

Historic Building Appraisal
No. 190 Nathan Road,
Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

No. 190 Nathan Road (the “Building”) is situated in Tsim Sha Tsui, a **Historical Interest** district which bears unique historical significance. Situated at the southern tip of the Kowloon Peninsula and overlooking Victoria Harbour, Tsim Sha Tsui used to be strategically important for coastal defence. The geographical advantage of the harbour-front was also a great attraction to businessmen. Tsim Sha Tsui was the first portion of the Kowloon Peninsula developed by the British, who developed it for defence and commercial purposes, a pattern similar to the early development of the Central district.¹ Some of the surviving buildings and structures, e.g. St. Andrew’s Church Compound, the Former Kowloon British School, the Former Whitfield Barracks, the Former Marine Police Headquarters Compound, Signal Tower at Blackhead Point, etc., are significant reminders of the early development of the Kowloon Peninsula.

The number of the land lot on which the Building is situated has changed twice. Originally referred as Sub-section 1 of Section A of Kowloon Inland Lot No. 611 (K.I.L. 611 S.A. ss. 1), it was first changed to Kowloon Inland Lot No. 3731 (K.I.L. 3731) in 1935, and then to the current lot known as K.I.L. 9735 in 1970.²

The Building was built between 1932 and 1933. In July 1932, Chan Yuen-sheung sold K.I.L. 611 S.A. ss. 1 to Lau Tsung-tai (劉松娣) at the price of \$23,500.³ No premises were mentioned in the land record K.I.L. 611 S.A. ss. 1. In April 1932, Woo Lai-tin anticipated that the flats on the site would be ready for operation in August the same year,⁴ and only four remaining sites

¹ Plans and maps relating to the development of the Kowloon Peninsula by the British by the late nineteenth century:

- (i) Lands Department, “Kowloon 1863, Proposed Roads” (Map Ref.: HD23-1);
- (ii) Lands Department, “Map of Kowloon Peninsula showing War Office Lands and Military Reserves, April 1891” (Map Ref.: MM-0182); and
- (iii) Public Records Office, “South of Boundary Line, Kowloon Peninsula”, dated 23 April 1897 (Map Ref.: Map CO-129-275, p. 597).

² The Land Registry Office, Property Particulars of Kowloon Inland Lot Number 9735.

³ The name of the purchaser “Lau Tsung Tai” is the name shown in the following land records:

- (i) The Land Registry Office, Memorial No. 132620, dated 27 July 1932; and
- (ii) Public Records Office, “Assignment of Subsection 1 of Section A of Kowloon Inland Lot No. 611 situate at Kowloon in the Colony of Hong Kong”, dated 27 July 1932 (File Ref.: HKRS 265-11B-1008(2)).

⁴ “New Houses for Kowloon. About 400 Flats to be Ready in August on Site of Chater Bungalow”, *Hong Kong Daily Press*, dated 29 April 1932.

were not sold in June 1933.⁵ In 1935, the re-registration of the re-developed K.I.L. 611 was formally completed by the then Land Registry Office.⁶ In a land record of the same year (1935), Lau Tsung-tai is also referred to as the sole registered owner of K.I.L. 611 S.A. ss. 1.⁷ On 16 February 1937, she entered into a “Lease of Kowloon Inland Lot No. 3731” with the government. This Lease contains a plan showing that the location of K.I.L. 3731 was the same as the old lot K.I.L. 611 S.A. ss. 1 at No. 190 Nathan Road. The verandahs and balconies of the Building facing Nathan Road and Austin Road respectively were indicated on the plan.

According to oral history interviews conducted on 6 June 2021 and 22 August 2021 with Virginia Chan⁸, granddaughter of Lau Tsung-tai, the sole registered owner as of 1932 and continuing until 1967, Lau Tsung-tai, whose hometown was Taishan (台山) in Guangdong province, was the mother of seven children, including Henry Chan/Chin (陳耀南), William Chan/Chin (陳耀芳), George Koock (Chan/Chin Yow Ching) (陳耀正) and Florence Chan/Chin (陳琮鳳).⁹ She ran a café in the United States where her children were born. In the late 1920s, she moved to Hong Kong with her family. She opened Café Evergreen (永青餐室) on the ground floor of the Building and the family lived on the upper floors.¹⁰ The exact year when the café was opened could not be ascertained. However, Ms. Chan reminisced that most of the customers of the café were army officers, naval officers or sailors, all in uniform.¹¹ Separately, according to the newspapers of the years 1934 to 1936,

⁵ “Last of Charter’s Bungalow: Four Remaining Sites Put Up for Auction. No Offers Received”, *South China Morning Post*, 29 June 1933.

⁶ Notification No. 890 dated 9 November 1935, *Hong Kong Government Gazette* dated 15 November 1935.

