

Historic Building Appraisal

Nos. 88 & 90 Staunton Street, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

**Historical
Interest**

The houses, built in 1951, are situated at Nos. 88 and 90 Staunton Street (士丹頓街).¹ It is one of the oldest streets developed by the British on Hong Kong Island, and can be identified on a map dated 1845. Staunton Street is bounded by Old Bailey Street (奧卑利街) at one end and Shing Wong Street (城皇街) at the other, and intersects with Shelley Street (些利街), Graham Street (嘉咸街), Elgin Street (伊利近街) and Aberdeen Street (鴨巴甸街). The Chinese community, mainly comprising newcomers from mainland China, was first established along the northern coast of Hong Kong Island in the early 1840s, with settlements concentrated in the Upper (上市場), Middle (中市場) and Lower Bazaars (下市場).² The Middle Bazaar was located very close to the areas inhabited by Europeans. In view of the cultural differences between the Chinese and European communities and the undesirable hygienic condition of the Chinese tenements, the government carried out a segregation policy and relocated the Chinese residents of the Middle Bazaar to the Taipingshan area crossed by Lower Lascar Row (下摩囉街), Hollywood Road (荷里活道) and Taipingshan Street (now known as Tai Ping Shan Street) (太平山街). By September 1844, all the old structures in the Middle Bazaar had been removed. Subsequently, the places to the east of Aberdeen Street in Central were inhabited by Europeans, and Staunton Street was no exception. The landlords and occupiers of Staunton Street were overwhelmingly Europeans before the late 1860s, when this situation began to change with the rise of wealthy Chinese merchants.

An interim assessment of rates for a period from September 1896 to June 1897 shows that by that time the even numbered house lots on Staunton Street only spanned from Nos. 2 to 62. Nos. 88 and 90 are first identified in the earliest available map dated 1897,³ when the perception that Aberdeen Street was the

¹ It was said that Staunton Street was named after Sir George Thomas Staunton (1781 – 1859). From 1792 to 1794, he accompanied his father, Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737 – 1801), to China as the latter was appointed secretary in the first British mission to China led by Lord George Macartney. George Thomas Staunton began learning Chinese as a child and thus acquired a good knowledge of the language. From 1798 to 1817, he, the only Englishman of the East India Company in Canton (now known as Guangzhou) who could understand Chinese, was an interpreter for the company, later a member of the East India Committee, and finally the chief of the company in Canton. His publications include the translation of the Qing legal code (大清律例), the first book translated from Chinese into English, in 1810. He also co-founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland with scholar Henry Thomas Colebrooke in 1823. From 1816 to 1817, he was a ranking member of Britain's second mission to China with Lord Amherst and Sir Henry Ellis. From 1818 to 1852, he was a Member of Parliament in England, and advocated the First Opium War (1839 – 1842).

² The main business centre near the coast was called Lower Bazaar (下市場), with the present Jervois Street (蘇杭街) in Sheung Wan as the main street. The Upper Bazaar (上市場) was located on the hillside at the back of Lower Bazaar, generally referred to as Taipingshan (太平山). The main streets were approximately the present Lower and Upper Lascar Rows (上摩囉街) (下摩囉街). The Middle Bazaar (中市場) was an area including the present Peel (卑利街), Graham (嘉咸街), Gutzlaff (吉士笠街), Cochrane (閣麟街), Gage (結志街) and Gough Streets (歌賦街) in Central. At the foot of this area were some marine lots.

³ The *Interim Valuation*, 1896 – 1897 (for a period from September 1896 to June 1897), with Nos. 2 to 62 indicated, is the only available record for the year 1897. The available rates records for the year 1897 are thus incomplete. The valuation

dividing line between the Chinese and European communities had indeed been fading from around the mid-1860s. Probably it had been more common to refer to the neighbourhood of Staunton Street as “卅間” (literally meaning 30 houses) from sometime around the turn of the twentieth century.

