

**Notes to accompany a hike by Members of the HK Natural History Society,
from Tung Chung to Pak Mong, Ngau Kwu Long, and Tin Liu Tsuen
in the Tai Ho Valley and on to Mui Wo.**

By Peter Stuckey, 3rd March 2013



We start our walk in **Tung Chung**, a New Town, with a projected population of 250,000. Its first phase was completed in 1994. We walk through the Caribbean Coast where people live in what Nostradamus would have called a high hollow mountain. It was a phased joint development of MTR, Cheung Kong and Hutchison and is now just 6 to 10 years old. We follow a path parallel to the Tung Chung MTR line and the Airport Express Railway. The railway was one of the 10 Core Airport Projects, completed in 1998. As a Society we last hiked the route from Pak Mong on 12 January 2002. From Pak Mong the HK Govt. have adopted much of our route as the 5.2 kms long “**Olympic Route**” in celebration of Hong Kong’s hosting of the equestrian events in the July 2008 Olympics. Some of the route now also forms part of the new **Islands Nature Heritage Trail**. Little has changed in consequence, but helpful notice boards have been erected describing some of the fascinating features along the route and some plaques illustrating sports have been installed in the concrete footpath.

Pak Mong can be written two ways in Chinese, one **translating** as the “White thatcher’s grass”, but also, as, for example on the watchtower from its days as a school, “Pak Mong Heung hohk hau”, as “looking to the north”, a reflection, perhaps of the origins of the Hakka inhabitants from Fujian. Ngau Kwu Long is “The Cattle pasture valley” and Tai Ho means “Big oyster” a reference, perhaps to the pearling industry that flourished in this bay. The three villages, together with Tin Liu Tsuen, share hakka customs and being close together, and remote from other villages, have worked together with watchtowers, the school, the ferry pier and boats, and there is much intermarriage.

Dense fung shui woods protect each of the villages. Remains dating from the period 200 BC to 900 AD have been found at **Pak Mong** and it is thought the Yue people settled in the Tai Ho valley 4,000 years ago. Unfortunately these Neolithic and Bronze Age (Yue culture) sites have been covered by 12 new “village” houses. There was an evacuation of the people living in the area in about 1200 AD following a massacre of villagers by Government troops sent to quell unrest over the Salt administration. In 1256 Lantau was granted to a senior Sung Dynasty official, Lei Mau Ying, in lieu of unpaid salaries. Perhaps the most attractive part of the deal to him was the production of **salt**, particularly at Tai O (for more on salt see **RAS Journals**, Vol. 7 (1967) and Vol. 49 (2009), also “Of Hearts and Hands: HK’s traditional trades and crafts”, Urban Council, 1995).

A village was also re-established near Tai Ho during the Ming period in the 16th and 17th centuries. The villagers were, however, cleared, along with other coastal dwellers by imperial decree during the **coastal evacuation** when the population was required to move at least 50 li (15 miles) inland from 1662 to 1668 in a move designed to avoid assistance to “pirates” and particularly to Koxinga, a Ming loyalist based in Taiwan. Following repeal, only about one third of the villagers returned. They found their fields overgrown and their houses destroyed. There was an important battle at Ho Chung Bay in about 1670, when the County Magistrate, Lei Ho-shing, destroyed a large pirate fleet there. He led the military and militia forces of the County, and battled the pirates (this was a serious pirate fleet with dozens of ships), at Tuen Mun. He was successful, and the defeated pirates fled to Ho Chung. Lei Ho-shing followed, and trapped the pirate fleet in the bay. A large-scale battle followed until the **pirate fleet** was utterly overwhelmed. Most of the pirates were killed in battle, but 70 were captured and beheaded. The 1689 County Gazetteer praises Lei Ho-shing for this action, and he himself wrote a poem on his feelings, which survives in the Gazetteer.

