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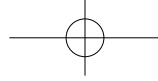
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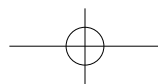
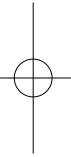
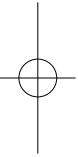
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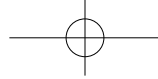
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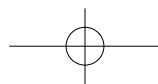
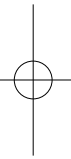
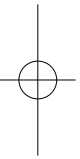
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EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE IN CONTEXT





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# EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE IN CONTEXT

## PUBLIC MARKETS IN HONG KONG (1842–1981)

CARMEN C. M. TSUI



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***Everyday Architecture in Context:  
Public Markets in Hong Kong (1842–1981)***

By Carmen C. M. Tsui

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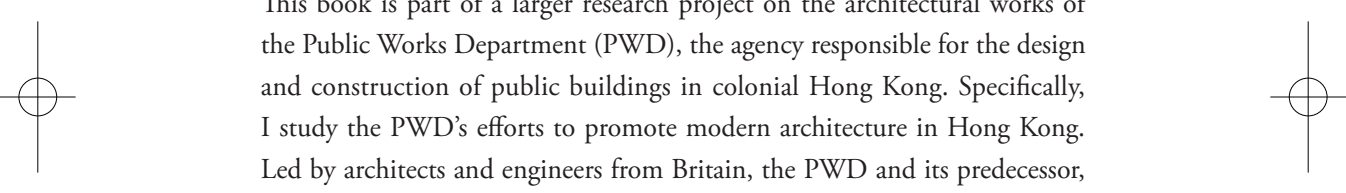
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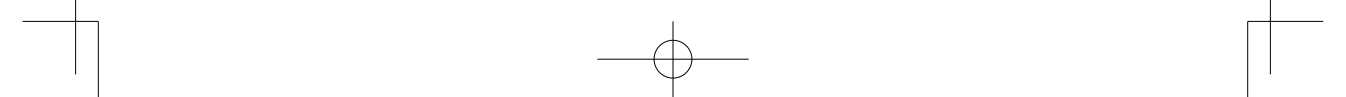


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## PREFACE



This book is part of a larger research project on the architectural works of the Public Works Department (PWD), the agency responsible for the design and construction of public buildings in colonial Hong Kong. Specifically, I study the PWD's efforts to promote modern architecture in Hong Kong. Led by architects and engineers from Britain, the PWD and its predecessor, the Surveyor General's Office, had built many impressive public buildings in the Western architectural idiom since the British occupied Hong Kong in 1841. Notably, the PWD's preference for neoclassical, Victorian, and Edwardian architecture, which not only prevailed in governmental but also private buildings sponsored by Western businesspeople at that time, changed in the 1930s. When it was commissioned by the government to construct a series of new public markets to meet the growing demand in expanding urban areas, the PWD abandoned the Western architectural forms. Instead, for the first time in the department's history, the PWD opted for a modern design, an architectural style that became popular in Europe in the wake of the First World War. Wan Chai Market, completed in 1937, was plausibly the first PWD-designed building that had absolutely no allegiance to the traditional forms of the past. Why, among all types of public buildings, did the PWD select markets as its first experiment with modern architecture?



The curious case of public markets as Hong Kong's first group of modern government buildings is intriguing and deserving of a more in-depth investigation than had been granted to it in the past. Throughout the research process, I discovered myriad interesting facts about Hong Kong's public markets that extended well beyond the scope of what was originally meant to be a study of modern architecture. For example, the public market was one of the first types of public buildings erected by the British after they set foot in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the erection of public markets in the nineteenth century followed the pattern of population growth in Hong Kong. The three earliest markets were erected in Central, Admiralty, and Sheung Wan, where the population was concentrated. Later, public markets were strategically planned—one in each urban district in Hong Kong. They were generally located at the focal point of the districts they served. Most of the modern markets, including those that are still in operation today, were reconstructed at the same location as the historic markets. Many of them have occupied the same site for more than a century. For instance, the present-day Central Market (completed in 1939) is the fourth generation of public market erected on its Queen's Road site, replacing the earlier generations completed in 1842, 1858, and 1895 respectively.

Thus, I found it impossible to isolate the discussion of modern markets from their colonial precedents. Focusing only on the modern period would limit our understanding of how public markets, as a building type, emerged in Hong Kong and what has propelled the changes in their architectural form. For this reason, the book expanded into a full-scale, longitudinal study of the history and architecture of public markets owned by the government. It covers the period from 1842, when the first public market was built, to the early 1980s, which was when standalone public markets were replaced by multi-purpose municipal services buildings.

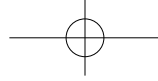
A public market is a type of building that is closely associated with our everyday lives. We may not be aware of its importance until the day access to such a familiar facility is no longer possible. During my research on the history of Hong Kong's public markets, I discovered the important

role played by this building type in affecting a city's public hygiene, food safety, and cost of living.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Hong Kong's public markets began to modernize in the early twentieth century in response to the Bubonic Plague and world wars. Coincidentally, COVID-19 broke out during the course of writing this book. Several public markets were temporarily closed for business for disinfection. Access to public markets and other public facilities in Hong Kong was restricted to people who could present a vaccine pass. While I am saddened by the ways the pandemic has created social distance between people, I am also impressed by the resilience of those people who have tried hard to keep our everyday lives normal amid abnormality.

