

**Historic Building Appraisal**  
**No. 113 Bonham Strand, Sheung Wan, H.K.**

Bonham Strand was named after Sir Samuel George Bonham (1803-1863), the third *Historical Interest* Governor of Hong Kong. After a great fire in the Sheung Wan district on 28 December 1851, Governor Sir George Bonham ordered the burnt bricks and debris to be used for land reclamation. Bonham Strand and Bonham Strand West came into being after this reclamation. Bonham Strand was close to the jetties and piers for loading and unloading goods; for instance, the famous historic “Wing Lok Pier” (永樂碼頭, 俗稱「三角碼頭」) was located at the junction of Wing Lok Street and Des Voeux Road West. Hence, the area attracted many traders and merchants to set up their businesses, and became the centre of Nam Pak Hong (南北行) and Kam Shan Chong (金山莊).

The building at No. 113 Bonham Strand is situated on Marine Lot No. 158, Section A, which was subdivided from Marine Lot No. 158 in 1911. The first owner of the lot was Foong Tung (馮桐) but he sold it to Li Ying (李煥) in 1912. There is no new sales record since 1912 and the lot is now still in the name of Li Ying, although he must already be deceased. The whole building is occupied by a tea shop, namely “Pang Yu Tai” (彭裕泰) or “Pang Yu Tai Lung Kee” (彭裕泰隆記).<sup>1</sup>

The current building on the lot was rebuilt between 1930 and 1931. A covenant relating to a scavenger lane and a balcony undertaking<sup>2</sup> were signed between Li Ying and the Government in January and April 1930 respectively, likely during the planning stages for the new building. The plan attached to the covenant shows the footprint of the building, which is the same as the building today. The rates collection book records that rates collection stopped from the second quarter of 1930, and resumed only in the third quarter of 1931. This proves that the existing building was completed no later than the third quarter of 1931.

“Pang Yu Tai”, the tea merchant as well as general importer and exporter that still operates under the same name, set up the shop at the present location as early as 1909, as

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<sup>1</sup> According to a notice published in the Hong Kong Government Gazette of 1893, “Pang Yu Tai” is also known as “Pang Yu Tai Lung Kee”.

<sup>2</sup> Balcony undertaking was signed as a requirement between building owners and the Government, which requires owner to upkeep the balconies in good condition and to remove them if they became dangerous to the pedestrians, as balconies are usually projected over government land. A scavenger lane covenant took effect along with the No. 1 Public Health and Building Ordinance enacted in 1903, which requires the building owner to reserve a lane behind the subject building and another building on the back, so as to allow ventilation, light and night soil collector to access. The undertaking and covenant are signed before completion of the building to ensure that the regulations are followed.

indicated by a newspaper advertisement in *The Chinese Mail* placed by the shop that year. Hence, the shop has been in operation at No.113 Bonham Strand for more than a century. However, the brand has an even longer history. The first mention of the brand can be traced to the Annual Report of the Tung Wah Hospital (徵信錄) in 1885. It shows that “Pang Yu Tai” made a donation of five dollars to the Hospital. “Pang Yu Tai” was formally registered as a tea merchant as early as 1893 according to the Hong Kong Government Gazette, and its lion logo was trademarked by 1909.

Besides trading teas, “Pang Yu Tai” also operated as a Kam Shan Chong, as described in a shop directory published in 1915. The advertisement in *The Chinese Mail* states that their products were “famous at home and abroad”, thus indicating that the tea products of “Pang Yu Tai” were also exported overseas. The appearance on the market of counterfeit Pang Yu Tai’s products shows the brand’s popularity among locals.

In the 1960s, the address of the cockloft and the second floor were registered as the contact address of a film arts association and an accountant respectively. It is noted that the person-in-charge of each business was surnamed Li. However, it has not been possible to ascertain whether these two persons belonged to the Li family of “Pang Yu Tai”, as no more information is available.