The area became re-populated, a third time, particularly in 1750 to 1770 by the present clans, the first being the Kwoks of Pak Mong, then the Ho's from Fujian who settled in Tai Ho, the Lam's from Fujian who settled in Ngau Kwu Long and the Chau clan from Huizhou, just NE of Hong Kong who settled also in Tai Ho. All were **Hakka** people.

The area prospered with **N-S trade** from Canton to Cheung Chau. Some 7,000 people lived in Cheung Chau in the early 18th century and through to the British arrival in Hong Kong. Cheung Chau was a centre for fishing and shipbuilding. Its importance can be judged as its population was double that of Kowloon City at these times. Ferries from the mainland (Castle Peak) to Pak Mong and from Mui Wo to Cheung Chau facilitated the trade. Pak Mong was the principal gateway onto Lantau. Tidal currents between Tuen Mun and Pak Mong could be favourable. The **kaito ferry** service between Tuen Mun and Pak Mong terminated in 1986. (for more on Cheung Chau see RAS Journal 1963, Vol. 3).

However, the villagers, and indeed all the islanders have long suffered from **pirates**. On 21 August 1912 a gang of 40 to 50 pirates stole from the safe in the Police Station at Cheung Chau and from villagers and murdered three resident Indian policemen there. Tai O villagers had long been bothered by bandits. A brutal robbery occurred in Tai O Village on 25 March 1925. Around sixty bandits held up and robbed thirty-five houses and shops. After 1841 but prior to the British adoption of the New Territories in 1898, the Qing Government posted soldiers to Pak Mong as well as to many other guard posts. Sometimes payment was drawn but the soldiers were "ghosted". The area again became subject to pirate attack and the old Tai Ho village on the coast was abandoned in favour of the site now occupied on higher ground. The villagers set up a 3-village alliance against pirates. Watchtowers were manned but more to give advice to run away than to prepare to fight. Up to 5 soldiers would guard the ferry pier at Pak Mong.

The British, defending Hong Kong Island, fought two battles against pirates off N. Lantau in 1854 and 1864 and with increasing British influence the E-W trade route from Macau to Hong Kong became more important at the expense of the N-S route. The present **watchtower** in Pak Mong was built during the Republican period when pirate attacks were still a problem despite the British sovereignty. The recent plaque suggests it was built in 1939, but some suggest it may have been a little earlier.

The **fung shui** of Pak Mong is interesting and caused the form of much of the development. The "yang" line is strong – straight to the distant mountain. To augment the "yin" the path into Pak Mong has many bends and surrounded by thick woods preventing direct view to the exposed ocean. The fung shui **wall** was also built to prevent direct exposure of the village to the ocean and the "official" entrance-way was put at the far end of the village and is curved, again to prevent direct outflow.

Villagers would grow rice and use staked nets, raising and lowering them to catch fish. This practice continued till the 1950's. Remittances helped and firewood was carried over the hill to Mui Wo to satisfy the 2 tonnes daily needs on Cheung Chau. 100 catties (133 lbs.) would fetch HK10 cents in 1920. The trek would be all the more arduous as the track was concreted only after the war, using Jockey club funds. Cattle would be bred, for ploughing or for sale at Cheung Chau or Yuen Long. Houses were made of chiseled stone – bricks would be imported from Tuen Mun or Cheung Chau but were double the price of the stone.

The first electrical generator was installed in the 1960's and served the villagers for 3 hours daily. Fuel had to be carried in. Permanent **electricity** and the telephone service were installed only in the 1970's.

Since the 1970's **agricultural** subsistence has terminated and for the most part only the older villagers have remained. Villagers grow vegetables, pineapples, bananas, jackfruit, ginger, wohng pei, lung ngan and custard apples, but not the quality rice of the pre-war years. In those days villagers would sell the high quality rice at Castle Peak and buy a lower grade rice, using the spare cash to buy oil and sugar. A pig could also be sold to provide money for such needs.