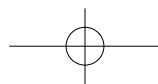
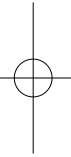
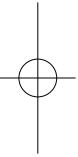
This book would not have been possible without the funding support of the Lord Wilson Heritage Trust (LWHT). I am grateful to the staff of the LWHT Secretariat for their administrative support. Also, the work described in this book was partially supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. LU 11604419). Professors Ho Puay Peng and Wallace Chang have always shown encouragement and support for my work. My research team, comprising Ophio Chow, Teresa Chong, and Lee Ho, helped conduct archival research, interview stallholders and shoppers, and illustrate the book. I also wish to thank The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press for publishing this book. Editors Brian Yu and Alice Chan have provided valuable suggestions for me to improve the content and writing of the book. Last but not least, I thank my Lord and my family for their unconditional love.

### *Note*

- 1 The currency used in this book, unless otherwise specified, refers to Hong Kong dollar.



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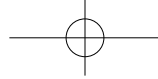
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## INTRODUCTION

### Hong Kong's Marketing Tradition

In the past, the Chinese bought and sold meat and produce in the open air. Street markets were key places in most Chinese towns and cities where townspeople acquired food and other commodities. In some places, food trading took place at designated open-air marketplaces on certain days of the week. Unlike the mainlanders who refer to markets as *shi chang* 市場, the local Cantonese in Hong Kong call them *kai shi* 街市. Interestingly, even though the Cantonese phrase *kai shi* literally means “street markets,” this terminology was adopted by both local people and the government and remains today to denote covered or indoor markets.

This book provides the contexts to understand the history and architecture of public markets, including those that were standalone, covered, and designed by the government's architectural agency, the Surveyor General's Office, which was subsequently renamed the Public Works Department (PWD). I study the different roles that public markets—a type of architecture with which most people are familiar—serve in our everyday environment. Everyday architecture like public markets is underrepresented in the literature on Hong Kong, as reflected by the



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lack of scholarly research on its history and heritage value. Unlike other early colonial public buildings, such as courthouses, churches, and the city hall, which were seldom visited by the Chinese, the public markets in Hong Kong were closely tied to people's daily life. Because public markets can be found in every district, they are easily mistaken as unimportant or ordinary. In fact, markets may have been the type of public building most often frequented by Hong Kong people, especially prior to the invention of supermarkets and modern grocery stores.

Covered public markets were introduced to Hong Kong by the British. James Schmiechen and Kenneth Carls have pointed out that by the eighteenth century, a typical open-air marketplace in Britain consisted of a ramshackle collection of stalls plagued by congestion, noise, and poor hygiene. Therefore, beginning in the nineteenth century, most British towns imposed either a complete or partial ban on street selling. Consequently, the buying and selling of food moved from the streets to covered market houses. During the Victorian period, what started as small market houses had gradually evolved into enormous and grandly decorated market halls.<sup>1</sup>

In Hong Kong, public markets were erected by the colonial government for reasons that went beyond the obvious one of supplying food to urban dwellers. They were institutions that enabled the colonial government to not only prevent public nuisance from obstructing streets and public places but also monitor food safety and food prices. When the British occupied Hong Kong in 1841, they started to build roads in the new colony. They quickly realized that food hawking on the streets impeded traffic. Therefore, in 1842, the colonial government erected the Central Market to remove food peddlers from dirty, windswept streets and gather them in a single marketplace. This revolutionized how Hong Kong people obtained their food. Subsequently, the colonial government prohibited the operation of private markets and the sale of raw meat and fish in places other than public markets. In the following decades, market laws and policies were passed to regulate local food supplies, guide the ethics of trade in fresh food, and establish standards for built spaces devoted to food sales.

Different governmental departments were put in charge of public markets in Hong Kong at different times. As a means of eliminating food hawking and preventing public nuisance in the streets, the earliest markets were supervised by the police, who would intervene only in the market affairs in case of robberies, thefts, assaults, and other serious crimes and accidents. Each market was operated by a franchise holder who was usually a Chinese businessperson. Meanwhile, the Surveyor General's Office was only responsible for checking whether the public markets built by franchise holders met a certain standard. Nevertheless, in 1858, the colonial government took back control of public markets from the hands of the franchise holders to prevent monopolization. It gave the Surveyor General's Office the duty to not only design and construct public markets, but also to register and lease out market stalls.

The management of public markets changed again in 1883. At that time, public markets became an essential element of the colony's public health campaign and were managed by the Sanitary Board rather than the Surveyor General's Office, which was subsequently renamed the PWD. From that point onwards, the PWD primarily focused on the architectural aspect of public markets, including sourcing appropriate sites on which to erect public markets and market design, construction, and maintenance. In 1935, the Sanitary Board was replaced by the Urban Council, which remained in operation until 1999. However, in 1982, the PWD was split into various departments, such as the Architectural Services Department, the Lands Department, and the Planning Department. Thus, the Architectural Services Department became the official department responsible for the design of public markets and municipal buildings in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's public markets—whether designed by the Surveyor General's Office or the later PWD—can be divided into three major types. The first type is open-type market sheds. These are so named because of the absence of enclosing walls. The sheds are usually simple and rectangular in shape with a big roof supported by evenly distributed pillars. As the open-type market sheds are not enclosed, it is convenient for shoppers to come

and go. The second type is single-storey market houses. As market houses are enclosed by walls, food trading can be conducted in an indoor, weather-resistant environment. Both types of public markets were commonly seen in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States. In Hong Kong, the PWD would sometimes erect more than one open-type market shed or market house on a large site, forming a market compound to accommodate more food stalls. The last type of public market is multi-storey markets. These are much bigger than the other two types and are usually located in densely populated districts. Early public markets served both food wholesale and retail functions. The government began erecting wholesale markets in the 1930s. Since then, public markets have been reserved solely for retail trade.

