Site and Situation

Fan Lau is located at the extreme southwestern tip of Tai Yu Shan or Lantau Island. It is almost equal in distance from Hongkong and Macau and it is situated about twenty-five miles due east of the latter. Fan Lau can be reached by sampan or fishing boat either from the market towns of Cheung Chau or Tai O, or by walking along the water catchment from Shek Pik reservoir to a point above and beyond Kau Ling Chung, and then by descending a steep stony path towards the settlement. Another route is to strike out from Tai O, taking the coastal footpath through Yi O, and thence to Fan Lau. There is no motor road to Fan Lau.

The area of Fan Lau includes a headland known as Kai Yik Kok (鸡翼角) meaning “chicken wing point” where an old fort is located (see map 1).† The high point of the Kai Yik Kok promontory rises to about 380 feet above sea level. In the north of this headland lies the cultivated waist of Fan Lau where a small settlement is located. Looming above the settlement is Kai Yik Shan from which two streams supply irrigation water to the padi fields. Two fine beaches, Tung Wan and Sai Wan, flank the waist of the peninsula. Tung Wan, though exposed to prevailing easterly winds and a long fetch from the village, can accommodate deep-draught junks.

The actual territory associated with the village extends beyond the physical boundaries of the settlement. Fan Lau villagers, for example, cultivate fields located in Tsin Yue Wan (see map 1) and records show that, at least in 1904, padi fields in Kau Ling Chung (since abandoned) were also cultivated.

Situated at the entrance of the Chu Kong or Pearl River estuary, Fan Lau enjoyed a strategic location in the past. This position was reflected in the construction of numerous forts and guard stations

* Mr. da Silva has a Master’s degree from the University of California at Berkeley and is at present with the Department of Geography, University of Hawaii.
† Maps 1-4 are located at pp. 92-95.
overlooking various approaches in connection with the maritime
defence of the Chu Kong estuary.\textsuperscript{2}

In the past vessels proceeding towards Canton from northerly
points used two main routes. The first was an inner route through
Fat Tong Mun\textsuperscript{3} into Kowloon Bay by way of Lei Yu Mun, after
which a stop was made near the present day Kowloon City. Vessels
then proceeded through what is today's Hongkong harbour towards
Kap Shui Mun. Continuing northwesterly, they negotiated the
inner Tai Yu Shan passage towards Lung Kwu island, using for
their landmark Castle Peak (\textit{鰂魚涌}), Shing Shan) the same landmark
that Sung sailors used centuries ago to pinpoint the then bustling
emporium of Tuen Mun, located near its base. From then on, ships
continued towards their destination, stopping either at Lin Tin or
at Nam Tau with a final clearance at Fu Mun \textsuperscript{4}.

A second approach used by vessels was to raise their landfall
at Pak Tsim, Yung Hai, or at Tam Kong (see page 87 for these
places), and thence to proceed through the Sam Chau Mun picking
up the twin-peaked heights of Fung Wong Shan (鳳凰山), the high­
est point in the Tai Yu Shan, as a navigational landmark. On this
bearing, ships entered the estuary of the Chu Kong at a point below
Fan Lau fort. From Fan Lau they set course for Lung Kwu, before
continuing up the estuary to Fu Mun and then to Canton.

The importance of Fan Lau to the Chinese coastal defence
system lies in its location athwart the entrance of the Chu Kong
estuary. The headland of Fan Lau too, made an excellent naviga­
tional landmark for ships approaching the estuary.