Recent village house **development** and the North Lantau Expressway have altered the characteristics of Pak Mong. Nowadays there are around 20 inhabitants living at Pak Mong and altogether around 100 who occasionally stay there. The 20 or so old houses have been supplemented by recent modern houses, some of which were rented by airport construction workers. With the new N. Lantau expressway, a side road from

Tung Chung was built and there is now a daily bus service and taxis can serve the village (Tel. 2984 1328). Developers, including, the villagers say, Sun Hung Kai Properties, are quietly buying up the land.

The villagers have built no temple in their villages – they make use of the Hau Wong temple in Tung Chung, which was rebuilt in 1910. At that time the Pak Mong villagers, notably the Kwok clan originating from Fujian Province, contributed 3% of the costs. There are two local **shrines** to “Leung Ma”, the “Good Lady” one at Pak Mong and the other at Tai Ho. At the boundaries of the village are stone shrines to To Dei Gung, the earth god. At Pak Mong there is an **ancestral hall** of the Kwok clan, built of grey brick. There is a Taoist temple, Luk Hop Yuen Kung, near the old coastline at the east side of the valley. This has been under the administration of the Chinese temples Committee since 1981.

There were two **schools**, one at Pak Mong (sometimes in the watchtower) and the other at Ngau Kwu Long but these were replaced by one school, equidistant from the two villages in 1955. At its peak it had about 30 children in 1975, but it was closed down due to lack of children in 1985, following abandonment of agriculture. Now it is deserted except for the bats.

Villagers suffered badly under the **Japanese** occupation. 10 died of starvation and 6 were murdered by the Japanese during a protest. 1 in 5 of the wartime population thus died prematurely. Japanese and with them, the Taiwanese and Koreans, were brutal. One villager recounts being forced to run over a fire as punishment for a minor misdemeanor. Such deprivations led the villagers to support the East River Guerillas who were a communist-sympathising resistance movement and received support from the villagers. Many of the villagers became Maoist and set up a cooperative. At Pak Mong, beside the “**sword-testing stone**” and scratched in mortar near the watchtower, can be seen the Chinese characters dating from the 1960’s Cultural revolution and translating to “**Long life to Chairman Mao, his heart linked to the Motherland, his eyes to the world**”.

Villagers from the three villages also set up the “Maoist shrine” with racks of Mao statues and paintings in the two storey **Village Hall in Tin Liu**. We can still see the liberation slogan “**Raise high the great red banner of Maoist thought, be brave and go forward**” which was painted on the next door building during the Cultural revolution. In Tin Liu, up a path from the Village Hall there is a small Qing cannon.

Population pressure led to **reclamation** of 7 acres of arable land by the Lam family at **Ngau Kwu Long** beyond Tin Liu. They used bamboo bundles to dam an area then backfilled behind the bund. Despite the reclamation the adjacent river remains natural and healthy with good bio-diversity. The population grew to 200 by 1911. The river beside this reclamation is clean and relatively unspoilt.

Along the way we pass a couple of sites where **pots** containing the bones of departed villagers are stored. Above the new Tai Ho village (“Big oyster”) we reach a clapper **bridge**, built in 1827, as recorded by a memorial stone at the upper side of the bridge. The bridge slabs make good structural use of a central boulder. We climb on up to a pavilion with fine views over the three villages and to the new airport. At the top of the hill we cross old abandoned farmland, which has been re-afforested to limit soil erosion. Fast growing Casuarina (horsetail) trees with their series of leaves and phyllodes and of acacia with no leaves but flattened petioles, and Brisbane Box trees were used. Shrubs growing naturally include Rose myrtle, and the 5 and the 6 petal pink flowered Melastoma. We also see the native shrub Baeckia frutescens or Dwarf Mountain Pine.

Before descending we pass the **Mong To Au pavilion**, built in 1981 and have good views to Mui Wo (the name probably derives from Mui Wei, the 5 petal plum blossom, matching the five valleys which converge on Mui Wo). We can also see Butterfly Hill between us and the Silvermine Beach; to the west is the 766m. Lotus Peak and to the east Discovery Bay and Lo Fu Tau, the Tiger Head Peak. On descending we come to the disused **silver mine** at Silvermine Bay. There are several entrances, two of which we can conveniently find and both are now sealed. At the upper entrance there is a memorial plate describing the history of the 19th century mine and its closure in 1896. The other entrance is near the waterfall, behind the toilet. Mining probably started in the Tongzhi reign in 1862, with HK Portuguese and Chinese investors.

