

Historic Building Appraisal

No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road

Kowloon City, Kowloon

No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road (衙前壆道) in Kowloon City (九龍城) was built **Historical Interest** around 1935, and has borne witness to the historical development and urbanisation of the district before the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945). The building is situated on a plot of land registered as “New Kowloon Inland Lot No. 2029” (or N.K.I.L. 2029). With the extension of their authority to the entire Kowloon Peninsula in 1898, the British named the areas to the north of Boundary Street (界限街), including Kowloon City, as “New Kowloon”.¹ Kowloon City was first known as Kwun Fu (官富場), and was an area with imperial salt fields garrisoned by government troops. The history of those government-run salt fields can be traced back to the Song (宋) dynasty (960 – 1279).² From the Yuan (元) dynasty (1271 – 1368) through to the Qing (清) (1644 – 1911), an assistant magistrate of Kwun Fu, known as “官富巡檢司”, was responsible for the governance of villages.³ The magistrate had its administrative office (i.e. *yamen*, 衙門, which later became the Kowloon Walled City, 九龍寨城), where suspects of criminal offences were interrogated. In the twenty-third year of the Daoguang reign (道光二十三年, 1843), the assistant magistrate of Kwun Fu was retitled the assistant magistrate of Kau Lung (九龍巡檢司), with the responsibility for the governance of around 400 villages,⁴ one of which was Nga Tsin Tsuen (衙前村, literally meaning the village in front of the *yamen*).

The name “衙前村” can be identified in the *Xin'an Gazetteer* (《新安縣志》) published in the Wuchen year (戊辰, 1688) of the Kangxi (康熙) reign and the twenty-fourth year of the Jiaqing reign (嘉慶二十四年, 1819). The story goes that during the twelfth year of the Zhizheng reign (至正十二年, 1352) of the Yuan dynasty, the three clans of the Chans (陳氏), the Ngs (吳氏) and the Lees (李氏) together established Nga Tsin Tsuen, which was situated to the northeast of the *yamen*. It is said that during the Ming (明) dynasty (1368 – 1644), around the middle of the sixteenth century, some of the Chans moved out of Nga Tsin Tsuen and

¹ The boundary of New Kowloon was marked on a map dated 1937. Places like Cheung Sha Wan (長沙灣), Sham Shui Po (深水埗), Kowloon Tong (九龍塘), Tai Hom (大磡), Kowloon City (九龍城), Ngau Chi Wan (牛池灣), Ngau Tau Kok (牛頭角), Sai Tso Wan (茜草灣) and Cha Kwo Ling (茶果嶺) fell within the boundary.

² The name “官富山” (literally meaning the mountain of Kwun Fu) can be identified on a map in *Xin'an Gazetteer* (《新安縣志》) compiled in the twenty-fourth year of the Jiaqing reign (嘉慶二十四年) (1819) during the Qing dynasty. However, salt production was forced to cease due to the Coastal Evacuation Order (遷海令), which was carried out between the first and the eight year of the Kangxi reign (康熙, 1662 – 1669) against the anti-Qing rebels led by Zhang Chenggong (鄭成功).

³ The number of villages amounted to around 300 during the Jiaqing reign (1796 – 1820), for instance. The magistrate was also responsible for the villages outside Kau Lung Shing (九龍城), such as the villages of Wong Nai Chung (黃泥涌), Hong Kong (香港), Pok Fu Lam (薄扶林) and So Kon Po (掃管莆) on Hong Kong Island, as well as the villages in what we now refer to as the New Territories until the British took possession of them.

⁴ The name “Kowloon” was only formally adopted after the British possessed the entire Kowloon Peninsula.

established another village named Nga Tsin Long (衙前塱)⁵ at the southwest of the *yamen*. Having said that, Nga Tsin means “in front of the *yamen*”, whereas Long means “low-lying marshy land”. Historical maps show that Nga Tsin Long was quite near to the coast. Today’s Nga Tsin Long Road occupies the approximate location of the former village of Nga Tsin Long.