Public markets in Hong Kong had always been standalone structures, but this began to change during the 1970s. The Urban Council began to combine markets with non-market facilities, such as food centres and playgrounds, locating them on the upper storeys. To ensure efficient use of urban land, the Urban Council started to develop multi-storey, multi-purpose markets that provided other community and recreational facilities in addition to normal market facilities beginning in the 1980s. Since then, the Urban Council and the PWD ceased to construct standalone buildings in urban areas that only served as markets. As of October 2019, only 35 standalone public markets managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department remained in Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup>

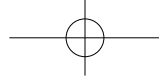
### **Towards a Modern Market Design**

In Hong Kong, public buildings completed in the nineteenth century usually followed the western architectural traditions. However, in the 1930s, the PWD designed several public markets in the modern style as the first batch of modern public buildings in Hong Kong. The study of public markets will enlighten us about the way Hong Kong's architecture has shifted from the traditional forms and construction techniques of the



past to a new era of modern design. In a broad sense, modern architecture is the architectural style that emerged under the influence of modernism. It was conceived during a time of tremendous upheaval in Western culture: the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, as well as a series of political revolutions in the nineteenth century, inspired Europeans to challenge traditional culture, norms, and thinking. European architects shared a strong desire to get rid of classicism in architectural design and create new forms of architecture that fit the modern epoch. Many new architectural styles, such as Stripped Classicism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and De Stijl, were born in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Modern Movement of architecture began to widely influence architectural design in Europe. In 1928, a group of European architects, including Le Corbusier and the founder of the Bauhaus School Walter Gropius, established the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), an association intended to advance modernism in architecture. They held congresses in different parts of Europe for members to exchange ideas on the direction of architecture and planning in the modern era. They saw architecture as a tool for societal transformation, arguing that architecture must meet the political, economic, and social needs of the modern era. They scrutinized the functionality, economic benefits, and production methods of modern buildings. The architectural style they advocated is generally referred to as “modernist architecture,” which is plain and simple. It refrains from the use of ornamentation and can be constructed in mass quantity using industrially produced materials. After the First World War (WWI), modernist architecture proliferated in Europe and the United States. It became the dominant architectural style in the West and quickly spread to Hong Kong and the rest of the world. Several public markets in Hong Kong completed in the 1930s were influenced by this new architectural trend. After the Second World War (WWII), all of Hong Kong’s public markets were designed in the modern style.



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## The Objectives of the Book

This book has three objectives. First, it seeks to tie the public market's architectural history to the history of Hong Kong by directing our examination of the architecture of everyday life to its social, political, and economic contexts. During the studied period (from the 1840s to the 1980s), Hong Kong experienced the arrival of colonialism, the Bubonic Plague, two world wars, periods of social unrest, global inflation, regional food shortages, and economic upturns and downturns. How did public markets adapt to these social challenges? How did the people of Hong Kong experience improvements in their standard of living? I employ a longitudinal study of architecture to relate changes in the repertoire of market design strategies to the historical circumstances and nature of the issues that Hong Kong sought to resolve at a given time, by explaining how and why the PWD chose a certain type of market building over another.

Second, the book tracks the architectural changes of covered public markets in Hong Kong. By focusing on public markets, a type of everyday architecture, this book moves beyond the canonization of iconic buildings and introduces Hong Kong's urban and architectural history to general readers on a more approachable level. I outline the chronological development of public markets and identify the various types of market buildings developed by the PWD, from simple open-type market sheds and small enclosed market houses that followed the British architectural tradition to multi-storey modern buildings containing a full range of amenities.

Third, the book studies Hong Kong's path to architectural modernization as engineered by the PWD. Modern architecture reached Hong Kong in the 1930s and became the dominant style after WWII. Surprisingly, few studies on the history and design of modern architecture in Hong Kong have been carried out. The lack of scholarship may be attributed to a mainstream, overly simplified assumption that takes the advent and dominance of modern architecture in Hong Kong for granted. Scholars and architects have often assumed that every city with a vigorous economy eventually adopts

modern architecture and that Hong Kong was no exception. The PWD's decision to construct modern-style buildings which required modest capital expenditure was, in fact, a thoughtful response to Hong Kong's post-war social conditions and financial realities, as Hong Kong's rehabilitation after WWII imposed an enormous financial burden on the colonial government. I focus on the public markets designed by the PWD as a point of entry for the analysis of architectural modernism in Hong Kong in order to examine how the design of this specific type of public building gradually moved away from the traditional architectural forms of the past and embraced the modern style. As the government was one of the biggest patrons of buildings in Hong Kong, the decision made by its official architectural agency, the PWD, to start employing the modern style in public markets after the 1930s played a critical role in changing architectural thinking in Hong Kong.

This book systematically tracks the trajectory of public market development in colonial Hong Kong by looking at how public markets have adapted to the social imperative to modernize. It references a wide range of primary historical materials, such as colonial office files, government correspondence and documents, official reports, historical maps and photographs, architectural drawings from the PWD, and newspapers and magazines. Although I try to provide thorough documentation of Hong Kong's public markets, it is seemingly impossible to study every single market that has ever been built. In general, I focus only on the public markets that were erected in urban areas, operated by the former Sanitary Board and Urban Council, and designed by the Surveyor General's Office and PWD. Regrettably, this study is not able to cover those public markets built in the New Territories, the resettlement areas, and the public housing estates, which were generally smaller in scale and simpler in design.