⁷ Public Records Office, “C.S.O. 1315-1922, K.I.L. No. 611, Chater’s Bungalow - 1. Question of Government Acquiring the - 2. Proposed Purchase by the Military Authorities for Building Officers’ Mess 3. Development of - ”, dated 3 January 1922 to 6 January 1936, Enclosure 20 and the minute sheet dated 23 September 1935 on this enclosure (File Ref.: HKRS58-1-106-1).

⁸ Appendix I to *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022) <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022. Two oral history interview records are provided in the Report. The first interview was conducted on 6 June 2021 by Alfred Ho, Carla Lung and Wendy Ng. The second interview was conducted on 22 August 2021 by Alfred Ho, Carla Lung, Rusty Choi, Paul Chan and Ally Fung.

⁹ *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022), p. 4, 8, 9 and 41. <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

¹⁰ The interview conducted by Alfred Ho, Carla Lung and Wendy Ng on 6 June 2021, p. 35 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022) <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

¹¹ The interview conducted by Alfred Ho, Carla Lung, Rusty Choi, Paul Chan and Ally Fung on 22 August 2021, p. 40 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022) <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk

a shop selling women’s clothing, known as “Messrs. Paul Rennet ET CIE” operated at Nos. 186 - 190 Nathan Road.¹²

According to the Japanese Title Deed (家屋所有權登錄申請書) of the Building dated 1942, the ground floor was occupied by a shop and the upper three storeys were for residential use.¹³ Lau Tsung-tai lived on the first floor at that time.¹⁴ Ms Chan, aged around eight in 1944, recounted in the oral history interview that Café Evergreen served the Japanese army during the occupation period¹⁵, though no information about the shop can be identified from various documents, namely the Japanese Title Deed, a telephone directory printed in 1943 and any other government records available for inspection.¹⁶

Apart from having a café serving the Japanese army, according to the oral history interviews conducted on 6 June 2021 and 22 August 2021, the Building was related to the resistance of the local residents against the Japanese Occupation and that two of the sons of Lau Tsung-tai, the Building’s owner, Henry Chan and William Chan, provided information for the British Army Aid Group (BAAG).¹⁷

According to the statements made by Chan Wai-mui (née Choy Wai-mui 蔡惠梅, widow of Henry Chan), William Chang (鄭維廉) and Lam Sik, who

In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

¹² Sources:

- (i) “Apartments to Let”, *South China Morning Post*, dated 15 December 1933;
- (ii) “PAUL RENNEN ET CIE”, *South China Morning Post*, dated 11 April 1934; and
- (iii) “Local and General”, *South China Morning Post*, dated 17 February 1936.

¹³ Public Records Office, “K.I.L. 3731 (Japanese Title Deeds)” (File Ref.: HKRS57-6-9796). “地階商店” and “貳叁四階住宅” were mentioned in the record. It is also noted from this title deed that Nathan Road was renamed from “彌敦道” to “香取通” (literally meaning “fragrant thoroughfare”).

¹⁴ 「九龍第一號『密偵』，黎傑昨日公開受審：威廉陳慘遭毒斃」，《香港工商日報》，1946年4月5日。

¹⁵ The interview conducted by Alfred Ho, Carla Lung, Rusty Choi, Paul Chan and Ally Fung on 22 August 2021, p. 45 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022) <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

¹⁶ Other restaurants used by the Japanese in Tsim Sha Tsui, included the canteens designated for the Japanese army at Nos. 13 – 15 Hankow Road, Nos. 12A & 13 Humphrey’s Building and No. 132 Chatham Road (all redeveloped). According to an intelligence summary prepared by BAAG, there was an “Army Canteen in Nathan Road”, and about 300 Japanese could be seen every Sunday buying things there. Café Evergreen cannot be identified in the telephone directory printed in 1943. Queen’s Café (皇后餐室) at No. 29 Nathan Road is the only café which appears in that directory. Evidence of the location of this “Army Canteen in Nathan Road” is yet to be available.

¹⁷ BAAG was an underground resistance organisation, which was active against Japan in Hong Kong and South China during the Second World War. Also see p. 11 – 12 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022). <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

were among the witnesses at the trial of Inouye Kanao (井上加奈雄), a Japanese war criminal, held in an Ordinary Criminal Session in 1947 at the then Supreme Court of Hong Kong, testified that both Henry Chan and William Chan worked for William Chang. William Chang was a wireless technician in Hong Kong before the Japanese Occupation from 1941 to 1945. In July 1942, William Chang joined BAAG and served as its agent in Waichow (Huizhou). Around early 1943, William Chang instructed Henry Chan to build a radio transmitter. William Chang tested the transmitter and used it to convey, from Hong Kong to his BAAG comrades in Waichow, information about the Japanese, including Japanese troop and ship movements, ammunition dumps, anti-aircraft gun posts and bombing targets. Lam Sik helped Henry Chan tune up the transmitter. Henry Chan once told Lam Sik that the radio transmitter was for sale, and Lam Sik believed this because he knew that many people sold transmitters to Waichow at that time. Indeed, the radio transmitter which Henry Chan and Lam Sik built was itself later sent to Waichow. In 1943, Henry Chan was arrested by the Japanese. He was released in the same year, but died within a few days after the release.¹⁸

While the statements made by the above witnesses reveal that Henry Chan worked for BAAG, there was no other information about what he actually did in the Building, including whether the radio transmitter was built or used there, or whether the Building was used for observing Japanese military activities in the surroundings.

