
THE HISTORY OF HONG KONG: FROM A VILLAGE TO A CITY

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Introduction

Hong Kong, which lies at the mouth of the Pearl River, has an area of 398¼ square miles. It lies between 113°52'E and 114°30'E, and 22°9'N and 22°37'N. It is 83 miles south of Guangzhou and 39 miles east of Macau. It consists of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula (the land which lies to the south of Boundary Street), and the New Territories (including Tai Yue Shan and 235 adjacent islands).

The name 'Hong Kong' does not appear in any Chinese historical records before the Ming Dynasty. It was the name of a small village on the south coast of Hong Kong island.¹ The village lies to the north-east of Shek Pai Wan 石排灣, nowadays known as Aberdeen Harbour.

How Hong Kong got its name

The village of Hong Kong (Heung Kong Tsai Tsuen 香港仔村) got its name from its export of incense products. Previously, Hong Kong and its surrounding areas were famous for the growing of incense trees which produced incense wood, known as Kwun Heung 莞香. During the Ming Dynasty, incense wood and incense products were assembled at the north-east of Shek Pai Wan before being shipped to Canton.³ Thus, the bay which lies to the north-east of Shek Pai Wan was named Hong Kong (Heung Kong), i.e. Fragrant Harbour, and the village which lay near the coast was called Heung Kong Tsuen.

Hong Kong Island before the Ming Dynasty

Before the Han Dynasty, Hong Kong Island and its neighbouring areas were occupied by the Si 峇, the Yao 僚 and the Tan 蛋. Little is known about them. However, ancient rock carvings were found in Tai Long Wan 大浪灣 and Wong Chuk Hang 黃竹坑 on Hong Kong Island recently. The carvings have approximately the same spiral appearance 回紋 as the carvings on the bronze drums of the ancient Yuet 越 people.⁴ These prove that there were people living on Hong Kong Island in very ancient times.

During the Tang and the Sung Dynasties, most of the people, lived on the south coast of the island. In recent years, lime kilns established

in the T'ang Dynasty were found in Chung Hom Wan 椿坎灣, Sha Wan 沙灣 and Aplichau 鴨洲.⁵

Hong Kong Island in the Ming Dynasty

In the Ming Dynasty, because of the production of incense wood in the area, the economic condition of the people became better. More people came to live on the island. During the Wan Li Reign 萬曆, there were at least seven villages, namely: Hong Kong 香港, Tit Hang 鐵坑, Chung Hom 春坎, Chik Chu 赤柱, Tai Tam 大潭, Shau Kei Wan 筲箕灣, and Wong Nei Chung 黃泥涌.⁶ The north coast was still sparsely populated.

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the island was frequently attacked by pirates.⁷ Though naval vessels from the Nam Tau Chai 南頭寨 patrolled along the coast from Tai Pang 大鵬 to Long Pak Kau 浪白滯,⁸ piracy was still very active.

Hong Kong Island in the early Ch'ing Dynasty

During the early Ch'ing Dynasty, the Coastal Evacuation was carried out.⁹ People on the island fled inland. The villages were abandoned.

In the 8th year of the K'ang Hsi Reign (1669), the Edict of the Coastal Evacuation was revoked. People returned from inland and rebuilt their villages. In the early years of the Yung Cheng Reign, the seven villages, i.e. Hong Kong, Tit Hang, Chung Hom, Chik Chu, Tai Tam, Shau Kei Wan and Wong Nei Chung, were rebuilt.¹⁰ Because of the danger of piracy, the government built forts and set up military posts along the coast. Nam Tau and Tai Pang were the two main military bases near Hong Kong Island. However, no military post was established on the island at that time.

In the years of the Chia Ching Reign, two villages, Pok Fu Lam 薄扶林 and Soo Kon Poo 掃管莆, were newly established.¹¹ The Hung Heung Lo Naval post 紅香爐水汛, which was under the control of the Tai Pang Battalion 大鵬所, was established too.¹²

Hong Kong at the beginning of its Colonization

In the 20th year of the Tao Kuang Reign (1840), the Opium War between the British and the Ch'ing government broke out and the Ch'ing

forces were defeated. In 1841, Hong Kong Island was ceded to the British. According to the Census taken on 15th May, 1841, there were sixteen villages, with 7450 people, on the island.¹³

At that time, pirates still caused great disturbance along the coast. Those of outstanding importance were Shap Sei Tsai 十四仔 and Tsui Ah Po 徐亞保. In the 30th year of Tao Kuang (1850), piracy along the coast was suppressed by the combined force of the British and the Ch'ing navies.¹⁴ With this, the island gained its name 'Tai Ping Shan 太平山' which means 'the Mountain of Peace'.

