

ROPE-MAKING AND DYEING/ CALENDERING ON AP LEI CHAU, HONG KONG

Editor's note. *The following Note describes a visit to Ap Lei Chau in March, 1971 with several members of the Ap Lei Chau Kaifong, namely Messrs. Tam Wah, Tam Keng-fat and Yue Yiu-wah.*

We first visited the shop, Kwong Po Wah (廣寶華), at 141 Main Street where Mr. Yue's father, Yue Kou, aged 73 and born on Ap Lei Chau, was waiting for us. Pre-war, Mr. Yue had operated a dyeing manufactory whilst his elder brother, Yue Yip, had operated a rope manufactory.

Mr. Yue explained to us how the glazing or calendering part of the dyeing was carried out. The only visible sign of this activity was a large cut-granite slab. (See Fig. 1).^{*} This had been the top part of the equipment. It had been obtained from Kowloon City, where there were many dyers and had been brought by boat and then carried by four coolies to his shop. The lower part, now destroyed, consisted of a wooden block of lai chee wood and a wooden roller of the same wood. (See Fig 1). The cloth, measuring two or three 丈 (up to 30 feet) in length and 2.4 尺 in breadth was wound round the roller. A man stood with a foot on each end of the granite block and, holding on to a specially made wooden frame with his hands, moved it over the roller.

Mr. Yue had not learned this trade from his father but from a partner whom he had financed. They did not buy cloth to sell retail but operated whenever persons brought white cloth to them for dyeing. At that time it was customary to dye dark blue or black. This was a part-time activity, and Mr. Yue supplemented it by rearing pigs and chickens and cultivating fruit trees.

His elder brother, Yue Yip, had been a rope-maker at a long level platform behind and above the shop, Kwong Po Wah. This space, known as Ta Lam Lo (打纜路), is now occupied by squatter huts. The area was long and wide enough to provide a working space 300 feet by 15 feet. One-sixth of it had a thatch made of palm leaves (葵葉頂). This was to provide cover for storage of materials and completed goods.

Rope-making was of two kinds: using *mit lam* (篾纜) for the trawling ropes of trawlers† and *wong ma lam* (黃麻纜) in com-

^{*} On p. 197.

† Ap Lei Chau with Aberdeen has always been a home base for a fishing fleet.

bination with rattan (藤) for net frames only. The ropes were usually up to 20-28 丈 in length and could be even 30+ 丈, in which case the rope was turned round and carried part of the way back the rope road. Mr. Yue recalled that the first type of rope had been used by trawlers up to and through the Japanese Occupation but had stopped shortly after the Liberation. The second type had been made and used in local fishing craft up to his brother's death some 7-8 years ago.

The ropes were twisted from three strands, so that there were three stands with handles at one end of the rope road and a single one at the other. Up to ten persons were employed in the work. Unlike dyeing, this business had been in the Yue family for several generations as both Yue's father and grandfather are reported to have engaged in this work.

There were several pools at Ta Lam Lo filled with sea water and lime in which the 簍 was soaked for 10 days to soften it and preserve it. If fresh water was used salt had to be added.

There is still some rope-making on Ap Lei Chau at a place beyond the Kwun Yum temple but the material used is nylon and wire. This place had also been used to manufacture the other kinds of rope in the earlier period and was known locally as Lam Lo Mei (纜路尾), being subsidiary to the main area.

A short description of the calendering process is given at p. 190 of the 1970 Journal. This dates from the 1860s, and probably relates to Central China.

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JAMES HAYES

CHARCOAL BURNING IN HONG KONG

In his compendious work on China published in 1878 Archdeacon Gray of Canton wrote:

"As coal is not used for domestic purposes, charcoal is in great demand, and charcoal-burners are to be seen daily on the hills. The hillsides of Pun-yu, Fa-yune, and Tsung-fa — districts of Kwun Tung — are studded with their fires; and on the slopes of the Lew-Shan range of mount-