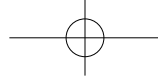
This book is structured chronologically to describe the six stages of Hong Kong's public market development. Chapter 1 covers the period from 1842 to 1882, focusing on the birth of covered public markets in Hong Kong and their operation and governance in the first four decades of their existence. To generate more revenue and avoid the hassle of managing public

markets, the government sold public market franchise rights to Chinese businesspeople, eventually leading to the monopolization of food selling in Hong Kong. Chapter 2 studies how the formation of the Sanitary Board in 1883 and the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in 1894 influenced the development of public markets. As one of the few places where perishable food could be lawfully sold, the sanitary conditions of public markets were critical to the maintenance of public health in Hong Kong. Hence, amidst the plague, the PWD expanded market accommodations and upgraded the new public markets to achieve modern sanitary standards. Chapter 3 describes how the global economic depression before and after WWI led to a high unemployment rate and high food prices in Hong Kong. To suppress the inflation of food prices, the Sanitary Board tried to introduce competition by erecting more public markets in Hong Kong. Thus, the PWD developed a new public market model, which featured a simple open-type shed made of reinforced concrete. Chapter 4 analyses how the new architectural aesthetics developed in the early twentieth century propelled a change in public market design in Hong Kong. In understanding how the PWD pursued a new architectural expression for a group of public markets designed in the 1930s, Shanghai's architectural influence is suggested. Chapter 5 studies how the PWD found an economical way to construct public markets during Hong Kong's recovery from the economic damage caused by WWII. In response to the post-war social conditions and financial realities, the PWD had fully embraced modern design in public markets. Chapter 6 studies the setbacks experienced by the government's market reconstruction programme during the 1960s. As the marketing habits of the local population shifted, the government began to doubt the future of traditional public markets. To ensure efficient use of scarce government land resources, in the 1980s, public markets became integrated into multi-purpose municipal services buildings, which eventually marked the end of standalone market buildings in Hong Kong.

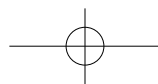
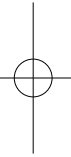
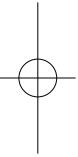
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*Notes*

- 1 James Schmiechen and Kenneth Carls, *The British Market Hall: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 4–5, 24–27.
- 2 “Management of Public Markets,” <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/essentials-2021ise07-management-of-public-markets.htm>.



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# **PUBLIC MARKETS AND FOOD MONOPOLIES**

**(1840s–1880s)**

## **1.1 New Markets for a New Colony**

### *The First Marketplace: Central Market (Government Market No. 1)*

In January 1841, when the British troops took possession of Hong Kong Island, which only had a small population of 7,500, they settled on the largely unoccupied northern shore. In May, the British Royal Engineers began building Queen's Road, an east-west running thoroughfare along the coast. A month later, Captain Charles Elliot auctioned 50 land lots along Queen's Road to foreign merchants, although Hong Kong had not been officially ceded to Britain. Since then, the northern shore of Hong Kong was turned into a boom town, which attracted business interests not only from Westerners but also from the Chinese.<sup>1</sup> Looking for development and job opportunities, many people from South China had flocked to this new British colony named Victoria since June 1843. The territory of the City of Victoria covered Wan Chai, Admiralty, Central, Sheung Wan, and the Western District.

As the native Chinese population increased, Acting Governor Alexander Johnston leased out 150 lots (each 40 by 20 ft.) along a coastal strip of land

to Chinese inhabitants in September 1841. This area, named Sheung Wan by the Chinese, became the Lower Bazaar. When more and more Chinese poured into Hong Kong in early 1842, Johnston developed another Chinese settlement in Victoria. This area, named the Upper Bazaar (sometimes referred to as the Middle Bazaar), consisted of 118 lots, each 14 by 36 ft.<sup>2</sup> It ran from north to south uphill, perpendicular to Queen's Road. The Lower and Upper Bazars formed the two major Chinese settlements in Victoria.

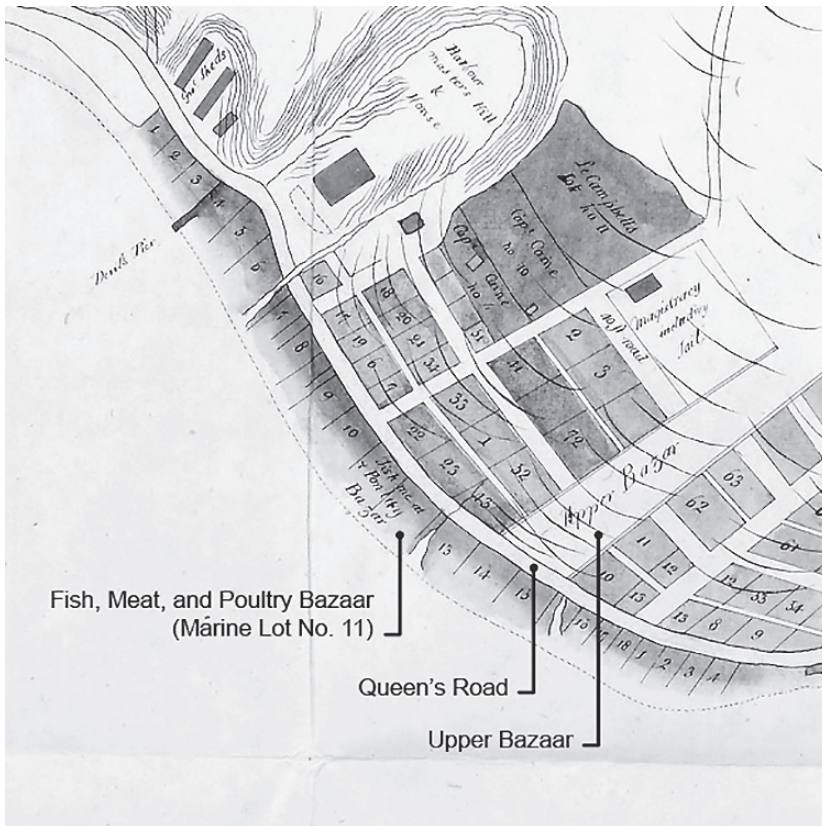
In the Chinese settlements, the then colonial secretary Colonel George Malcolm recalled that hucksters who went around to hawk food on the principal roads and thoroughfares created considerable inconvenience to traffic.<sup>3</sup> By March 1842, there were 600 Chinese hawkers in Victoria out of 8,181 members of the native population.<sup>4</sup> To remove road encroachment, Malcolm felt the need to collect all hucksters into a marketplace.<sup>5</sup> He built the first marketplace near the Upper Bazaar. Carl Smith suggested that Malcolm engaged a Chinese contractor, Wei Afoon 韋亞寬, to construct the market but Smith did not provide the source of this information.<sup>6</sup> Opened on 16 May 1842, the marketplace was named "Government Market No. 1," "Central Market," "Middle Market" or simply the "Market Place."<sup>7</sup>