While the exact dating of the name “30 houses” is not known, it can, for instance, be identified in an English newspaper dated 1919 and a Chinese one dated 1927. In other words, it was no later than the 1910s that Staunton Street and its neighbourhood had formed a local community known as “卅間”. According to local residents, the story goes that a cluster of 30 stone houses on Bridges Street (必列啫士街), acquired by a wealthy merchant, had been a local landmark. The local residents then used the name “卅間” to denote the local community approximately extending from Shelley Street (些利街) to Tank Lane (水池巷). At present, the name “30 houses” and its demarcation are still respected; for example, the annual Yu Lan Ghost Festival (盂蘭勝會) is organized by a local association named “中區卅間街坊盂蘭會” (or known as “Central 30 houses *kaifong* Yu Lan association” in English, which has its office at No. 62 Staunton Street). The ritual boundary follows the aforesaid informal demarcation of “30 houses”. Staunton Street falls within this boundary.

Unfortunately, most of the timber and brick buildings in the area of “30 houses” had been so devastated by bombing, looting, flooding and rainstorms during the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945) that the area was then described as “卅間廢墟” (literally meaning 30 houses in ruins). In 1947, the government appointed well-known businessmen and community leaders, including Ho Kom-tong (何甘棠) (1866 – 1950) and Ma Tsui-chiu (馬敘朝) (1878 – 1959), to advise on the rehabilitation of the community and reconstruction of the buildings there. Each new house was expected to be of four storeys and accommodate some 50 residents. The existing Nos. 88 and 90 Staunton Street were rebuilt against this background of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The plot of land on which the present-day Nos. 88 and 90 now stand was, first registered between 1844 and 1930 as Inland Lot No. 157 (or I.L. 157). In 1930, I.L. 157 was divided into two new land lots, namely I.L. 2984 for the house lot of No. 88 and I.L. 2174 for No. 90. Lam Yu-tat (or Lam Yue-tat) (林如達) acquired I.L. 2984 (i.e. No. 88, with a lot area of 625 sq. ft.) on 3 October 1930 and Li Yau-chuen (李右泉) (1861 – 1940) acquired I.L. 2174 (i.e. No. 90, with a lot area of 784 sq. ft.) on 18 November 1930.⁴ No. 88 changed hands several times between

books dated from 1898 to 1904 are now missing records.

⁴ Lam Yu-tat was a merchant, and operated a Nam Yuen Restaurant on the ground floor of No. 112 Wellington Street.

1934 and 1947 until it was sold in 1950.⁵ Regarding No. 90, after Li Yau-chuen passed away in 1940, his family members became the registered owners in the capacity of the executors of his will until they sold it in 1950.⁶ According to the Japanese Title Deeds of 1942 (昭和十七年), No. 90 Staunton Street was a three-storey (參階) shop-cum-residential building (商店及住宅) constructed of brickwork and timber (煉瓦及木造), with some damages (小破).⁷

The houses both changed hands on 31 May 1950, when I.L. 2984 for No. 88 Staunton Street was acquired by Chan Kai (陳楷/陳佳) (1885 – 1967)⁸ and his wife, Poon Pui-ching (or Pun Pui-ching) (潘佩清), while I.L. 2174 for No. 90 passed to Kong Fook-to (江福桃), wife of Shum Wai-yau (岑維休) (1897 – 1985).⁹ Chan Kai, Shum Wai-yau and others co-founded a Chinese newspaper named *Overseas Chinese Daily News* (華僑日報) in 1925. Nos. 88 and 90 Staunton Street were within walking distance of the paper's offices at Yuen On Lane (元安里) and Hollywood Road.¹⁰

