

Historic Building Appraisal
Nos. 3-4 Li Kwan Avenue,
Tai Hang, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

The exact construction year of Nos. 3-4 Li Kwan Avenue (利群道) is not known, but according to government records they were built between 1931 and 1933, whereas Li Kwan Avenue is a private street established in 1931. According to an archival document “家屋所有權登錄申請書” compiled during the Japanese Occupation (1941-1945), the houses at Nos. 3-4 Li Kwan Avenue were built in Western style with a garage in the basement. The houses have changed hands a number of times over the years. Chi Owyang (歐陽奇) (1897 – 1988), who moved to Hong Kong from Guangzhou in 1938 after Guangzhou fell into the hands of the Japanese, was the owner of the houses between the early 1930s and early 1940s. He was Manager of China State Bank (國華銀行) in Hong Kong and Canton at that time. However, neither he nor his family lived in the houses. In 1942, they moved to Zhanjiang (湛江) in Guangdong Province, which was under the jurisdiction of the French government. In 1943, Chi Owyang became the General Manager of Overseas Chinese Union Bank (華僑聯合銀行) in Chongqing (重慶) and sold the houses at Nos. 3-4 Li Kwan Avenue.¹

*Historical
Interest*

The buildings are a pair of three-storey semi-detached houses built on a raised platform with a garage at basement level. The design of the building demonstrates some Neo-classical influences. The walls are finished with natural unpainted rendering (possibly Shanghai plaster) grooved to imitate stonework. The front facade is symmetrical with a central pedimented entrance porch at street level. Windows are large and regularly spaced, originally wooden casements with fanlights in a transomed tripartite arrangement with small glazing squares. Unfortunately some have been replaced with modern aluminum units. The windows have moulded cills and canopies. At parapet level there is a wide overhanging cornice which curves up in the centre of facade to form an elliptical pediment. The side and rear walls match the front facade in appearance. Ornamental ironwork can be seen in the security grilles to doors and windows and

*Architectural
Merit*

¹ Chi Owyang was born in 1897 in Chaozhou (潮州) on Mainland China. When he was one, his parents brought him to Bangkok, Thailand. But later he was back to Mainland China, beginning his secondary school education in Shantau (汕頭) of Guangdong Province in 1917 and graduating in Commerce and Banking from Fudan University (復旦大學) in Shanghai in 1921. In 1943, he became General Manager of Overseas Chinese Union Bank (華僑聯合銀行) in Chongqing until 1946, when the Bank's headquarters moved from Chongqing to Guangzhou. Then in 1947, he went to Singapore to start the groundwork for the establishment of Overseas Union Bank there (華聯銀行). The Bank, opened in 1949, was the first bank established in post-war Singapore. Owyang was its first Manager, then its first General Manager and a Director until his retirement in 1968. He had established a wide social network with Thai bankers. Many Thai banks maintained a Singapore Dollar account with the Bank. In 1971, Owyang, with his proficiency in Thai, was appointed as Singapore's Ambassador to Thailand (新加坡駐泰國大使). He stayed in Bangkok until passing away in 1988.

the railings to the front terrace.

This pair of houses is a rare piece of 1930s built heritage worthy of preservation. Some obvious alterations such as replacement of windows have occurred, otherwise the external walls retain much of their original appearance.

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

The social value of the houses to the community is not apparent, however they are of local interest as examples of typical town houses of the 1930s in prosperous Tai Hang.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The houses at Nos. 3-4 Li Kwan Avenue are directly next to No. 2 Li Kwan Avenue (Grade 3) and geographically close to No. 4 Wang Fung Terrace (宏豐臺) (Grade 3). Other historic buildings located nearby include Lin Fa Temple (蓮花宮) (Declared Monument), Haw Par Mansion (虎豹別墅) (Grade 1), St. Mary's Church (聖瑪利亞堂) (Grade 1), St. Paul's Convent Church (聖保祿修院) (Grade 1), St. Paul's Primary Catholic School (聖保祿天主教小學) (Grade 2), Tung Wah Eastern Hospital (東華東院) (Grade 2) and Shing Kwong Church (聖光堂) (proposed Grade 2).

Group Value

REFERENCES

Document Records at The Land Registry Office, Hong Kong

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