The **waterfall** is caused where a vertical porphyry dyke (i.e. igneous rock with large crystals known as phenocrysts dispersed in a fine grained feldspathic matrix) has intruded into the more erodible granite. At the foot of the waterfall are potholes caused by prolonged abrasion by sediment and pebbles in whirlpools. Most

of our route has been over the granites of the eastern half of Lantau. The predominant rocks to the west are volcanics.

Entering **Pak Ngan Heung** (Silver Village) we go through an arch and soon come to the **Man Mo Temple**. This is the oldest Man Mo Temple in Hong Kong and there has been a temple on this site since the Wan Li era of the Ming Dynasty (1573 – 1619). The current building was last restored in 2001. It is dedicated to the Taoist civil and martial gods, **Man Cheong and Kwan Kung**. Man Mo literally means civil and martial. Both these deities were mortals and lived around 1800 years ago in the time of the Three Kingdoms. You may have seen Kwan Kung feature in the film “Red Cliff”. Man Cheong is reputed to control the destinies of civil servants and is a god of literature. Kwan Kung lived from AD 160 –219. He was a famous warrior who was captured and beheaded. He refused to betray secrets to the enemy and there is a shrine to him in every police station in Hong Kong. He is worshipped as a god of war and respected for his loyalty. Pawnshops and curio dealers have altars to him, as do triad societies! He is also known as Kuan Yu and Kuan Ti.

The **paintings** on the front outer walls of the temple represent, on the left, **Yue Fei 岳飛**. Also known as Pengju, Yue Fei lived from 1103 AD to 1142 AD. He was a military general from Henan during the Southern Song Dynasty. His mother famously tattooed *Jin Zhong Bao Guo* (盡忠報國 - *Serve the Country Loyally*) on Yue Fei's back. He is best known for leading the defence of Southern Song against invaders from the Jurchen-ruled Jin Dynasty in northern China, before being put to death by the Southern Song government following intrigue against him. He was granted the posthumous title of **Prince of E** (鄂王) by Emperor Ningzong in 1211. Widely seen as a patriot and national hero in China, after his death, Yue Fei has evolved into an epitome of loyalty in Chinese culture. Pictures of his life feature among the paintings on the cross beams of the Long Corridor at the Summer Palace.

On the right is **Shun, 舜, the Great**. The story of Shun is Number 1 in the **24 Paragons** (Ershi-si xiao 二十四孝) of **Filial Piety** written by the Yuan Dynasty scholar Guo Jujing. The humane Emperor Yao was growing old and wanted to select a wise and worthy successor. His advisors told him of a devoted filial son named Shun. Although Shun's father was unreasonable and harsh, his step-mother was petty by nature, his step-brother was arrogant and lazy, and his older brother was jealous, nonetheless Shun managed to not resent them but he behaved as a devoted son and brother should with a proper attitude of respect and affection. The boy continued plowing the fields every day. Shun's devotion to filial respect inspired the heavens and the earth to respond. In the spring the elephants came down from the mountains to plow the furrows for this young man. In the summer the crows and magpies flocked down to pull up the weeds with their beaks. Nature itself approved of his righteous attitude, in the face of hardship, with his impossible family situation.

Emperor Yao 堯 dispatched nine of his sons to assist Shun with the farming work. He instructed his daughters, to serve Shun as his wives. The Emperor put the young man through years of training and testing, and when he felt satisfied with his capabilities, he bestowed the throne of Emperor on him, and retired from the duties of ruling China. Under Shun's half century of rule during the 23rd-22nd century BC, the people of China prospered. Following his virtuous influence, all creatures enjoyed peace and happiness. Such were the manifold benefits of a proper attitude of filial respect.



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