According to the record of the first land sale executed on 14 June 1841, Marine Lot No. 16 was reserved for "Government Market No. 1," and the adjacent Marine Lot No. 17 was reserved for the extension of the market.<sup>8</sup> These two marine lots were located between Queen's Road and the shoreline.<sup>9</sup> *The Friend of China and Hong Kong Gazette* described that the marketplace "fronts upon the Queen's Road, and faces also in a long line on the water."<sup>10</sup>

The *Plan of Hong Kong* produced in 1842 was the earliest map of Victoria. The map was commonly known as *Pottinger's Map*, attributed to the first governor of Hong Kong, Henry Pottinger. On this map, a "Fish, Meat & Poultry Bazaar" was drawn on the seaward side of Queen's Road, opposite Town Lot No. 23 and a narrow uphill street across the road (Fig. 1.01). Curiously, this bazaar was numbered Marine Lot No. 11, not Marine Lot No. 16 as suggested in the first land sale record.<sup>11</sup> In fact, many scholars have challenged the accuracy of *Pottinger's Map*. For instance, Hal Empson,



the author of *Mapping Hong Kong: A Historical Atlas*, remarks that *Pottinger's Map* has considerable distortion and scale variation, and only a few of the land parcels shown on the map recur on later plans.<sup>12</sup> Dung Kai-cheung believes that *Pottinger's Map* was not a survey record of the first land sale but was possibly a sketch showing how Pottinger envisaged the city of Victoria.<sup>13</sup> As such, the “Fish, Meat & Poultry Bazaar” shown on *Pottinger's Map* was most likely Central Market.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig. 1.01.** A “Fish, Meat & Poultry Bazaar” was drawn on Marine Lot No. 11 on *Pottinger's Map* produced in 1842.  
 (Plan of Hong Kong. MS. In Sir H. Pottinger's “Superintendent” No. 8 of 1842, 1842, FO 925/2427, The National Archives, Kew.)

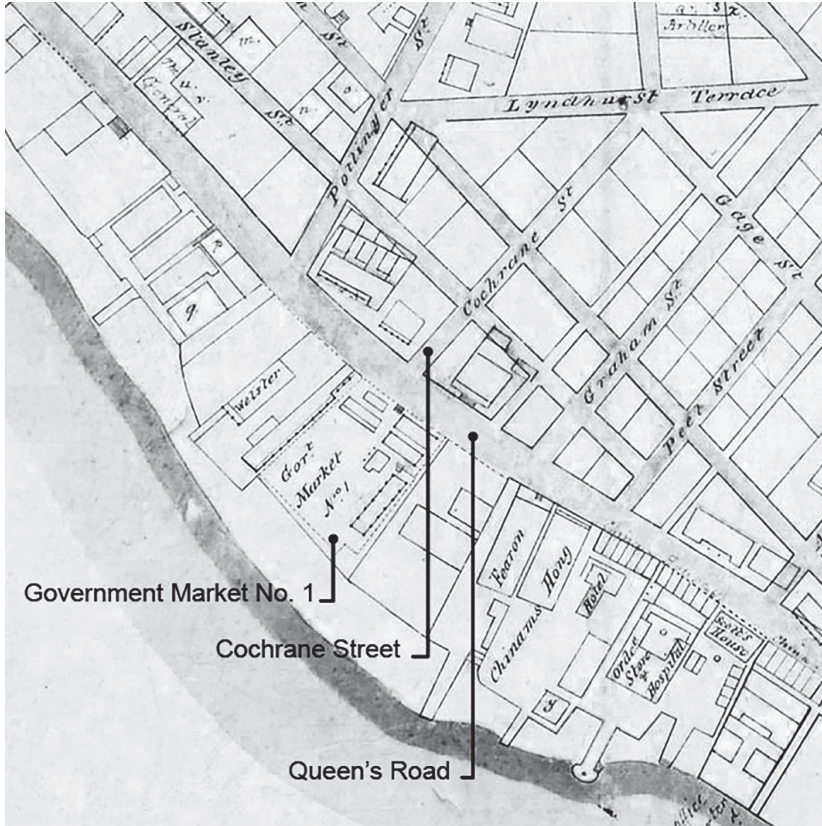


Fig. 1.02. “Government Market No. 1,” as shown in the *Plan of Victoria, Hong Kong* produced in 1845. The market faced Cochrane Street.