\textit{Fan Lau fort}\textsuperscript{4}

The fort is sited on high ground about 235 feet above sea level.
The exterior dimensions are 155 feet by 70 feet. The stone walls
vary from 3 to 7 feet in width depending on the extent to which
the existing walls have crumbled (plate 7). The height of the walls
also varies, being higher at the southern end facing the sea than at
the northern end. The area inside the fort covers no more than
7,380 square feet (123 feet by 60 feet). The smallness of this area
suggests that the structure was a small outpost fitting the descrip­
tion of "guard-station" rather than "fort", although it appears on
a map in the \textit{Kwong Tung T'ung Chi} as the Tai Yu Shan \textit{pau toi}
(大嶼山炮臺; literally "Tai Yu Shan gun terrace").
One could reasonably suspect that the edifice was used more for signalling and coast watching than for outright defence, and as a navigational landmark. The stone walls are made from local material, the porphyritic granite. Certain nearby boulders of this granite have drill markings on them, the drill holes 3 or 4 inches apart. The fort appears to be built on an older stone base measuring some 225 by 130 feet, the walls of which are surmounted by superstructure walls of fired gray bricks (plate 8). A red clay found nearby, when mixed with lime, blocked and fired, could have produced this type of Chinese gray brick. The stone blocks and the gray bricks are held in place by lime cement made of lime mortar mixed with fine sand particles. The possibility that the bricks were produced from materials close at hand should not be dismissed.

Many of the stone blocks and gray bricks have subsequently been removed by villagers for their own use. The Tin Hau temple near by, for example, may have been partly constructed from bricks looted from the old fort (plate 9).

When was the station constructed? The San On Yuen Chi makes no mention of any date but hints that law and order were established after troops were stationed at various outposts on the Chu Kong estuary after the order for the Coastal withdrawal (tsin hoi) had been rescinded in 1669. We have a brief mention in that district gazetteer that the Kai Yik Kok fort, as well as the forts located at Nam Tau and Chik Wan further up the estuary, were garrisoned by troops engaged in the restoration of order in “dangerous” areas not previously altogether under their control.

The persistent belief, still current today, that the ruin was of Dutch origin derives from the fact that Dutch ships in the early decades of the 17th century frequently stopped by the offshore islands of the Chu Kong estuary to take potable water. They were denied anchorage in Macau by the Portuguese and prohibited from entering Chinese ports by the Chinese. The myth of Dutch origin has been reinforced by confusion of the name with that of the Dutch fort of Castel Zeelandia built on Taiwan in the 17th century, which is also known as Fan Lau (扇楼), meaning “foreign building”. It takes no stretch of the imagination to ascribe to the fort at Kai Yik Kok, a Dutch, or Portuguese, or any other foreign origin. Fan
Lau 分流, meaning "division of flows" and the name of that point on the southwestern tip of Tai Yu Shan, describes accurately and specifically the abrupt change of colour of the sea off the point, from a clear green to a muddy brown, as any traveller from Hongkong to Macau can attest. The name Fan Lau is not only appropriately but propitiously applied. In jung shui 風水 the confluence of streams or sea currents is considered auspicious (conversely, a site flanked by forking streams is not considered lucky). Fan Lau, situated as it were at such a confluence, is considered a lucky site; hence the presence of a fort, a temple, and a settlement.

Conditions must have deteriorated in the Chu Kong estuary some sixty years after the return of Ch'ing control in 1669, for we hear of the garrisoning and reinforcement of troops in Tai Yu Shan in 1730 to shore up existing coastal defences there. "In the 7th year of Yung Cheng (1730) forts were constructed on two hills, to deploy garrisons for their defence and to reinforce the troops garrisoning Tai Yu Shan 太樂山, thus forming an angle similar to that made by the horns of an ox, to serve the exterior defence of Macau and the Boca Tigre". The Kai Yik Kok fort must have been one of the two strong points mentioned, the other being probably the fort at Tung Chung. The analogy between the location of the fortifications of the estuary and the shape of an ox's horns is interesting. A glance at a map of the Chu Kong estuary would show Macau (in reality, the Heung Shan district forts) and Fan Lau to be the tips of those horns. Both these strategic areas cover the entrance to the estuary. The Boca Tigre (Fu Mun 虎門) at the apex of the near-isosceles triangle formed by these three points, served as the pivotal central fortification.

We know too, that the Fan Lau fort was designated as the administrative boundary between the San On District and the Heung Shan District on the other side of the estuary from Fan Lau. A map of the Chu Kong estuary in the O Mun Kei Leuk 澳門記略 depicts the Kai Yik Kok fort with the accompanying caption "San Heung Fan Kai" (新香分界), meaning "This is the dividing boundary between the San On and the Heung Shan districts".

