly community which lived a peaceful existence year by year in ever growing prosperity, it is as well to call attention to the more uncertain side of daily life at the time under review. The period was characterised by the gradual break-down of imperial control which was reflected in unsettled conditions. The tablets of 1835 recording the fishermen's petition to the Viceroy recalls the presence of pirates, and cargo junks and ferries in the

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coastal and riverine areas of Kwangtung were always receiving the unwelcome attention of pirates and robber gangs, right up to the end of the nineteenth century and well into the present one. The Taiping rebellion occupied the middle years of the century and, though it does not seem to have caused much bloodshed in the San On district, the large-scale struggle between Hakkas and Puntis in the parts of the province west of the Delta must have increased mutual antipathy between the two groups elsewhere. The Opium War and the War of 1857-60 saw increased foreign activity in Hong Kong waters. There were therefore both internal and external dangers to be expected on a small island settlement like Peng Chau at this time.

Internally there was probably less trouble than there was potential. There are no recollections of fighting between the various groups of settlers on the island, though the Hoklos, who are generally credited with a more turbulent disposition than the Cantonese and Hakkas, perhaps in most cases having fewer possessions to make them cautious, sometimes fought among themselves.[51]. The Cantonese shops in the main street were ever fearful of robbery and violence and until ten years ago one could see the last of the protective gates known as 閘門. There were three of them, barred every night, one at each end of Wing On Street and a third at the entrance to a large lane which left the main street at right angles and led to the Hakka settlement. Within living memory one or more watchmen were employed at night by the Kaifong and collected contributions from shops according to their size. These night defences were erected as much to keep out bandits and robbers coming from the sea as thieves or dissatisfied elements from within the island. There was, as Mr. CHUNG recalls, a small military post on the island in the late nineteenth century, but this would scarcely deter would-be assailants, especially if they were numerous and well-armed, and there can be little doubt that the first farmers and shopkeepers lived in genuine fear of such assaults. There are sufficient instances of violence from neighbouring places at various times to show that such fears were fully justified[52] and an isolated town like Peng Chau would have offered better prospects for pillage than a lonely village of farmers.

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It is hoped that this account of Peng Chau will demonstrate the diversity of settlers and enterprises which appears to characterise even the smaller settlements of this of the Kwangtung coastline. Peng Chau is a Cheung Chau in miniature, and because of its smaller size a wider treatment than was possible for Cheung Chau can be given, in an article of this length. Again, my intention is to provide no more than an outline, and an indication that, despite their size, such communities could be complex settlements in which traditional lines of division were blurred by proximity and a common environment.

NOTES

Any statements in respect of Peng Chau and its people which appear to be unsubstantiated are based on information supplied by various elders. I am most grateful for the assistance given by the Chairman of the Peng Chau Rural Committee, Mr. LAM Shue-chun 林樹春, and Mr. LO Chi-chung 盧志忠 of the District Office, South.

[1] See "The pattern of life in the New Territories in 1898" pp. 75-102 of this Journal, vol. 2 (1962) and "Cheung Chau 1850-1898" in vol. 3 (1963) pp. 88-106.

[2] See *Papers laid before the Legislative Council of Hong Kong*—hereafter styled *Sessional Papers* (Hong Kong Noronha & Company, at yearly intervals, in this case 1905) p. 144 in the Report on the work of the Land Court for the New Territories for 1900-1905.

[3] See G. N. Orme, "Report on the New Territories 1899-1912" in *Sessional Papers 1912*, pp. 56-57, for significant changes in wages and the cost of living.

[4] *A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories* (Hong Kong, Government Printer 1960) p. 83. In this article characters have not been given for any place names which appear in the Gazetteer.

[5] Schedules to the Block Crown Lease for Peng Chau, District Office, South, New Territories Administration. Hereafter styled BCL.

[6] Under the Convention of Peking signed on 9th June 1898.

[7] *Sessional Papers 1911*, p. 103(22) and (26). This figure is broken down into 434 males and 208 females, children included. The preponderance of males is noteworthy and may be due, in part, to the number of single men employed in the limekilns. The boat population are not specified separately in the Census returns and cannot be separated from the 4,442 contained in the Cheung Chau district figure. Cheung Chau with Peng Chau and Nei Kwu Chau formed a census district in 1911, but whilst the land population for each place is given separately, the boat populations are not so specified.