During the early years of British rule on the island, Chik Chu was considered as a suitable place for the capital city of the Colony.¹⁵ However, because it was subject to severe tropical disease, the British built the capital city between the Central and Upper Bays (Chung and Sheung Wan 中上環). It was named Victoria after the name of the British Queen at the time of the early colonizaton.

From then on, development on the island continued. With political changes in mainland China,¹⁶ more people flocked to Hong Kong, and they helped to make the city famous in the world.

Conclusion

Hong Kong, an isolated island at the mouth of the Pearl River, was only sparsely populated with fishermen. During the Ming Dynasty, because of the cultivation of incense trees, which gave great profit, population increased rapidly. However, the Coastal Evacuation at the 1st year of the K'ang Hsi Reign obliged the people to retreat to the mainland. Fields were left barren, and houses were pulled down.

When the Edict of the Coastal Evacuation was abandoned, people were encouraged to return to their old dwellings. Villages were rebuilt, people from the neighbouring counties came and settled in the Hong Kong region, too.

With political changes in mainland China, more people came to Hong Kong. They helped to develop Hong Kong into a densely populated commercial city.

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- ¹ See the map of the Kwangtung coast-line, Chapter 32 of *Yuet Tai Kee*, Wan Li edition 郭斐粵大記卷三十二 .
- ² Shek Pai Wan is the old name of Aberdeen Harbour or Heung Kong Tsai Wan 香港仔灣 (which in Chinese means Little Hong Kong Harbour).
- ³ Some of the incense products were sent north to the Provinces of Kiangsu and Chekiang.
- ⁴ See Chapter 3 of Lin Tien-wai 林天蔚 and Siu's *Articles on the Early History of Hong Kong*, the Commercial Press Ltd., Taiwan, R.O.C., 1985.
- ⁵ See 'The Lime Kilns and Hong Kong's Early Historical Archaeology', Special Session, Volume 7, *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society*, 1876-78.
- ⁶ See note 1.
- ⁷ It was said that Hong Kong Tsuen had been robbed by pirates in the time of the Lung Ching Reign 龍慶 in the Ming Dynasty. (See Hui Tei-shan 許地山's 'A Brief Research on the History and Geography of Hong Kong and Kowloon' 香港與九龍租借地史地探略, Chapter 6 of *Kwangtung Wen Mu* 廣東文物, 1940).
- ⁸ See Siu's 'Nam Tau Chai: the Middle Defensive Military Zone of Kwangtung in the Ming Dynasty' 明代粵東海防中路之南頭寨, in *Essays of Research into Ming-Ch'ing History* 明清史研究論文集, Chu Hai College, 1984.
- ⁹ The Coastal Evacuation was carried out in the 1st year of the Kang Hsi Reign (1661).
- ¹⁰ See the map of the Coastal Defence of Kwangtung 粵東海防圖, Chapter 3 of the *Kwangtung Tung Chi*, 1731 edition 雍正郝玉麟廣東通志卷三 .
- ¹¹ See Chapter 2 of the *San On Yuen Chi*, 1819 edition 嘉慶王崇熙新安縣志卷二 .
- ¹² See Chapter 178 of the *Kwangtung Tung Chi*, 1822 edition 道光阮元廣東通志卷一百七十八 .
- ¹³ See the Original Gazetteer and Census, May 15th, 1841.
- ¹⁴ See p. 15 of Lai Chun Wai 黎晉偉's *Hong Kong 100 Years* 香港百年史 .
- ¹⁵ The English name given to Chik Chu is Stanley.
- ¹⁶ Notable political events in China after 1841 were the 2nd Opium War (the Anglo-Chinese War), the Tai Ping Rebellion, the Boxer Rebellion, the Revolution of 1911 and the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45. These changes assisted the increase of population in Hong Kong. Also, another rapid increase of population occurred because of the change of government in China in 1949.

TAI YU SHAN FROM CHINESE HISTORICAL RECORDS

Tai Yu Shan 大嶼山, known as Tai Hai Shan 大溪山 in the past,¹ was also called Tai Kai Shan 大溪山,² Tai Yi Shan 大姨山³ and Tuen Mun Island 屯門島.⁴ It lies to the west of Hong Kong Island. It has an area of 55.55 square miles, and is the largest island in Hong Kong.⁵

The name 'Tai Hai Shan' first appeared in Chapter 87 of Yu Ti Ji Shing 輿地紀勝, a book published in the Sung 宋 Dynasty. It records,