It is very likely that some of the fort's soldiers were allotted plots of land for their own use. Another interesting possibility is that the soldiers and officials appointed to preserve law and order came from the very ranks of rebels and pirates who had previously
defected to the government cause, and that as a reward, their land holdings were recognized officially by the government. This is a very Chinese approach to the problem of pacification. The Cheng family of Fan Lau claims to have ancestral connections with Cheng Lin Fuk 鄭連福 and his son, Cheng Yat 鄭一, both notorious pirates from Tai Yu Shan, who terrorized the Chu Kong estuary during the latter half of the 18th century. The Cheng family still owns the land nearest to the old fort, which may suggest that this family had ancestors who were also on the government side (plate 10). The garrison could not have existed for long without food and it is reasonable to suppose that the padi fields of Fan Lau supported the soldiers from the fort (plate 11).*

There are reasons for believing that the Kai Yik Kok fort may have pre-dated the Coastal Withdrawal of 1662, and that it may have been a Ming rather than a Ch'ing fort. Some confirmation of this is afforded by a series of nautical charts in the Mo Pei Chi (武備志). The preface to this work is dated 1621, but it was not presented to the throne until 1628. However, it has been shown that the charts almost certainly date from the first half of the fifteenth century.*

Many of the place-names in that section of the charts pertaining to the Chu Kong estuary are identifiable when checked against similar or equivalent place-names found in the maps of the 19th century editions of the Kwong Tung T'ung Chi, San On Yuen Chi, Heung Shan Yuen Chi and O Mun Kei Leuk, but the reader must be warned on two points. First, place-names may differ in both pronunciation and orthography in different sources. Yung Hai is written as 翳海 on the Mo Pei Chi charts, but as 𤤃海 on the maps of the Kwong Tung T'ung Chi. A second point to remember is that adjoining districts on one island are not infrequently depicted as separate islands. The Kwong Tung T'ung Chi carries a map of the San On district, for instance, which marks Tai Yu Shan, Tung Chung and Kai Yik Kok fort as separate islands, whereas the last two places are in fact both located on Tai Yu Shan. It is obvious that the place-names on these maps serve not so much to pin-point localities as to mark well-known landmarks and stopping places. Navigation in these waters depended not on nautical instruments, but on the experience of pilots familiar with key channels and navigational landmarks, such as headlands and mountain peaks.

* Plates 12 and 13 also relate to this article.
FAN LAU AND ITS FORT

Using the Ch'ing dynasty maps from the District Gazetteers and the Provincial Gazetteer, I identify the places on the Chu Kong estuary section on the Mo Pei Chi charts as follows: (see map 4)—

Po Toi Shan 蒲胎山 ... an island south of Hongkong. Now written 蒲台

Tung Keung Shan 東姜山 ... Tam Kon islands 擔桿

Yung Hai Shan 翁鞋山 ... Yung Hai 洗鞋 or Hai Chau 鞋洲

Fat Tong Mun 佛堂門 ... retains the same name, Fat Tong Mun 佛堂門

Pak Tsim 北犬 ... retains the same name, Pak Tsim 北犬

Lang Tin Shan 冷汀山 ... as the "outer Lintin", Ngoi Ling Tin 外伶仃

Nam Tin Shan 南停山 ... as the "inner Lintin", Ting Lin 行伶仃

Tai Kai Shan 大美山 ... "Lantau", Tai Yu Shan 大嶼山

Siu Kai Shan 小美山 ... "Fan Lau", Kai Yik Kok 鳖翼角

Kwun Fu Chai 宮富塞 ... present day "Kowloon City", Kau Lung Shing 九龍城

Tung Kwun Sor 東莞所 ... District of Tung Kwun, Tung Kwun Yuen 東莞縣

Heung Shan Sor 香山所 ... District of Heung Shan, Heung Shan Yuen 香山縣

The absence of any mention of the San On district (新安縣) on the charts is significant. It is highly improbable that the compilers of the charts would have deliberately omitted or accidentally overlooked that district. Now, we know that the San On district was detached in 1573 from the Tung Kwun district to form two separate districts, the Tung Kwun and the San On districts, a circumstance which confirms the suggestion that the Mo Pei Chi charts were drawn at least before the creation of the San On district. If this were the case, the Kai Yik Kok fort must also be dated before 1573, which would make it a Ming dynasty fort.