I.L. 2174 was on the list of estates in the probate of the last will and testament of Li Yau-chuen. According to the probate, Li Yau-chuen (or Tsun, or Chun) (李右泉), alias Li Shiu-yuen (李肇源), Li Siu-yuen (李少源), Li Yuen (李源), Li Yee (李怡), Li Kai (李楷), Li Shun-shing (李慎誠), Li Cheung (李祥), Li Ngoi (李藹), was a pawnbroker, with a registered address of No. 66C Bonham Road, and passed away on 9 September 1940. Li Yau-chuen was both a successful businessman and prominent community leader. For example in the 1930s, Li owned about 80 percent of the pawnshops in Hong Kong and was dubbed “King of Pawnshops” (當舖大王). Besides, he had been Treasurer, Director and finally Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (華商總會). In serving the community, he was, for instance, a member of the Board of Directors of the Tung Wah Hospital (東華醫院) in 1897 and 1899, and since 1906 he had become a permanent advisor of the institution. He was also Director of the Public Dispensary (公立醫局). In 1929, he was awarded the Order of C.B.E. to recognise his contribution in liaising with the Guangdong government in Guangzhou during the General Strike (省港大罷工) in 1925.

⁵ No. 88 was acquired by Ho Kit in 1934, Ho Li Shi in 1938, Lau Chok-wai in 1939 and Fong Tse Wing-mui in 1947.

⁶ Li Shum Shi (李岑氏), Li Ka-shu (李家恕), Li Ka-shi (李家仕), and Li Ka Ngok (李家萼) were the executors of Li Yau-chuen's will.

⁷ Public Records Office, 「香港占領地總督部家屋登錄所」(Ref.: HKRS57-6-6252). The Japanese Title Deeds of No. 88 Staunton Street is missing.

⁸ Chan Kai was a member of the business staff of the *South China Morning Post*. Then in 1925, he co-founded *Overseas Chinese Daily* (renamed *Wah Kiu Yat Po* in the late 1920s) with Shum Wai-yau. After the Second World War, he devoted much time to a wide range of business activities in addition to the affairs of the newspaper. He developed properties and started many business ventures. For instance, he operated motor boat services (民力電船公司), Universal Pharmaceutical Laboratories Ltd. (環球製藥有限公司), a brick manufacturing factory in Tsing Yi (青衣磚廠), etc. Chan had also made generous donation for the construction of the office building of the Tsing Yi Rural Committee (青衣鄉事委員會會所) and a school initiated by that committee.

⁹ Apart from founding *Overseas Chinese Daily*, Shum Wai-yau was also Chairman of the Board of Yew Sang Hong Ltd., a Director of the Hongkong and Yaumati Ferry Co. Ltd., etc. He was also active in serving the community. For instance, an education fund for children was set up under the auspices of *Wah Kiu Yat Po*. It was named “華僑日報讀者救童助學基金” in Chinese and “Wah Kiu Yat Po Readers' Scholarships Fund” in English. He was also Chairman of the Sze Yap Clansmen's Association, Chairman of the Newspaper Society of Hongkong, Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the Causeway Bay Kaifong Welfare Association, a Director of the Anti-Tuberculosis Association, and a member on the Executive Committee of the Hongkong Society for the Protection of Children. Shum was awarded the O.B.E. in 1956 in recognition of his public services in Hong Kong.

¹⁰ Yuen On Lane could be accessed round the corner of No. 116 Hollywood Road. 「元安里 Yuen On Lane 在荷李活道 116 號側」, 見「日用便覽 – 街道指南」, 《香港年鑑》, 1952 年第五回中卷, 頁 2 (香港: 香港華僑日報, 1952)。

