

Historic Building Appraisal
No. 15 Robinson Road,
Mid-Levels, Hong Kong

The site of No. 15 Robinson Road was first leased to **Lee Kin-choon** in 1861 and later sold to a well-known Hong Kong businessman called **Li Sing-kui** (李星衢) (1879-1955). The lease started from 1861 and land records indicate that a house existed on that site before 1894, but the style of the house suggests that the existing building was built in the 1930s. After the death of **Li Sing-kui**, the house was inherited by his descendants.

***Historical
Interest***

Li Sing-kui was a Toishanese (台山人) who started his business in Hong Kong and later became the General Manager of the Hong Ning Saving Bank (康年銀行) and the China Hong Ning Life Insurance Company (康年人壽保險公司). He was the Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (香港華商總會) between 1936 and 1940. He also served as Director (總理) of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (東華醫院) and Po Leung Kuk (保良局).

The strictly symmetrical floor plan and classical façade are indicative of the **Italianate Renaissance** architectural style. The street façade features a central recessed entrance porch with classical Tuscan Order columns supporting a simple entablature. Above the porch are two semi-enclosed verandahs featuring giant two-storey pilasters and decorative balustrade panels. Windows are tripartite Venetian style wooden casements. The finish to the walls is Shanghai plaster finished to imitate stonework. The garages on either side of the entrance porch are a modern adaptation and may be a later alteration since the first motor car did not arrive in Hong Kong until 1910. The same architectural vocabularies are repeated on the rear façade. An unusual feature is the narrow U-shaped courtyard formed by two wings extended at the rear of the house. There are also some very elegant ornamental wrought ironwork gates to the front entrance porch.

***Architectural
Merit***

Its grandiose style and relatively unspoilt façade make No. 15 Robinson Road a rare building type in the neighbourhood. As a grand mansion house it has considerable built heritage value. Some unsightly rooftop structures and damp stains mar the general appearance as do the installation of window mounted room coolers.

***Rarity,
Built Heritage
Value &
Authenticity***

The social value of the house is limited as it appears only to have been used as a residence. Nevertheless, its owner was a prominent figure in commerce, banking, insurance, and the Tung Wah and Po Leung Kuk. The building therefore has local interest to students of Hong Kong's past and social

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

development.

Due to subsequent urban development, No.15 Robinson Road is currently surrounded by modern high-rise residential apartments. However, there are still a number of historic buildings near this elegant residence including the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (聖母無原罪總堂), Jamia Mosque (清真寺), and Sacred Heart Chapel (聖心教堂). **Group Value**

The descendants of Li Sing-kui sold the house to Dragon Creation Ltd. in 1996, but their future plans for the building are not known. The site must have valuable redevelopment potential, and an adaptive re-use to equal the return on a high-rise block of flats will be difficult to find. **Adaptive Re-use**