Between 1805 and 1810 control of the Chu Kong estuary slipped from the forces of the government. A new pirate leader, Cheung Po-tsai (張保仔) became master of the seas around Tai Yu Shan.
A legend has grown up around this man, and most coastal Tin Hau temples today claim association with him.

According to local tradition, Cheung was a lavish patron of the seafarer's temples which, in turn, probably supplied him with shipping intelligence. This pirate was reputed also to have constructed a number of forts, in reality armed camps, and village tradition has it that the Kai Yik Kok fort was once occupied by Cheung's men. There are reasons to believe this may be so. In 1809 a strong Chinese government fleet, assisted by six Portuguese lorchas from Macau on loan to the government, ambushed Cheung's pirate fleet at Tung Chung bay. Cheung fought his way out of this trap only to surrender to the government after he had received peace overtures from the Provincial Governor. In the grand Chinese tradition of rewarding enemy defectors, Cheung was promptly made a paid government official and installed as chief customs collector in Macau. If Cheung's fleet was able to assemble at Tung Chung bay, which was dominated by a much larger fort it follows that Cheung may have also controlled the second, but smaller, Tai Yu Shan fort at Fan Lau.

In 1815 the Chinese government, alarmed at the presence of foreign opium boats in the Chu Kong estuary, again began fortifying the coast. Existing forts were strengthened and new coastal strong points were constructed as part of a design to establish full and total control over the estuary. The fort at Fan Lau appears on a contemporary coastal defence map of the Chu Kong estuary. This map, in the 1864 edition of the Kwong Tung T'ung Chi, was drawn in 1821 or 1822.

The Fan Lau fort was conspicuous enough to warrant a brief mention in the sailing directions of a foreign commercial guide on China published after Hong Kong was founded. The relevant passage reads, "Lantau, the largest island in the estuary below the Bogue is about 15 miles long and 5½ in its greatest breadth; its peak is about 3000 feet high, and is the loftiest summit in this region, but foreigners have never been to the top. It has several villages on its shore, and a fort, called Shek Sun pau toi 石井炮塲 on its S.E. side. The village Tyho on its eastern shore* has given name to the whole island on our charts, but it is usually called Tai Yu 大嶼.

* The compiler was evidently confused between E. and W., as Shek Sun and Tai O (Tyho) are at the west end of Lantau. Ed.
i.e. great island, by the Chinese; the town Toongchung on the north shore opposite Chulocock I. is the largest on the island”.13

On the other hand, it seems by this date that the fort was already abandoned since one of the British officers who came out to China for the hostilities of 1841-42, has this to say of it in an account of his experiences:

At the S.W. part of Lantou (sic) we saw, on a height, the remains of an old walled fort, supposed to have been one of the haunts of the famous Coxinga, the pirate ..........14

However, the fort could not have been abandoned for very long since a repair tablet inside the Tin Hau temple at Fan Lau dated the 2nd summer month of the 25th year of Chia Ch’ing (11th June—9th July, 1820) records contributions by officers of the 大嶼山 as it is described thereon. Both these records can only apply to the Fan Lau fort.15

When the Hong Kong Government surveyors arrived at Fan Lau in 1904 after the New Territories were ceded to Britain, they found the fort still abandoned. In the Block Crown Lease Survey, it is described as “old fort, ruins, waste”.16 It had probably not been re-occupied since the early part of the 19th century.

It can now be argued that the Kai Yik Kok fort is a Ming dynasty fort built sometime before 1573, possibly abandoned, but rebuilt again in 1730, captured by pirates and re-taken by government forces sometime between 1810 and 1815, and then refurbished, refortified, and garrisoned until some time before 1841-42, by which time it was already again abandoned.

NOTES

1 Also known to the villagers as Yuen To Shan (遠眺山) or “the hill from which to watch the arrival of distant boats”. There is a level spot high above the village, which, according to tradition, was used by observers to watch for incoming vessels proceeding up the Chu Kong or Pearl River estuary.