There is no information as to whether William Chan lived in the Building. However, at the trial of accused Japanese collaborator, Lai Kit (黎傑), Lau Tsung-tai and her daughter Florence Chan (William Chan's younger sister), stated that William Chan was arrested in the Building in June 1944 by Lai Kit, George Wong (黃佐治) and a man known as "Fatty Lau" (肥仔劉), secret detectives of the Japanese Gendarmerie (憲兵部特務密探), accusing William Chan of being a spy. William Chan returned to the Building in August 1944 and hid there, going out only at night; but he did not return after going out in March 1945. Later, in June 1945, Lau Tsung-tai was informed that William Chan was in Kwong Wah Hospital. She visited him, finding that

¹⁸ Sources:

(i) Public Records Office, War Criminals – Inouye Kanao (File Ref. HKRS163-1-216), Enclosure 26(2), pp. 12 – 13; and

(ii) "Collaboration Case: Witnesses Tell of Arrest and Torture, *South China Morning Post*, 5 December 1946.

he was seriously injured. William passed away a few days later.¹⁹

As mentioned above, Chan Wai-mui (widow of Henry Chan, also referred as Choy Wai-mui) stated that her brother-in-law William Chan worked for William Chang who was an agent of BAAG. William Chan's granddaughter, Ms. Amy So, learnt from family members that her grandfather had a radio transmitter, camera and radio. He would lock himself in a room, not allowing anyone to enter. No one knew what he did in the room.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is believed that the radio set was associated with the transmission of secret information. The fact is that in July 1943, the Japanese government instructed owners of radio receiving sets to take them to the broadcasting station for testing and inspection. Those within the 545-200 metre wave length would be passed and permits issued, while others would be liable to confiscation.²¹

Some of the statements made by other witnesses reveal what kind of spying activities were carried out by other people. For instance, one stated that he had a short-wave receiving set to give wireless information about local movements of Japanese troops and shipping and the results of Allied bombing.²² Others sold radio parts to BAAG agents and some sent weather reports by radio to Waichow. Some, like William Chang, conveyed information about Japanese troop and ship movements, ammunition dumps, etc. to Waichow.²³ However, no information of such activities is available with respect to Henry and William Chan.²⁴

¹⁹ Sources:

- (i) "Twelve Overt Acts: Detailed Charges Brought Against Lai Kit", *South China Morning Post*, 5 April 1946;
- (ii) "Woman's Trying Ordeal: Stripped Off Clothing and Given Water Torture", *South China Morning Post*, 30 May 1946;
- (iii) "Stories of Torture: Further Evidence Against Alleged Collaborator", *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 1946;
- (iv) "Collaboration Case: Witnesses Tell of Arrest and Torture", *South China Morning Post*, 5 December 1946;
- (v) "Collaboration Case: Complete Denial Made by Accused in Box", *South China Morning Post*, 6 December 1946 ;
- (vi) 「九龍第一號『密偵』，黎傑昨日公開受審：威廉陳慘遭毒斃」，《香港工商日報》，1946年4月5日；
- (vii) 「附敵案第三宗開審，黎傑暴行比敵更甚」，《華僑日報》，1946年4月5日。

²⁰ At other times, when hearing someone knock at the door, William would hide in the cockloft (used for the storage of rice and sugar) on the second floor of the Building. Ms. Chan saw her father reaching the cockloft by a wooden ladder, which he would then place in the cockloft until he wanted to leave it. Also see footnote 30 and p. 12, 39 and 40 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022). <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong's website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

²¹ Colonial Office, "Registration of Radio Sets", Secret Hong Kong: Situation in Enemy Occupied Hong Kong, C.O. 129/590/22, p. 22.

²² Public Records Office, "Albert Edward Peveril Guest", War Criminals – Inouye Kanao (File Ref. HKRS163-1-216), Enclosure 26(2), p. 9.

²³ Public Records Office, "Lam Sik", War Criminals – Inouye Kanao (File Ref. HKRS163-1-216), Enclosure 26(2), p. 13.