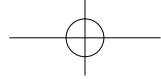
(*Plan of Victoria, Hong Kong, Copied from the Surveyor General's Dept., 1845, WO 78/479, The National Archives, Kew.*)

The information regarding the marketplace’s location on *Pottinger’s Map* does not match other maps produced around the same time, which shows the latter may be more accurate.<sup>15</sup> On the maps surveyed in 1843 by Major Edward Aldrich (commonly known as *Aldrich’s Map*) and by the colony’s Land Officer, Alexander Thomas Gordon (commonly named *Gordon’s Map*), the land lot where the “Fish, Meat & Poultry Bazaar” stood was labelled as Marine Lot No. 16, thus matching the first land sale record.<sup>16</sup>

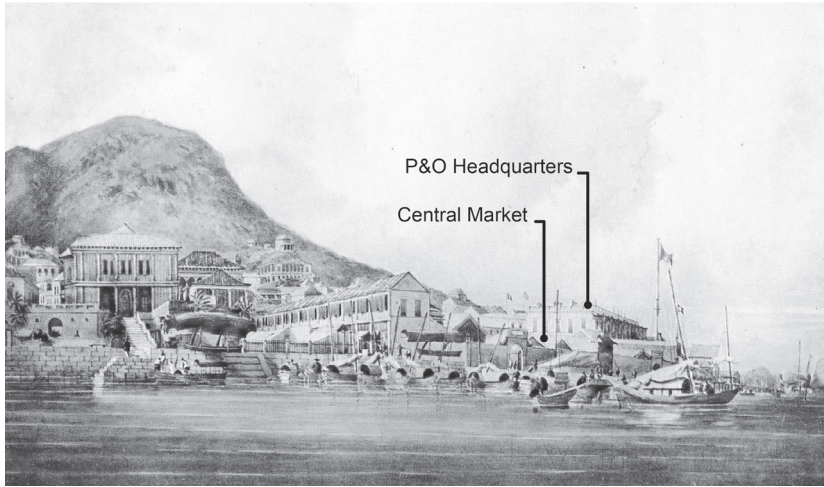
Furthermore, on the *Plan of Victoria, Hong Kong* produced in 1845, the name “Government Market No. 1” was added to this location (Fig. 1.02).<sup>17</sup> The opposite narrow uphill street was named Cochrane Street on this map. This proves that the first marketplace was erected in the exact location of the current Central Market.

The *Plan of Victoria, Hong Kong* (1845) showed that Central Market was enclosed by walls. A small structure, which could be steps or an entrance gate, was erected on Queen’s Road. The buildings were constructed on the southern and western edges of the site, whereas an ample open space was reserved on the northeastern corner for future expansion of the market.<sup>18</sup> The biggest building was surrounded by colonnade, which suggests that it could be an open shed without any enclosures. Two paintings produced in the 1850s provide some ideas of the appearance of Central Market. The watercolour painting by George Chinnery in 1851 depicts a view of Central from Victoria Harbour. On the right-hand side of the painting is the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation (P&O) Headquarters. The painting shows that Central Market, which was adjacent to P&O Headquarters, consisted of several houses with gable roofs. The market was enclosed by walls with three entrance gates opening toward the seaside (Fig. 1.03). Another watercolour painting produced in 1855 by an unknown artist shows some Central Market buildings next to P&O Headquarters (Fig. 1.04). The looks of these market buildings are similar to those depicted by Chinnery.

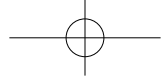
In Malcolm’s original plan, these market buildings would be covered with tiled roofs. However, the marketplace’s construction cost exceeded the original budget of \$3,500 by approximately \$500 due to the difficulty of levelling the ground and the necessity of building a strong retaining wall to support the roads near the site. As a result, part of the ground was covered with only mat sheds. Nevertheless, Malcolm suggested that the government could use the revenue yielded from the market to gradually substitute the mat sheds with permanent buildings, which would render the marketplace “freer from the risk of being injured by fire, or the effects of gales and the weather.”<sup>19</sup>



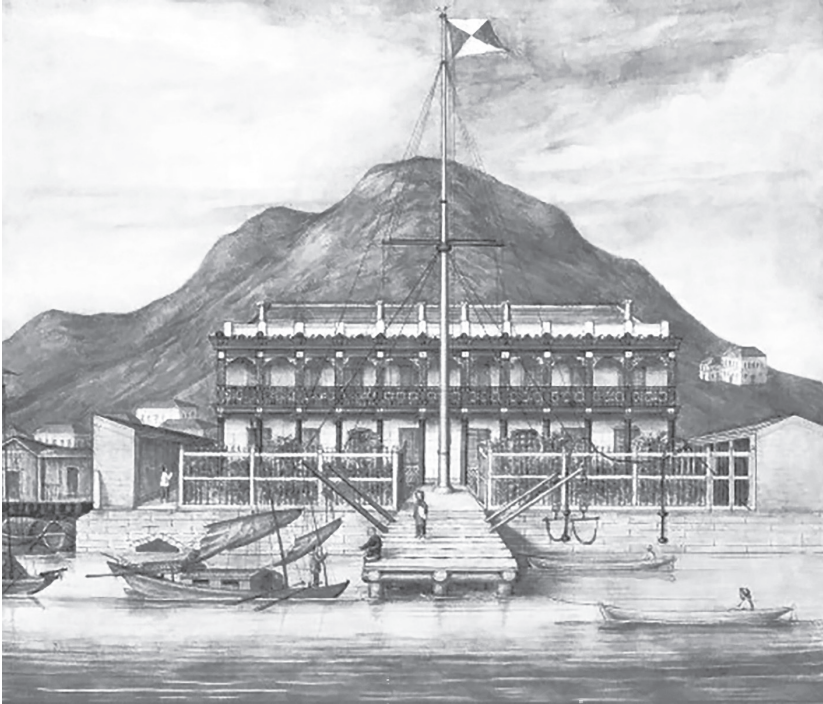
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**Fig. 1.03.** The watercolour painting by Chinnery shows that Central Market was enclosed by walls.  
(George Chinnery, *Victoria West and P. & O. Hong*, 1851, watercolour on paper.)



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**Fig. 1.04.** The P&O Headquarters and the adjacent Central Market (on the left of painting).