2 The locations of these various strongpoints can be plotted from the text and maps in the Coastal Defence sections of the 1864 edition (map circa A.D. 1822) of the Kwong Tung Tung Chi 廣東通誌; the 1819 edition of the San On Yuen Chi 新安縣誌; the 1827 edition of the Heung Shan Yuen Chi 釜山縣誌; and the 1800 edition of the O Man Kei Leuk 澳門記載. The last three works contain maps of varying dates from earlier editions.
It will suffice here to say that the exterior defence of the Chu Kong estuary consisted of a series of forts, customs-stations and guard-posts in the Lo Man Shan, Kai Pong, Sam Chau Mun, Ngoi Ling Ting, and the Tam Kon groups of the outer offshore islands. The civil administration ruled from Nam Tau the district city of the San On district. The military administration was centred at Tai Pang on the western arm enclosing Tai Pang Hoi (Mirs Bay). The civil administration operated on a north-south axis, as against the east-west axis of the military coastal defence system. This is understandable when one realizes that the military could facilitate their control of the coast-line by establishing easy communications by water running the length of the coastal line from strongpoints on strategic headlands and the offshore islands.

3 For the Chinese characters of place names of some localities in the vicinity of Tai Yu Shan see map 3. For names of places within the present territory of Hong Kong see A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories (Hong Kong, Government Printer, 1960).

4 So far as I know there has been no published study of this fort by Hongkong's local historians, except for a brief mention in one work which states that Kai Yik Kok fort was of Ch'ing dynasty date. Lo Hsiang-lin, Hongkong and its External Communication before 1842, (Hongkong, Institute of Chinese Culture, 1963) p. 172.

5 The principal ingredients of this cement are clam and oyster shells which are crushed and burnt to produce slaked lime. The lime is then mixed with fine sand to produce a holding cement. Shells and fine sand are common to many local beaches and are, apparently for this purpose, used in lime kilns.

6 San On Yuen Chi, kuen 22, under section on Coastal Defence reads: The principal ingredients of this cement are clam and oyster shells which are crushed and burnt to produce slaked lime. The lime is then mixed with fine sand to produce a holding cement. Shells and fine sand are common to many local beaches and are, apparently for this purpose, used in lime kilns.

7 Fan Lau is also known as Shek Sun, meaning “boulder growths”, a reference to the numerous residual boulders at Kai Yik Kok.

8 Luis Gomes, Monografia de Macau (Macau, 1951), a Portuguese translation of the O Mun Kei Leuk p. 70. “No 7” año de long Tcheng (1730) construiram-se fortalezas nas duas montanhas, distribuiram-se as guarnições para a sua defesa e foram reforçadas as tropas que guarneciam Tai-U-San forming assim como que um angulo semelhante ao que é constituído pelos chifres dum boi, para servir de defesa exterior do Macau e o Boca Tigre”.


10 The district of San On ( 新安) was formed in the sixth year of Lung Bing ( 六月 ) i.e. 1572-73. Fourteen years later, in 1587, the San On district gazetteer was written by Yau T'ai-kum ( 資優 ), the District Magistrate. Various editions followed. The latest edition was published in 1519. This gazetteer provides the best primary source of information on pre-British Hongkong. Chapters (kuen) XIV and XXII deal with Coastal Defence. These are chapters of special interest to historical geographers.
A lORCHA is a specialized fighting craft from Macau that combined a Western-style hull (for speed and maneuverability) with Chinese batten sails and rigging (for easier sail-handling and disguise).


There is, in addition, the possibility that the fort had a temporary garrison in 1834 — see the imperial directive given respecting defence and patrolling at Lantau and Macao quoted by J. L. Cranmer-Byng in his brief note “An old fort at Tung Chung on Lantao Island” in *J.H.K.B.R.A.S.* Vol. 3 (1963) pp. 144-145.


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CULTIVATED FIELDS

PATHS

DENSE VEGETATION

HOUSE CLUSTER

MAP 1
FAN LAU AND ITS FORT

MAP 2

SOURCE: BRITISH WAR OFFICE
GEOLOGICAL MAP
1:80,000 (1892)
BASE MAP 1:20,000 (1949)