²⁴ Henry Chan and William Chan both died before the end of the Second World War. Some court files were still classified as

Café Evergreen continued to operate after the war. Other uses of the Building are known from old newspapers and oral history interviews.²⁵

In 1967, Lau Tsung-tai transferred the ownership of the Building to her son George Kooock, alias Chin Yow-ching (陳耀正). In 1970 the Building was purchased by Kam Chan & Company Limited (錦燦有限公司), co-owned by a prominent entrepreneur Ma Kam-chan (馬錦燦) (1909 – 1984) and others. In 1972, the Building was sold to Tai Mau Company Limited (大懋有限公司), which was renamed Tai Sang Land Development Company (大生地產發展有限公司) in 1973 with Ma Kam-chan being its Chairman and Managing Director.²⁶ The Company held the Building for rental purposes. The ownership of the Building remains unchanged as of October 2022.

This four-storey Verandah Type Shophouse is located at the southeast corner of the junction of Austin and Nathan Roads so that its front and side elevations are very prominent. The Austin Road elevation has long balustraded balconies with rounded ends at each floor level with a matching typhoon canopy at parapet level. The parapet wall to the flat roof is decorated with vertical fins. There are two staircase bulkheads on the roof, one at each end. Windows and doors facing on to the balconies have moulded architraves. The bottom of the canopy and the balcony of each floor are decorated with mouldings. The front elevation facing Nathan Road features faux masonry columns and verandahs which have been enclosed by glazing. The parapet is in the same style as the side elevation and features a flagpole in the centre with a triangular shaped base. The faux masonry columns are also triangular shaped at the top. The rear elevation is rather plain with regularly spaced windows. The design of the exterior of the Building displays Art Deco and Neo-classical influences. The Building as a whole is an eclectic mix.

**Architectural
Merit**

closed files and restricted from inspection at the time of this survey.

²⁵ The third floor of the Building was used at least once to organise an auction of goods, such as chairs, tables and cupboards (“Public Auction”, *South China Morning Post*, 11 November 1945). At other times, a dental clinic operated on the third floor (*South China Morning Post*, 16 November 1945 and 4 February 1948, and p. 31 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022)). Ms. Chan recounted that Lau Tsung-tai had sold candies and biscuits there and she mentioned that the married couple Cheung Ying and Mui Yee (both were film stars) once lived on the second floor. (p. 31 of *Historic Building Appraisal Report for 190 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui* (June 2022)) <https://walkin.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/190_Nathan_Assessment_Final_v2_20220604-1.pdf> uploaded on Walk In Hong Kong’s website on 5 June 2022, accessed on 3 October 2022.

²⁶ As a businessman, Ma was one of the leading market providers of warehousing spaces, cold storage and general godown services in Hong Kong between the 1950s and 1970s. He also founded the Tai Sang Bank in the 1930s. As a community leader, Ma served on the Board of Directors of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in 1948 and 1949, and was Chairman in 1951.

The social value of the Building to the community lies in the commercial role it has played in this busy part of Tsim Sha Tsui. Being situated on a prominent corner it is quite a well-known local landmark with some local interest.

***Social Value
& Local Interest***

The Building is within walking distance of other historic buildings and structures, including the military buildings and structures at the Former Whitfield Barracks (前威菲路軍營, four barrack blocks and one battery), the Hong Kong Observatory (天文台, Declared Monument), the Former Marine Police Headquarters Compound (前水警總部, Declared Monument), the Signal Tower at Blackhead Point (大包米訊號塔, Declared Monument), Rosary Church (玫瑰堂), St. Andrew's Church Compound (聖安德烈堂), the Former Kowloon British School (前九龍英童學校, Declared Monument), St. Mary's Canossian College (嘉諾撒聖瑪利書院), Kowloon Cricket Club (九龍木球會), the Ex-Portuguese Community School (Escola Camões) (前賈梅士學校), the Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower (前九廣鐵路鐘樓, Declared Monument), and the Peninsula Hotel (半島酒店) etc. All serve as reminders of the important roles Tsim Sha Tsui has played in the development of the Kowloon Peninsula from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

Group Value

The Building is a surviving shophouse or residence in Tsim Sha Tsui with a direct relationship with the Japanese Occupation. Other buildings and locations in the area, also associated with the Japanese Occupation including the Former Whitfield Barracks, the Former Marine Police Headquarters Compound and the Peninsula Hotel were occupied by the Japanese army and navy for military and administrative purposes.

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

The Building was designed with Western-style decorative features which is quite rare for a shophouse. However, its authenticity has been severely affected due to extensive alterations and spatial re-organisations, including change of internal layout, removal of partition walls, replacement of original windows and doors with modern ones, modern shop frontages, removal of old servant staircases and construction of new concrete staircases with balustrades. In addition, the access to the staircase facing Nathan Road from the ground floor has been rearranged to the rear of the Building to maximise the shop frontage facing Nathan Road. The new connection corridor of the staircase to the new access entrance/exit formed at the rear of the Building was also constructed at the original open backyard.

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