The architect of the current building was Messrs. Clark & Iu Architects, which was set up in 1924, with John Caer Clark (1877-1942) and Iu Tak Chung (1896-1933) as partners. John Caer Clark came to Hong Kong and worked for the Public Works Department. He set up his own practice in 1913 and designed No. 1 Chatham Path, which was used as his private residence and then the Chatham English School. Iu Tak Chung, one of the earliest Chinese architects in Hong Kong, was a graduate of the University of Hong Kong as well as directors of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and the Po Leung Kuk. One of his works was the Main Building of the Po Leung Kuk at Causeway Bay.

***Architectural  
Merit***

The building at No. 113 Bonham Strand is four stories high with a flat roof. As recorded in the Title Deed of House Registration Office of the Japanese Military Government in 1943, the building was constructed of reinforced concrete. On the roof, there is a parapet finished with cement lime render with a curved silhouette moulding. All the balconies on the upper floors are cantilevered and project over the pavement on Bonham Strand. Formerly, the edges of the balconies were moulded in cyma recta style, but they have now been changed to plain flat surface. The balustrades on the first, second and third floors have been replaced by stainless steel rods and chains, while the old wooden fanlights and doors open onto the balconies still remain in place.

A metal shutter gate encloses the entrance of the shop. Shanghai plaster finish can be found above the gate with the shop name, “彭裕泰” painted in red on a white background and a green frame. The door number, “No. 113” painted in red on either side of the shop name. A pair of wooden doors to the shopfront is located in the midst of two wooden framed glazed windows, the lower part of which are decorated with floral tiles. Above the wooden doors and windows, mirror plaques are embedded. The middle panel bears the name of the shop, the left panel has “wholesale” in Chinese (批發), both in golden colour, while the right panel is plain. Photos of the interior from the late 2010s show that the shop setting is that of a traditional Chinese tea shop. Inside the shop, a row of hardwood cupboards was built along the walls. A mirror plaque with the Chinese shop name and the lion trademark in golden colour was hung on the middle wall. Reinforced concrete slabs can be observed on and around the ceiling.

On the roof of the building, a chimney stack can be seen, with a small concrete structure probably a store room adjacent to it. It can be observed from the roof of the adjacent building that there is a small enclosed backyard, most likely accessible only from within the shop.

According to the Hong Kong Miscellanea (《香港雜記》) published in 1894, there were around twenty tea traders in Hong Kong at the time. Today, the number has increased to around 115 registered tea traders and sellers in Hong Kong. However, there are only a few remaining century-old brands, “Pang Yu Tai” being one of them. Ying Kee (英記), Yiu Yeung (堯陽) and Ngan Ki Heung (顏奇香) are a few other examples. “Pang Yu Tai” testifies to the development of Kam Shan Chong business and tea trade in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong. Nowadays, Pang Yu Tai’s tea tins, tea boxes, wrapping paper and memorabilia can be found amongst the collections of local and overseas museums, which stands as a testimony to the brand’s value in the Hong Kong tea trade as well as among Chinese emigrants to Europe and North America. The four-storey pre-war building is itself distinctive in the area, as most of the buildings in bustling Sheung Wan have already been redeveloped into high-rise buildings.

*Social Value  
and Local  
Interest*

There are several monuments and historic buildings nearby. They include Western Market, Man Mo Temple Compound, Old Pathological Institute (all Declared Monuments), No. 112 Jervois Street, No. 120 Wellington Street, Nos. 172-176 Queen’s Road Central, No. 1 Queen’s Road West, Nos. 26A-C Graham Street, No. 60 Hollywood Road, No. 62 Hollywood Road, Main Block of Tung Wah Hospital, Kwong Fook I Tsz, Bridges Street Market and Former Married Police Quarters.

*Group Value*

The building has operated as “Pang Yu Tai” tea shop for over 90 years. Having a *Rarity,*

century-old local brand is a rarity in itself, and it is even rarer to see a century-old brand operating at the same location for more than one hundred years. Although the old metal balustrades of the upper floors have been changed to steel bars and chains, the original appearance of the building has been kept in a rather authentic condition.

***Built  
Heritage  
Value &  
Authenticity***

This type of pre-war shophouse is becoming rare. The building has survived surrounding developments over the decades, and stands to witness the development of the overseas trade in early Hong Kong.

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