Historic Building Appraisal

No. 118 Wellington Street, Central, Hong Kong

Historical Interest

Wellington Street was laid out in the early days of British colonial rule. It was in the core of the commercial-cum-residential area of the City of Victoria. There have been various trades here, and shops can be found in the adjacent lanes. No. 118 Wellington Street stands on Inland Lot 173 s.A ss.1 s.A. The lease on this landed property commenced in 1844 and this must have been one of the earliest lots to be sold. It is not known when the lot was first built on. Possibly, there was an earlier building which the present building replaced.

No. 118 Wellington Street has been used as the main offices of two Chinese-run shops over the past 90 years. It was the site of Ching Loong Bakery (正隆餅家) since at least 1923. There was a change of user of the site in 1952, when the Bakery moved out to make way for Nam Wah Ink Company (南華油墨公司). During the change-of-use process A&A (alterations & additions) works were carried out to the pre-war building.

Ching Loong Bakery (正隆餅家) (1923 - 1952)

No. 118 Wellington Street was the main office of a bakery which was founded in 1889 and operated under the firm name of “Ching Loong” (正隆). In July 1923, Mr Ho Hong Po (何康甫), in co-partnership with Mr Ng Min Sau (吳勉修) bought Inland Lot No. 173 s.A ss.1 s.A from a Chinese woman at the price of $45,000, where they set up the bakery office.

On 20 January 1925, Mr Ho Hong Po (何康甫) filed an application for the registration of a trade mark for “the Ching Loong Bakery, of No. 118, Wellington Street, Victoria, Hongkong”. With its strict adherence to quality, the “Sunflower” Brand (葵花牌麵飽 餅 干中西 餅 食) gradually gained a reputation and became synonymous with quality. Founded in 1889, Ching Loong Bakery grew from a small shop to a household name renowned for its products such as moon cakes and bread freshly made daily to clients. The Bakery was carrying out business in four premises in HK Island and Kowloon by 1939.

During the period of Japanese rule (1941-1945), Ching Loong Bakery at No. 118 Wellington Street was re-registered by the House Registration Office set up by the Japanese to re-register deeds which were previously registered by the British administration before 1941. Its owners, which comprised members of the Ho (何) and Ng (吳) families, stayed in Hong Kong. One of them, Mr Ng Iu-sai (吳曜西) was described in Japanese archives as “正隆果子店支配人”.

The Japanese surrender in August 1945 brought to an end almost 4 years of war and utter misery in Hong Kong, and the beginning of an interim military

administration that lasted until 1 May 1946. After more than half a century of development, in June 1947 Ching Loong Bakery was incorporated under the Hong Kong Companies Ordinance, 1932, and became a limited company. In December 1952, the head office of the Bakery was removed from No. 118 to No. 62 Wellington Street, ground floor.

A managing director of Ching Loong Bakery, Ltd., Mr Ng Iu-cheung (吳曜章) was a distinguished old boy of Queen's College (皇仁書院) with which the Ng Iu Cheung Memorial Scholarship was endowed and named after him. In July 1947, the owners of Ching Loong Bakery participated in a territory-wide fund raising campaign in response to the urgency of relief work in aid of the victims who suffered from torrential rains in Guangdong (廣東). Through a charity sale of biscuits, a total of $1,105 was raised and all went to the relief fund. The story was headlined in Wah Kiu Yat Po (華僑日報).

Nam Wah Ink Company (南華油墨公司) (1952 - nowadays)

The ink company was founded Mr Tsui Woon (徐 桓). Proficient in both Chinese and English, Mr Tsui had worked for a law firm, Johnson Stokes & Master (孖士打律師行) as a clerical staff before he set up a printing house at No. 134 Hollywood Road as a sole proprietorship by the 1930s. In the 1940s he focused his business on the provision of ink (raw materials) for printing. Like his father, Mr Tsui thought highly of the education of his sons, who studied in Wah Yan College (華仁書院) and eventually took up the baton of his business.

When the ink company first opened for business, its office was located in No. 27 Cochrane Street (閣麟街). After he acquired the Wellington Street site, Mr Tsui engaged an architect to convert the pre-war building into the present office of the Nam Wah Ink Company. The A&A works (dated 1955) involved the replacement of timber joists and floor boards by reinforced concrete ones and the addition of upper-floor balconies which are bonded into old in cement mortar. A new staircase is provided for accessing to the upper floors.

In its heyday, the ink company had business dealings with publishing houses such as Chung Hwa Book Store (中華書局) and Commercial Press (商務印書館). The other customers included Hong Kong newspaper offices such as Wah Kiu Yat Po (華僑日報) in Hollywood Road, Kung Sheung Daily News (工商日報) in Des Voeux Road Central, Hsin Sheng Wen Po (新生晚報) in Li Yuen Street East, and Heung Kong Sze Po (香港時報) in Gloucester Road.

The proprietor of Nam Wah Ink Company was full of benevolence towards the community. To take one example, Mr Tsui Woon (徐 桓) donated HK$500 on behalf of the ink company in response to a fund-raising campaign in 1969 to promote poor children's education in Hong Kong. The other fund contributor which also donated $500 was Sik Sik Yuen (嗇色園), the managing body of Wong Tai Sin Temple. These were headlined in Wah Kiu Yat Po (華僑日報).

Architectural Merit

This 4-storey shophouse is built on an elongated rectangular plan with narrow frontage facing Wellington Street. It is in the form of Verandah Shophouse that the upper floor balconies project over the pavement, but unlike conventional shophouses there is no covered walkway and no vertical columns in front of the shop on the ground floor. One of its distinctive features is that the 1/F and 2/F are cantilevered out to form open air balconies. There is a circular porthole window at the rear elevation on 2/F. The side staircase with its green and yellow polished terrazzo handrail and skirting has survived. Some old features and relics of the ink company are retained, such as floor tiles of 1955 and a glass mirror presented as a gift by Dainippon Printing Ink Manufacturing Co., Ltd. (大日本油墨公司) when the ink company first opened for business.

The shop front is characterized by calligraphy featuring the Chinese name of the ink company "南華油墨公司" and the main businesses of the company "專辦各國名廠油墨洋紙印刷材料". They were handwritten by Mr. Su Shi-jie (蘇世傑) (1883-1975) who joined the revolutionary league of Tung Meng Hui (同盟會) in his youth and eventually became a republican politician (1910s to 1930s) and then a great calligrapher. In 1975, the Hong Kong Art and Museum Gallery (香港美術博物館) organized an exhibition titled《蘇世傑書法展》.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

Its particular design is probably unique as it involves a blending of pre-war high ceiling plan and post-war architectural elements including the upper-floor open air balconies cantilevered over the pavement, and there is nothing in the vicinity of the same type. Few alterations appear to have been carried out since 1955. The authentic building materials and artifacts of the ink company remind us of the old charm of shophouse and the character of the building as it was.

Social Value & Local Interest

The old bakery and ink company are owned and managed by local Chinese elites who were trained in English education. Being more receptive to western culture and values than most fellows of their times, they were examples of a new social group that emerged in early 20th century Hong Kong and inclined for innovations and new commitments.

The Nam Wah Ink Company has been operating for about 60 years and it is recorded in a 2013 publication《守下留情 —中西區老店扎記 》issued by the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage (長春社文化古蹟資源中心) in collaboration with the Central and Western District Council (中西區區議會).

Group Value

No. 118 Wellington Street stands tightly adjacent to another shop known as Wing Woo Grocery (永和 雜 貨 舖) in the midst of a street market. It has group value with the old shophouse at No. 99F Wellington Street (Proposed Grade 2) which form a group of tangible cultural links with the past in Central.