(Anonymous, *The P&O Headquarters in Hong Kong*, 1855, watercolour on paper.)

### *Operation of Central Market from 1842 to 1844*

In Central Market, stalls selling the same kind of food were organized into one department. Altogether, the market consisted of seven departments: (1) all kinds of meat, (2) fruit and vegetables, (3) poultry, (4) salted fish, (5) fresh fish, (6) weighing rooms, and (7) money changer houses.<sup>20</sup> *The Friend of China and Hong Kong Gazette* praised the abundant food provisions in the marketplace:

The crowd of buyers and sellers which thronged its spacious area afforded a convincing proof of the necessity for its erection. The exhibition of Fruit

and Vegetables was large and its effect was very pleasing. The singular variety of fish exposed, would afford many subjects of interest to the ichthyologist. From an attentive inspection of the plan and proposed arrangement, we are led to believe the successful opening of the market may be looked upon, as exclusive evidence of the ability of the projector, to render it every way adequate to meet the pressing requirements of our daily increasing population.<sup>21</sup>

The government let out the stalls in Central Market at fixed rates. The monthly rent for a pork stall was \$1, while for stalls selling fish, salted fish, poultry, cake and tea, and vegetables was only \$0.75. The rent for cook shops was the highest, costing \$2.5 a month (Table 1.1).<sup>22</sup> The government charged only a moderate rent for the market stalls to barely cover the expenses of maintaining the marketplace operation. According to Malcolm, any person could come over from the mainland and rent a stall “for either one day or a month.”<sup>23</sup>

**Table 1.1. Charges of Renting Different Stalls at the Government Marketplace in 1842**

Stall Type	Monthly Rent (Dollars)
Fish stalls	0.75
Salted fish stalls	0.75
Poultry stalls	0.75
Cake and tea stalls	0.75
Vegetables	0.75
Pork stalls	1
Cook shops	2.5

(Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China, *Report from the Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China* [London: HMSO, 1847], 348.)

Malcolm appointed Wei Afoon as the superintendent and built a house for him on the market ground. Since then, the Wei family was closely associated with Central Market. As the superintendent, Wei Afoon was responsible for the day-to-day management of the market and collecting rent from stallholders. He reported to the Chief Magistrate, who was in charge of the colony’s law and order. No one other than the superintendent

was allowed to stay in the market overnight.<sup>24</sup> Alongside Wei Afoon, an assistant, three coolies, and two watchmen were hired at Central Market. The government shouldered a monthly expense of \$60 for the market personnel hired (Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2. Monthly Expenses in the Management of the Government Marketplace in 1842**

Personnel	Monthly Expenses (Dollars)
A superintendent	20
An assistant	10
Three coolies, at \$6 each	18
Two watchmen, at \$6 each	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>

(Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China, *Report from the Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China* [London: HMSO, 1847], 348.)

***Resumption of Eastern Market (Government Market No. 2)***

Pottinger was satisfied with Malcolm’s effort in erecting the first marketplace in Victoria. He even suggested that as soon as Central Market was completely filled, he would have no objection to allot further ground to erect a second one, provided that “the wants of the settlement demand it.”<sup>25</sup> In the end, the second government market was created much earlier than both Pottinger and Malcolm anticipated, but it was not built by the government.

In June 1842, the same month that Central Market was opened, a private market was erected by John Ouchterlony of the Madras Engineers on Marine Lot No. 71 for the convenience of the troops stationed in Admiralty.<sup>26</sup> The *Aldrich’s Map* shows that the market was located to the north of Queen’s Road, was opposite to the Artillery Barracks (whose location was where the Victoria Barracks located on later maps) and was close to Morgan’s Bazaar and Canton Bazaar. It was probably located on the present site of Pacific Place. The section of Queen’s Road where the market stood was subsequently renamed Queensway.



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Pottinger considered that the operation and management of markets in Victoria should be put in the hands of the government, not private individuals. Therefore, the government resumed Ouchterlony's market in 1843 and renamed it "Government Market No. 2" or "Eastern Market."<sup>27</sup>

## 1.2 Farming of Markets from 1844

### *The Market Farming System*

After John Davis succeeded Henry Pottinger as the governor of Hong Kong in 1844, he quickly knew that the colonial government's local revenue could not cover local expenditure. To increase the government's income, Davis adopted the revenue farming system which was popular in many European colonies in Southeast Asia, such as British Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>28</sup> He auctioned off the franchise of several major businesses (such as opium, salt weighing, stone quarrying, markets, and fishery) to a handful of individuals. The franchise holder, or the farmer as he was called, had to pay a monthly duty to the government for the right to hold the monopoly of the business or the sale of certain excisable items.<sup>29</sup>

Markets were one of the farms included in Davis' new policy. By then, there were only two markets in Victoria: Central Market and Eastern Market. Curiously, the government leased both markets to farmers who were Chinese. This decision marked the beginning of market monopoly by Chinese elites in the colony. Some records suggested that these markets were put up for public auctions; others, on the contrary, claimed that these markets were sold privately.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese farmers holding the market lease had to provide a surety in advance and paid the colonial treasury a monthly duty. They were then free to charge the stallholders. The shortest market lease lasted for one year and the longest five and a half years. When the lease expired, the market was sold again to the highest bidder.