The road’s name, “衙前塱道” in Chinese and “Nga Tsin Long Road” in English, together with another eight new streets, was formally listed in the Government Gazette on 12 May 1933.⁶ The development of these nine streets is a reflection of the urbanisation of Kowloon City. Before the 1920s, farming, fishing and quarrying were important to the local economy of the district. There was a market town (or *hui*, 墟) known as Kau Lung Kai (九龍街), which extended from the southeast corner of the *yamen* right down to the coast. The urbanisation of Kowloon City started with the Kowloon Bay Reclamation Scheme, which was initiated by Sir Kai Ho-kai (何啟, 1859 – 1914) in early 1914.⁷ Reclamation work commenced in 1916. Houses were built after the first phase of the reclamation was completed in 1920, and the new housing estate was named Kai Tack Bund (啟德濱). Prominent figures such as Tso Seen-wan (曹善允) (1868 – 1953) moved to Kai Tack Bund with his family in 1920. The names of a number of Chinese and foreign residents, such as Li Chor-chi (李楚池) and C. G. Anderson, can also be identified from historical records dating to the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ The seafront area of the reclaimed land later became part of the Kai Tak Airport.⁹ Later, sometime between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s, the government developed the inland areas. The new streets, including Nga Tsin Long Road, were indicative of the urbanisation of

⁵ The village of Nga Tsin Long was a member of an alliance known as Seven Alliance (七約, literally meaning the alliance of seven villages). It was composed of seven former villages of Nga Tsin Long, Nga Tsin Wai (衙前圍), Sha Po (沙埔), Tai Hom (大磡), Kak Hang (隔坑), Ta Kwu Ling (打鼓嶺), Shek Kwu Lung (石鼓壟), which spanned across today’s Kowloon City and Wong Tai Sin Districts.

⁶ The other eight streets were Lung Kong Road (龍崗道), Nam Kok Road (南角道), Hau Wong Road (侯王道), Lion Rock Road (獅子石道), Fuk Lo Tsun Road (福老村道, now 福佬村道), Junction Road (聯合道), Carpenter Road (賈炳達道) and Southgate Road (南門道). A journal 《香港年鑑》, published by the then Wah Kiu Yat Po (華僑日報), shows that Fuk Lo Tsun Road has been referred to as 福佬村道 from 1949 onwards.

⁷ Sir Kai Ho-kai promoted the reclamation of Kowloon Bay, with the objectives of building houses at the waterfront both for the better-off local Chinese and wealthy Chinese incomers from Guangzhou. He hoped that the reclamation of Kowloon Bay could relieve the overcrowding of Hong Kong due to the influx of Chinese from Guangdong after the 1911 Revolution. In 1912, he formed The Kai Tack Land Investment Company Ltd. (啟德營業有限公司) with Au Tack (區德, 1840 – 1920). After Sir Kai Ho-kai passed away, Au Tack, with his partners Tso Seen-wan, Cheung Sum-woo (張心湖, ? – 1932) and others, resubmitted their reclamation proposal in November 1914, and it was approved by the government in December 1915. Reclamation started in 1916, with the first phase completed in 1920. The company was in its heyday in the early 1920s, but was liquidated in 1930.

⁸ C. G. Anderson was a manager of the Assurance Franco-Asiatique (保太水火保險公司). Li Chor-chi was the Chinese secretary of Ho Hong Bank and a well-known Chinese tenor at that time. He was also one of the guests laying the foundation stone of St. Stephen’s College in Stanley on 27 August 1928.

⁹ Kai Tack Bund was formally named in Government Gazette on 5 May 1922. In 1942, the Japanese ordered to have the bund demolished for the expansion of the Kai Tak Airport.

Kowloon City,¹⁰ and involved the redevelopment of the former market town of Kau Lung Kai, the village of Nga Tsin Long and the nearby agricultural land.

Regarding the development of Nga Tsin Long Road, the earliest rates records for it are dated 1933 – 1934, which show that “No. 12” was the street’s largest even-numbered house at that time. “24 Nga Tsin Long Rd.” can be first identified in the rates records of 1934 – 1935.