Overseas Chinese Daily News was indeed the successor of *Wah Sheung Chung Wui Po* (華商總會報, also known as *Chinese Commercial News*), a commercial paper published by the Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce (香港華商總會) at Jervois Street.¹¹ In May 1925, Shum Wai-yau and Chan Kai purchased the paper together with its machinery from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, whose chairman was Li Yau-chuen at that time. Both Shum and Chan had worked in the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*,¹² and later set up the *Overseas Chinese Daily News* in 1925, which was aimed to “supply the Chinese public with a really modern paper – a paper run, as far as possible, on the same lines as the Hongkong English dailies”.¹³ Publication under the name of *Wah Sheung Chung Wui Po* continued at Jervois Street following the takeover. The paper was then relocated to No. 1 Yuen On Lane and renamed *Overseas Chinese Daily News*. The first issue under the name of *Overseas Chinese Daily News* was published on 5 June 1925. It broke the old tradition among the Chinese dailies of having a holiday on Sunday, and maintained a seven-day issue week. In the late 1920s, the English name was changed to *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, which was a transliteration of the Chinese name. According to business directories dating from the 1920s to 1940s, the editorial and publishing offices were housed at No. 1 Yuen On Lane, while the business department was at Nos. 108 – 110 Hollywood Road. But according to the business registration record (商業登記) created by the Japanese in 1944 (昭和十九年), No. 106 Hollywood Road had also been its office by that time. To mark its 25th anniversary and meet its plan for expansion, *Wah Kiu Yat Po* called for construction of a five-storey concrete building to replace the premises at Yuen On Lane and Hollywood Road in June 1950.¹⁴ The new building at No. 110 Hollywood Road was completed in 1952.¹⁵ It was further enlarged and rebuilt in 1969.¹⁶

¹¹ *Wah Sheung Chung Wui Po* was first published in a house in Des Voeux Road Central and later removed to Jervois Street.

¹² Shum Wai-yau joined the *SCMP* as a clerk in 1915 and resigned in 1933 from his post as chief Chinese Assistant. Chan Kai was a member of the business staff of the *SCMP* before the war and remained its cashier until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941.

¹³ “Modern Paper: New Chinese Journal – The Overseas Chinese Daily News”, *South China Morning Post*, 5 June 1925.

Chung Ngoi San Po (中外新報, 1858 – 1919) was the Chinese version of the *Daily Press* (孖刺西報) and the first Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong. Due to financial difficulties, it was taken over by Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce in 1919 and became *Wah Sheung Chung Wui Po* (華商總會報). *Wah Tze Yat Po* (華字日報, 1864 – 1941, 1946) established by Chen Aiting (陳藹亭) was the second one. Another one was *Tsun Wan Yat Po* (循環日報, 1874 – 1941, 1945 – 1946) set up by Wang Tao (王韜).

¹⁴ The editorial and publishing office was temporarily accommodated by the Confucian Society next door, while the business office at No. 90 Hollywood Road.

¹⁵ Among the guests attending the reception celebrating its opening on 6 February 1952 were the then Governor Sir Alexander Grantham (葛量洪) (1947 – 1957) and Lady Grantham.

¹⁶ The then Governor Sir David Trench (戴麟趾) (1964 – 1971) attended the opening ceremony on 22 September 1969.

According to a former resident of No. 90 Staunton Street, Shum Wai-yau lived on 1/F (or the second storey) of the house from 1951 to 1953. He moved out in 1953 as he did not want to live near the Bridges Market, which was opened on 30 April 1953. The interviewee and her family members then rented and lived in the flat previously occupied by Shum from 1953, and had lived there for around 53 years from then on.¹⁷ It is believed that No. 90 Staunton Street, which was within walking distance of the head office of *Wah Kiu Yat Po* at No. 110 Hollywood Road, had only provided temporary accommodation for Shum. According to the aforesaid business registration record of 1944, No. 13 Wun Sha Street was the residential address of Shum Wai-yau and Kong Fook-to (owner of No. 90).¹⁸ It was then indicated in the land documents dated 31 May 1950 that No. 90 was acquired by Kong Fook-to (Shum's wife) of No. 13 Wun Sha Street. Shum Wai-yau then moved from Wun Sha Street to No. 15 Tin Hau Temple Road around 1954. In an interview in 2003, his son, Shum Choi-sang (1922 – 2016) (岑才生), said that he had been living in Tai Hang, including sometime on Tin Hau Temple Road, with his family members since his days as a primary school student up to the time of the interview. Besides, 2/F (or the third storey) of No. 90 had been occupied by the family of a senior staff of *Wah Kiu Yat Po* for about 20 years, while 3/F was shared by a number of the newspaper's staff. Kong Fook-to sold No. 90 to a company in 1990.¹⁹