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[8] There are said to be over 230 islands within the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. See *Hong Kong Annual Report* for 1962 (Hong Kong, Government Printer, 1963) p. 319.

[9] I am not well acquainted with the Chinese records, but there seems to be little information on Peng Chau available in the *San On Chi* 新安誌, or *Gazetteer of the San On District*, last edition 1819, but reprinted by Kwangtung Printers, Canton, 1933.

[10] A lucky day of a winter month of the third year of Chia Ching.

[11] A lucky day of the third winter month of the 57th year of Chien Lung.

[12] It is customary to do so: in fact the 1878 tablet states whether subscribers are local or from various other places. I base this statement on experience of many such tablets, but there are always exceptions to disprove the general rule. Tablets may be considered generally to be reliable, but are subject to occasional errors and omissions.

[13] A lucky day of the third winter month of the 丁丑 year, third year of Kuang Hsü (January/February 1878).

[14] The nineteenth day of the seventh Moon of the fifteenth year of Tao Kwang. There is nothing on the tablet to indicate that it was the only one erected. If it was, it confirms the island's importance as a fishing centre.

[15] This date and the number of boats stated cannot be confirmed. It is given in a short manuscript account of Peng Chau in Chinese, available locally, compiled anonymously a few years ago.

[16] On Cheung Chau a Peng On Tong 平安堂 existed in 1898 when, together with two other Tongs, it held a lease of land for a boatshed. These appear to have been organisations of Tanka fishermen. The Peng On Tong and its boatshed still exist, though its affairs have been managed by several generations of a prominent Punti family since at least 1910 (BCL and Land Registers).

[17] For some information on the origins of the Tanka see K. M. A. Barnett "The Peoples of the New Territories" in *Hong Kong Business Symposium* (Hong Kong, South China Morning Post, 1957) p. 261 and his Introduction, pp. 2-3 to T. R. Tregear's *Hong Kong Gazetteer* (Hong Kong University Press, 1958).

[18] The local name for trawlers is 拖船. The smaller types of Tanka fishing craft using the anchorage in 1898 are described as 扒艇 and 罟仔. Then there are Hoklo boats of a similar type: one usually equipped with oars and styled 拮仔, and a variant called 雞毛爪, literally "chicken hair claw", which was the type of boat used by Mr. CHUNG and his fellow Hakka fishermen. I am told that the first are principally shrimp boats and the latter mainly used for catching fish. There is a good description of such craft on p. 53 of Orme's Report in *Sessional Papers 1912* quoted above, which is also useful for a contemporary account of the boat people. A list of the various types of local fishing craft (modern) is given in Table I, pp. 45-51 of Stanley S. S. Yuan's paper on Fishing Junks, which was read to the Engineering Society of Hong Kong in the 1955-56 session and published in January 1956 in volume IX no. 2 of their Proceedings. A diagram showing six local types is on p. 55. For an interesting account of the Hong Kong fishing fleet before the Japanese War, see *Reports on the Fisheries Industries of Hong Kong* by S. Y. Lin, apparently written between 1938-48, of which there is a typescript copy in the Library, University of Hong Kong.

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[19] The Harbour Master's Report for 1906 in *Sessional Papers 1907*, p. 130, which presumably gives figures for the whole Colony, states that 1,796 native craft were sunk, and in the majority of cases totally lost. The total loss of life, he said, "must have been excessively high, amounting to approximately 5,000, though there are no positive records to show the actual number that perished". The typhoon was not expected, and a few days afterwards a committee was appointed to enquire whether earlier warning could have been given to shipping. A month later its members opined that "reviewing the evidence as a whole, the committee find that prior to 7.44 a.m. on the 18th September 1906 there was no indication of a typhoon approaching Hong Kong . . . . and warning was given as soon as, in the circumstances, was practically possible." The Report of the Typhoon Relief Fund Committee in *Sessional Papers 1907*, pp. 277-287, gives no information about Peng Chau, though Table I, p. 283 may include some Peng Chau craft.