On 13 August 1935, a Government Lease of N.K.I.L. 2029 was entered by Tai Shung-ching (戴崇貞). On the same day, she signed a Verandah Undertaking, through which she undertook that during the construction of verandahs at N.K.I.L. 2029, it would in no way deviate from the plans and drawings supplied by her architects.¹¹ During the Japanese Occupation (1941 – 1945), a Japanese Title Deed (家屋所有權登録申請書) dated 1943 (昭和十八年) shows that Tai Shung-ching was still the owner of No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road at that time, but she lived at High Street (高街) on Hong Kong Island. The property was described as a Chinese-style (中國式), three-storey (叁階) building constructed of reinforced concrete (鉄筋混凝土), in mixed use, with a shop on the ground floor (商店(階下)) and residential units at the upper floors (住宅(階上)), and it was in good condition (完整).

While no official records on the exact year of construction of the building can be identified, if one takes into consideration the rates records, the Verandah Undertaking of 1935 and the Japanese Title Deed of 1943, it is believed that No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road was built around 1935.

The ownership of the building has changed hands a number of times since 1950.¹² While the owners might not be well-known figures, a tenant named Tang Tai-chuen (鄧泰全, ? – 1999) and a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner named Chung Pak-ming (鍾伯明, 1912 – 1984) brought about a turning point in the building’s history.

Tang Tai-chuen opened a Tai Wo Tong Chinese Medicine Co. (大和堂參茸藥行) on the ground floor of No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road. It is believed that it was

¹⁰ A map dated 1922 shows the general layout of Kai Tack Bund. The houses there were residential blocks, each having an open courtyard to the rear, which was similar to the layout of No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road. Besides, some photos dated 1927 and 1932 show rows of three-storey houses at Kai Tack Bund. However, in the background, there were also other three-storey row houses lying perpendicular to those of Kai Tack Bund. Those “perpendicular” housing blocks were within the area bounded by the aforesaid new streets. Moreover, as mentioned above, the new streets were only formally named in 1933. Therefore, it is believed that the urbanisation of Kowloon City first commenced with Kai Tack Bund between the late 1910s and the mid-1920s. Later, sometime between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s, the government developed the inland areas.

¹¹ Little was known about Tai Shung-ching. It was only recorded in the Verandah Undertaking that she was a spinster, and later a married woman in the land records of 1947 and 1949.

¹² The owners included Lee Mui-chi (李梅枝), a merchant; Ko Wai-har (高慧霞), a married woman, and Susan Au.

opened at the present site in the 1940s.¹³ Tang Tai-chuen, nicknamed “水龍王” (literally King of the Water Dragon), was a well-known footballer around the late 1940s. Later in the 1960s, he was a team manager in a number of soccer matches in Asia. He was also very active in promoting football and welfare services. For instance, in the 1970s, he was the president or a committee member of a number of football and youth associations, while in 1988, he was the Honourary President of Hong Kong Football Association (香港足球總會), Hong Kong Chinese Footballer’s Fraternity (HKCFF, 香港華人足球員聯誼會) and South China Athletic Society (南華會). In 1959, he was one of the founders of HKCFF. Besides, from 1969 to 1993, Tang served on the Board of Directors of The Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society, Kowloon (九龍樂善堂, referred to as Lok Sin Tong hereafter). In 1972, in order to relieve the financial burden of patients, he made a generous offer that any patient being able to present a prescription issued by Lok Sin Tong could buy medicine from Tai Wo Tong at cost price (祇收成本). In the Queen’s Birthday in 1974, Tang was awarded a Badge of Honour (榮譽獎章) to recognise his contribution to sports and the community. In the 1980s, he served on the then Kowloon City District Board (now known as Kowloon District Council).

Regarding Chung Pak-ming, his homeland was Xinhui (新會) in Guangdong province. He became a registered Chinese medicine practitioner in the twenty-first year of the Republican period (民國廿一年, 1932) and practised in Guangzhou. He then came to Hong Kong after the fall of Guangzhou to Japanese troops in 1938. For decades, from the early 1940s to the early 1980s, he served as the Chinese medicine practitioner at Tai Wo Tong until sometime shortly before he passed away in 1984.¹⁴ From 1948 onwards, patients having obtained a consultation card (贈診証) from Lok Sin Tong could receive free medical consultation from Chung Pak-ming at Tai Wo Tong, and from 1950 to 1983, he served on the Board of Directors of Lok Sin Tong. For decades, Chung had also been a member of the Kowloon City District Kai-Fong Welfare Association (九龍城區街坊福利會).