As for No. 88 Staunton Street, while it is certain that it was the property of Chan Kai and his wife, Poon Pui-ching, from 1950 to 1967, it was said that Chan Kai had lived there and moved out around the same time as Shum Wai-yau. Besides, a bonesetter often consulted by the staff of *Wah Kiu Yat Po* resided and practised on 1/F of No. 88. In fact, according to the said Japanese record dated 1944, No. 31 Wun Sha Street was then the registered residential address of Chan Kai and Poon Pui-ching. In 1950, according to land records, No. 88 was acquired by Chan Kai and Poon Pui-ching of No. 31 Wun Sha Street in Tai Hang. That registered address remained unchanged until Chan Kai and Poon Pui-ching passed away in 1967 and 1966 respectively. Chan paid a visit to the newspaper's office on Hollywood Road the evening before his death in his villa named “龍溪寄廬” on Tsing Yi on 18 August 1967. No. 88 then passed into the ownership of his

¹⁷ The story goes that the interviewee's mother sold eggs at a stall off the shopfronts of Nos. 88 & 90. One day in 1953, Shum Wai-yau's amah told her mother that Shum was about to move out from 1/F of No. 90. Since her mother wanted a larger flat with better living condition for a sick mom, it was decided to rent 1/F of No. 90. The interviewee was eight years old that year. The family had lived there for about 53 years from then on. The interviewee used to refer to the ground floor as the first storey. She lived on the floor above the ground floor, i.e. 1/F or the second storey of No. 90 Staunton Street.

¹⁸ According to the business registration record (商業登記) created by the Japanese in 1944 (昭和十九年), No. 31 Wun Sha Street was the residential address of Chan Kai, while No. 13 Wun Sha Street was Shum Wai-yau's.

¹⁹ It was acquired by Grace Field Development Limited, with Wong Fook-tai and Lai Wan-yuk as directors.

nephew Chan See (陳是) in his capacity of the executor of Chan Kai's will until it was sold to a merchant in 1971.²⁰

As mentioned above, on 31 May 1950, No. 88 was acquired by Chan Kai and Poon Pui-ching (his wife), while No. 90 was acquired by Kong Fook-to (Shum's wife). Given the relationship of the Chan and Shum families as close working partners, it was thus not surprising that they joined hands to re-develop Nos. 88 and 90. The architectural drawings prepared by the architect, A. H. Basto (Antonio Hermenegildo Basto) (1894 – 1979), in 1950 covered both house lots.²¹

*Architectural
Merit*

The houses were constructed for domestic purposes, with a Domestic Permit issued by the Building Authority on 17 February 1951, which describes them as “one Chinese house”.²² Externally, the four-storey houses, each with a cockloft for storage between the ground and first floors, are of simple and modest design. The front facade's design reflects an environmental concern with achieving sufficient natural lighting and ventilation through the row of timber windows and the open grilles under two of the window panels on each upper floor (1/F to 3/F). Openings were also designed at the middle staircore in the form of vertical fins, which are quite commonly found in post-war tenement houses. Besides, the curving balconies at the rear of each house also add visual interest to the exterior.

Internally, the houses are on a roughly mirrored plan, with a shared staircase and shared party walls.²³ The entrance, the staircase handrail and the linings of steps are finished with terrazzo. A number of hardwood doors with fanlights providing access to the flats still exist. The plans of each flat on the upper floors (1/F to 3/F) show layouts comprising a common area and bedrooms, as well as a kitchen and a washroom at the rear portion. The floors of 1/F to 3/F are finished with red and white cement floor tiles. Some of the fixed partitions defining the spaces for bedrooms, which have openings and grilles for ventilation, are still identifiable. Each kitchen was provided with a built-in stove with a flue connected to the chimney on the rooftop. Some of the built-in stoves can still be identified. The tenants of No. 88 could enter the washroom, which was in a corner of the kitchen, through the doorway of the adjoining store (or a bedroom for

²⁰ The merchant was Tsang Tin-fat (曾天發) of No. 252 Sai Yeung Choi Street.