[20] The system of credit is briefly described on p. 2 of the Report of the Fisheries Department, Hong Kong Government, for 1946-47.

> "The practice of the *laans* before the war was to obtain control over the fisherman by granting loans to him for the repairing of his boat, buying of new gear, etc. at certain period during the year. In return the fisherman was expected to market all fish caught through the *laan* who would make appropriate deductions although, in many cases, the laan would ensure that the fisherman never settled the loan and therefore was never free to market his catch through anyone else."

Peng Chau appears to have had several concerns of this type, though they combined their activities in this direction with general shopkeeping. They dealt in a variety of goods and sold also to land customers, besides acting as middlemen for the fishermen's catch and providing them with all their requirements. The big dealers connected with the Peng Chau fishing fleet at the time of the repair tablet of 1878 appear to have been seven Hong Kong *laans* mentioned on the tablet. This shows that the number of Peng Chau boats was sufficiently large for outside merchants to do business with them, either directly or through the local smaller dealers.

One should not, however, take too narrow a view of the fishermen's position vis-á-vis the *laan*. The same willingness to allow the fishermen goods on credit, and so run up debts and incur obligations which would ensure that they continued to patronise the same shop or *laan*, was also extended by shopkeepers to the farmers and townspeople. S. Y. Lin *op. cit.* gives much detail on *laans*, some of whom were Tankas.

[21] For this information see *Hong Kong Annual Report* for 1899, pp. 14-15, Colonial Reports, Annual, 1899, No. 314 (London, HMSO, 1901).

[22] BCL.

[23] BCL.

[24] Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1958) p. 101. Orme's Report mentions, p. 44, the diversity of the fishing population thus, "The Hoklos, who are a kind of sea-gypsy, only form a very small section of the land population, some 1500 in all, but much of the fishing is in their hands. Of the junk population, the large majority are Puntis (I assume he means Punti-speaking), and of the remainder some Hakka and some Hoklo."

[25] *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, Government Notification No. 557 of 1901.

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[26] Dated the thirteenth day of the sixth Moon of the 8th year of Kuang Hsü (27th July 1882).

[27] Other examples of local tax-lords are quoted in note 12 of my Cheung Chau article. For an interesting instance from another part of the New Territories see Appendix II to the Report on the New Territory for the year 1900, *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, vol. XLVII (1901), pp. 1403-4, where a claim by members of a branch of the TANG family of Kam Tin to ownership of the whole island of Ts'ing I was investigated by a member of the Land Court. He wrote "I have taken special pains to go thoroughly into this case because it seems a very typical example of the curious and unwarrantable pretentions to the ownership of very large tracts of country which are perhaps the most striking feature in the economy of what we call the New Territory." Like the TANGs, the CHANs may have owned part but claimed, or aimed to control, the whole.

[28] It is interesting that the earliest grave known on the island has a tablet dated Chien Lung fifteenth year (1749) and that the person buried there is a CHAN Yiu Hong 陳堯康 and the person responsible for erecting the tablet (no relationship is given) CHAN Hing Sin 陳慶善. These men may conceivably have had something to do with the CHAN Yan Hop and Yee Ka Tongs. The grave is unlikely to be that of a fisherman and most likely to be that of someone who was living on Peng Chau at the time of his death. Not everyone is provided with a formal grave, and therefore he was probably a person of some consequence. Also, at the time of the land settlement, various persons named CHAN who were not local villagers but belonged to Peng Chau and Nam Tau (BCL) owned land on the Lantau coast opposite Peng Chau. One of them was the CHAN Yan Hop Tong of Nam Tau. This land may represent the remains of larger holdings left over from an earlier period but mostly sold or mortgaged by 1899, or else not recognised by the Land Court during the re-registration of titles, as being "not compatible with the principles of British administration" as happened with some other tax-lord land in the New Territories—see note 12 to my Cheung Chau article.

[29] Peng Chau M.S.

[30] BCL.

[31] BCL, Lantau coast.

[32] A lucky day of the first winter month of the 甲午 year of Tao Kuang (1834).