Apart from Lok Sin Tong, Chung Pak-ming also served as the designated Chinese medicine practitioner of the gold shop known as Chow Sang Sang (周生生), and the seasoning and chemical company of Tien-Chu-Ve-Tsin Chemical Industries (H.K.) Ltd. (香港天廚味精化學工業廠有限公司), whose shop and administrative office were in Kowloon City respectively. The consultation fee and medicine would

¹³ A bulletin printed by The Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society, Kowloon (九龍樂善堂) in the twenty-eighth year of the Republican period (1939) contains a list of Chinese medicine clinics in Kowloon City; however, none of them was on Nga Tsin Long Road. According to a newspaper report dated 1988, the company had been operating for some forty years by that time, and employing Chung Pak-ming as its Chinese medicine practitioner.

¹⁴ In the past, the Chung’s family resided at No. 22 Nga Tsin Long Road, not No. 24.

be paid for by the companies as their employees' medical benefits.¹⁵ Besides, Chung would also offer consultation and medicine, both free of charge, to very poor patients.

According to local residents, another Chinese medicine practitioner named Choi Siu-wun (蔡兆垣) practised on the first floor of No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road. His patients would then buy the Chinese medicine he had prescribed at Tai Wo Tong.¹⁶ He also offered free medical consultation for Lok Sin Tong's patients.¹⁷ It is said that he practised at No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road from around the 1940s until he passed away in 1987.

After the death of Chung Pak-ming in 1984, his son, Chung Fook-lee (鍾福利, 1937 – 2012), assumed his father's role at Tai Wo Tong. Tai Wo Tong thus continued to operate until Chung Fook-lee passed away in 2012. A relative of the Chungs then operated a herbal medicine shop there until 2017. In 2018, the shop was converted for use as a café, which retains "Tai Wo Tong" as its name. The brand name of "Tai Wo Tong", though changed in nature from Chinese medicine to coffee, has thus continued.

No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road is a three-storey building with a rooftop structure. *Architectural Merit*
The ground floor is for commercial use while the upper floors are for residential purposes. Externally, it is a typical example of a verandah-type shophouse, with a deep verandah on each floor supported on rectangular columns over the pedestrian walkway at street level. The columns on the ground floor are built of granite, while the building materials of those on the first and the second floors have been concealed by plaster. The capitals on the top floor are of a simple stepped design. Over the years the balustrades at the verandahs on the upper floors comprise infilled panels without balusters. Below the second-floor balustrade is a moulded stringcourse. The party walls on either side of the second-floor verandah have a curved profile. Regarding the shopfront, the timber name plaque engraved with "大和堂" (Tai Wo Tong) above the main entrance is retained intact. In the past, the shop's name "大和堂參茸藥行" was painted on the front facade at the top of the covered walkway (i.e. below the first-floor balustrade), while "大和堂熟藥" (literally meaning Tai Wo Tong prepared medicine) appeared on the two columns; however, these were painted over during the conversion works. A new foldable metal gate with the name "大和堂" as a cut-out has been installed at the main entrance. A boundary stone engraved with

¹⁵ Chow Sang Sang had a shop (now closed) near Nga Tsin Long Road, whereas the office and factory of Tien-Chu-Ve-Tsin Chemical Industries (H.K.) Ltd. were in Pak Tai Street. The seasoning company is now named The Tien Chu (Hong Kong) Company Limited (天廚(香港)有限公司), with its Hong Kong headquarters in Tsing Yi.

¹⁶ It was said that Choi and Chung began their practice at No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road at about the same time.

¹⁷ According to Lok Sin Tong's publication, Choi provided free medical consultation in the 1940s and the 1950s at least.

N.K.I.L. 2029 can be identified at the rear wall.

The interior of the ground floor has been altered and renovated to fit the needs of the Tai Wo Tong café. There is a small store room under the staircase at the right. The original wooden herb cabinet (百子櫃) has been restored and preserved in-situ, whereas the original counter and display cabinet have been converted into a counter for ordering, brewing coffee, and placing drinks. In the past, the front and rear of the shop were partitioned with a timber panel, forming the clinic's consultation room at the rear and a waiting area at the front.¹⁸ But now the panel has been removed to open up the interior and facilitate the operation of the café. The floor finish was terrazzo in the past, but is now cement screeding. There is a new door leading to the backyard, which replaces the wall and window previously there, but part of the original foldable metal gate bearing the name “大和堂” has been salvaged and reinstated on either side of this new doorway. At the backyard are a kitchen and toilets.