²¹ A. H. Basto was the architect of St. Anthony's Catholic Church (聖安多利堂) at No. 69A Pok Fu Lam Road (Grade 2), for instance.

²² Domestic Permit issued by the Building Authority on 17 February 1951 (B.O.O. Ref. No. 3/2493/50).

²³ As mentioned before, the plot of land “I.L. 2984” on which No. 88 was situated had a lot area of 625 square feet, while that of No. 90 on I.L. 2174 covered 784 square feet. A ground floor plan shows that No. 88 was 15 feet and 10 inches wide, whereas No. 90 was 20 feet and 3 inches wide.

No. 90), then via a curving balcony and finally by the doorway of the washroom itself. As discovered during site inspection, some of the doorways had been filled in and new doorways opened, and the tenants would instead have entered the washroom through the adjoining kitchen. A plan dated 1951 for No. 90 shows that a washroom would be equipped with a “2 gallons iron water tank automatic for flushing cistern”.²⁴

A Chinese Overseas Clinic (華僑診療所) was opened at the ground floor of No. 88.²⁵ Regarding No. 90, a Po Pan teahouse (寶賓茶室) was first opened at the ground floor and later a Po Pan butcher’s shop (寶賓肉食公司) from the 1970s to the 2000s, with a grocery round the corner. The name plaque of “寶賓茶室” finished with terrazzo is still in place, and “Po Pan” had been an iconic shop name for decades and is still remembered by local residents.

There are a number of declared monuments and graded historic buildings in the close vicinity, such as the Chinese Y.M.C.A of Hong Kong (Central Building) (香港中華基督教青年會(中央會所)) (Grade 1), Bridges Street Market (必列啫士街市場) (Grade 3), the former Married Police Quarters (前已婚警察宿舍) (Grade 3), Man Mo Temple Compound (文武廟) (declared monument), Ladder Street (樓梯街) (Grade 1), Nos. 26A - C Graham Street (Grade 3) as well as the former Central Police Station Compound (中區警署), Central Magistracy (中央裁判司署) and Victoria Prison (域多利監獄) (declared monuments).

Nos. 88 & 90 Staunton Street are a good example of post-war tenement houses. While a number of elements of historic interest still exist, such as the terrazzo finishes at the entrance and on the staircase handrail, timber doors, windows and fanlights and cement floor tiles, the houses had undergone unauthorised alterations. A balcony built of concrete slab with a metal balustrade was added to the front facade of each upper floor. Two of the timber window panels together with the open grilles at the lower level were altered to create a timber door to the balcony. In 2016, the Building Authority ordered the respective owners of Nos. 88 and 90 Staunton Street to demolish an opening formed in the external wall giving access onto the approved canopy facing Staunton Street and a projecting structure erected on the approved canopy facing Staunton Street on the floor concerned. The owners were also ordered to reinstate the parts of the buildings affected by those unauthorised works. Such orders had been complied with by November of that year. The old timber frames are

²⁴ Proposed Additional Urinal, Grease Trap & Water Storage Tank at No. 90 Staunton Street on I. L. No. 2174, approved on 22 June 1951 (B.O.O. Ref.: 2363/51). Only the architectural plans of No. 90 Staunton Street are available.

²⁵ Oral history interviews with local residents.

retained, with the openings below (the original location of open grilles) in-filled with bricks.

Nos. 88 and 90 Staunton Street had once respectively provided temporary accommodation for Chan Kai and Shum Wai-yau, who were co-founders of the oldest Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong, *Wah Kiu Yat Po* (1925 – 1995), and were also well-known public figures actively involved in public services. The clinic, teahouse and butcher's shop on the ground floor are still fondly remembered by local residents.

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