[33] BCL.

[34] BCL.

[35] BCL.

[36] Peng Chau M.S.

[37] At the 1911 census (see note 7 above) the population of these villages was Nei Kwu Chau 78, Tai Pak 52, and Yee Pak 59. There were also families living in hamlets at Nim Shue Wan, Cheung Sha Lan, Hai Tei Wan 蟹地灣, Hung Shui, Kau Shat Wan and Man Kok, but they are not listed in the Census.

[38] There is conflicting evidence about the prosperity of the area in the second half of the century. The decline of population on the Lantau coast opposite Peng Chau has been noted. This is more noticeable elsewhere on Lantau, where some of the more important villages can be shown to have

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Since writing about Cheung Chau I have discovered that the Kaifong there were responsible for a large communal free grave 義塚 dated the sixth month of the twelfth year of Tung Chi (summer 1873) and repaired in 1901, which takes its history further back than I had imagined; whilst at Stanley 赤柱 on Hong Kong island the present Kaifong occupies the premises of its predecessor the Sin On Kung Soi 善安公所 which were repaired for that body in the twenty-seventh year of Tao Kwang (1847) according to the inscription on the granite lintel over the entrance and a tablet set in the wall outside of the same date.

[51] See *Administrative Report 1925* of the District Officer, New Territories for a later example.

[52] See the Cheung Chau article p. 92, and my earlier "Pattern of Life in the New Territories in 1898" pp. 86-88 and note 29. In the latter for "HO family" read "CHEUNG 張 family".

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from his own or adjoining villages worked with him. The Shek Pik people were therefore closely connected with the sea despite the fact that their fields were extensive and well-watered. Elsewhere on Lantau, as old account book of the Hakka CHEUNG Kung Tak Tong 張共德堂 at Pui O, which is dated 1897-99 (Kuang Hsu 23rd-24th years), shows that the Tong had a regular income from a fishing sampan.

41 It has been shown that the Peng Chau shopkeepers always contributed to the temple repairs. A more illuminating instance of merchants' concern for the safety of local waters is to be found in the Tin Hau temple at Fan Lau on the south-west tip of Lantau, facing Macau and the mouth of the Delta, a remote area two hours walk from Tai O Market. Here tablets survive from the Chia Ching and Hsien Feng periods (1796-1820 and 1851-61) and contain the names of many Tai O shops. One imagines that few of the donors would ever visit the temple, but they were obviously intent to ensure Tin Hau's benevolent care.

42 Information received from CHEUNG Kai Chun 張啟珍 of Ham Tin, Pui O, Lantau (born 1886). But this was not true everywhere. At Shek Pik several families of Tanka used the anchorage for at least fifty years. There was no remembered animosity during this time and these fishermen were allowed to cut grass and firewood without charge. However, they rarely strayed far from the beach and the two groups did not intermarry or have much to do with each other, except in casual contact at the main festivals and when villagers bought fish from them at the jetty, which was over a mile from the village. The fishermen would not go to the village to sell their catch.

43 Information received from the present leaders of the WONG Wai Chak Tong 黃維則堂 of Cheung Chau.

44 This statement is based on close knowledge of the Southern District of the New Territories and of the District land registers.

45 Barbara E. Ward "A Hong Kong Fishing Village", *Journal of Oriental Studies* (University of Hong Kong) volume 1, no. 1 (January 1954) pp. 195-214, especially p. 211. See also note 42.

46 See my Cheung Chau article for the Cheung Chau district associations before the British lease. At Tai O in the same period there appear to have been associations of Tung Kwun and San On origin, each with a club-house.

47 The number is wrongly given as 28 in note 14 to the Cheung Chau article.

48 A tablet in the Pak Tai 北帝 temple at Cheung Chau dated January-February 1906 (a lucky day of the first month of spring of the thirty-second year of Kuang Hsü) shows that Peng Chau people also contributed to its repair.

49 See the Cheung Chau article for this institution.

50 The Kaifong of the Hong Kong region, and their like, are local institutions with a fairly long history. The Peng Chau Kaifong is quite likely to have an early date in relation to the age of the present settlement.

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