A steep concrete staircase is located at the right-hand side of the building and provides access to the upper floors. It has treads finished with timber boards and a timber handrail on the wall along its right-hand side. There is a sliding metal gate at the entrance to the staircase. Above the gate is a metal grille with geometric design and coin motifs. The wired glass fanlight at the entrance door to the first floor is fitted with a patterned metal grille. The stairs leading to the two levels at the rear of the first floor are fitted with a V-pattern metal balustrade.

Regarding the internal layout of the upper floors, each has a verandah which is divided from the living area by a double-panel French door and casement windows with fanlights and security bars. The front portion of the first floor consists of the living area with a bedroom and a storeroom having cubicles partitioned by timber boards with patterned glazing. The living area was once used as the consultation room of Choi Siu-wun. The rear portion contains a kitchen, two toilets and a room with some furniture.

The front portion of the second floor consists of the living area with two cubicles formed by timber partitions with glazed panes. The rear of the second floor houses a kitchen and a toilet. There is a long and narrow internal concrete staircase at the right side of the second floor leading to the roof terrace. There is a skylight on the rooftop that illuminates the staircase below. A chimney stack is found on the roof in a position corresponding with the original smoke flues at the kitchen on the second floor.

¹⁸ The consultation room was situated behind the timber panel most of the time during Chung's practice. It was only for a short period of time in the later days that medical consultation was provided in the right corner of the panel's front, so that it would be more convenient for Chung to monitor the shop's operation.

Regarding the building's fabric and materials, No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road is a reinforced concrete building. The living areas on the upper floors are laid with cement floor tiles with an octagonal and diamond pattern, surrounded by a fret-patterned border. Not all of the patterned floor tiles survive at the verandahs, and the damaged tiling has been covered by cement screeding. The roof terrace is also paved with cement. The interior walls are mainly plastered and painted, while the dado area of the first floor is finished with pink mosaic tiles. There are timber panelled cubicle partitions decorated with floral patterned pressed glass.

The building is one of the important landmarks in Kowloon City. Tang Tai-chuen and Chung Pak-ming were respectively a well-known social leader and Chinese medicine practitioner in Kowloon City. For decades, they served to enhance the association of the building with the local community. Over the years, the old Chinese medicine shop has also attracted coverage in the mass media and publications, and has been a site for location filming. Many character-defining elements of the former Tai Wo Tong, including its name plaques, the timber herb cabinet, part of the old timber partitions and the foldable metal gate, as well as a number of framed mirrors with the names of Chinese medicines, have been retained. Artefacts such as the certificate of practice of Chung Pak-ming dated 1932, and other signs of appreciation for Chung in the form of certificate, mirror, calligraphy, etc. are also displayed in the café. These serve to retain the historic ambience of the building, and have attracted wide media coverage. The building's social value and local interest has also been sustained by its conversion to use as a café.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road is within walking distance of other historic buildings, including the former Yamen Building of Kowloon Walled City (前九龍寨城衙門) and Hau Wong Temple (侯王古廟, both Declared Monuments), Bethel Bible Seminary (伯特利神學院, Grade 2), Nos. 31 – 35 Hau Wong Temple New Village (侯王廟新村) and Nos. 1 and 3 Hau Wong Road (侯王道) (both Grade 3).

Group Value

No. 24 Nga Tsin Long Road is a good example of a verandah-type shophouse in Hong Kong. More obvious alterations can only be identified on the ground floor. But those changes have mainly affected the internal layout in order to facilitate its use as a café. The internal layout of the upper floors remains intact. The historical ties of the building with the pre-war development of Kowloon City add to its built heritage value. Such ties extend from the name of the street where it stands (which is related to the former village of Nga Tsin Long and the former Yamen Building of Kowloon Walled City) to the urbanisation of Kowloon City (the redevelopment of villages houses, market town and agricultural land to create streets lined with shophouses).

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

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