To the colonial government, farming out the markets had several benefits. Gary Luk points out that the government obtained more income through the farming system. In the first half of 1844, the Colonial Treasury collected only \$900 worth of rent from stallholders of Central Market and Eastern Market. However, in the second half of 1844, after implementing the farming system, it collected about \$2,600 from the market farmers.<sup>31</sup> Christopher Munn also believes that the franchise of markets freed the government from the trouble of collecting rent directly from stallholders.<sup>32</sup>

### *Farming Out Central Market and Eastern Market*

Besides generating greater revenue, the farming system allowed the colonial government to transfer the markets' maintenance responsibility to the farmers. The government often made it a leasing requirement for the farmers to rebuild or repair the markets. Central Market was sold by auction in August 1844 to Wei Aqiu (or Wei Agui) 韋亞貴, son of Wei Afoon (Central Market's superintendent), for a monthly fee of \$300 for one year, with one-half of the fee payable in advance.<sup>33</sup> The government renewed Wei Aqiu's lease for another five and a half years from 30 June 1845, on the condition that Wei Aqiu must replace the mat sheds on the market ground with new brick houses covered with tiles, lay down the roads with bricks or stones, and provide proper drains to keep the market dry and clean. All had to be done to the satisfaction of the Surveyor General.<sup>34</sup> The official position of Surveyor General, which was initially named the Land Officer, was appointed in 1844 to take charge of Victoria's basic infrastructure construction and manage land registration and land auction. Unable to fully pay off the construction fee, Wei Aqiu borrowed money from some Chinese businesspeople at exorbitant interest rates, which led him to significant debt.<sup>35</sup> When the lease expired in early 1851, the government auctioned off Central Market to a new farmer, Chow Aqiu 周亞蔡, who spent \$1,500 on rebuilding and re-erecting the market. Chow Aqiu held the lease of Central Market until September 1857.<sup>36</sup>

The government imposed similar leasing conditions on Eastern Market which was destroyed by fire on 24 May 1845.<sup>37</sup> Unwilling to rebuild the market, the government transferred the job to its farmer Fung Attai (or Fung A Tai) 馮亞帝, who wished to renew the Eastern Market lease. The government granted Fung a new lease for a monthly duty of \$50 for five years from 15 October 1845, but he was obligated to rebuild a substantial market on its original location within a year.<sup>38</sup> He also had to lay down proper and convenient passages and make suitable drains to keep the market dry and clean.<sup>39</sup>

### *Tai Ping Shan District and the Construction of Western Market*

The third market of Victoria was constructed by a private individual. Victoria had burgeoned since 1841, and its central district, of which government departments and military barracks occupied a significant part, had run out of land for development. The ramshackle Chinese houses in the Upper Bazaar occupied valuable land and blocked the westward expansion of the European settlements in the central district. Hoping to transform the Upper Bazaar into a European commercial area, the government resumed the land initially leased to Chinese lot holders and relocated them to Tai Ping Shan, a hillside district adjoining the Lower Bazaar, in 1844.<sup>40</sup> From then on, the Tai Ping Shan District and the Lower Bazaar became the key Chinese residential and commercial districts in town. By April 1844, the Chinese population on Hong Kong Island rose to 19,000, among which no more than 1,000 were women and children.<sup>41</sup> Most Chinese inhabitants were male labourers, working all sorts of manual jobs.

A Chinese businessman, Loo Aqui (or Loo Acqui) 盧亞貴, petitioned to build a new market on Marine Lot No. 41 at the western end of the Lower Bazaar (on the present site of Sheung Wan Municipal Services Building) for the Chinese communities in the bazaar and the new Tai Ping Shan District.<sup>42</sup> The government granted him a lease from 23 August 1844 for five years at \$200 per month, on the condition that he had to

build a substantial marketplace under the Land Office’s inspection and laid out \$2,500 in fitting it up. However, the market would become the government’s property at the expiry of the term.<sup>43</sup> The market built by Loo Aqui was named the “Western Market” or the “Lower Market.” After its completion, Western Market, alongside Central Market and Eastern Market, became the three major public markets in Hong Kong for several decades.

By adopting the farming system, the colonial government released its responsibility to manage and maintain the markets to the farmers, who were usually elites of the Chinese community (Table 1.3). For instance, the Western Market farmer Loo Aqui was one of the major suppliers to the British expedition during the Opium War. He settled in Hong Kong on its acquisition by the British and established himself as one of the most powerful early middlemen between the Chinese and colonial communities. During the 1840s, he was the biggest Chinese landlord in Victoria and earned hefty profits from running brothels, gambling dens, opium houses, and pawnshops.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Chinese elites often held monopolies of multiple businesses. Chow Aqui, Fung Attai, and Loo Aqui—the respective farmers of Central Market, Eastern Market, and Western Market—also held the revenue rights of opium farms.

**Table 1.3.** Licensees of the Three Major Markets in Hong Kong from the 1840s to the 1850s

Market	Lease Commencement	Leasing Period	Market Farmer/ Licensee	Conditions
Central Market	16 August 1844	1 year	Wei Aqui 韋亞貴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$300; pay one-half in advance</li> <li>• Surety: \$500</li> <li>• Keep and repair all government properties therein</li> <li>• Ensure good provisions are exposed for sale</li> <li>• Ensure no person of bad character can freely enter the market</li> </ul>

Market	Lease Commencement	Leasing Period	Market Farmer/Licensee	Conditions
Central Market	30 June 1845	5.5 years	Wei Aqiu 章亞貴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$400; pay one-half in advance</li> <li>• Surety: \$2,000</li> <li>• To the satisfaction of the Surveyor General:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Replace the mat sheds with new brick houses covered with tiles</li> <li>◦ Lay down the roads with bricks or stones</li> <li>◦ Provide proper drains to keep the market dry and clean</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure no unwholesome food is sold in the market</li> </ul>
	1 March 1851	2 years	Chow Aqiu 周亞蔡	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$400</li> <li>• Surety: \$1,500</li> <li>• Rebuild and re-erect the market and expend thereon a sum of \$1,500</li> </ul>
	14 September 1854	3 years	Chow Aqiu 周亞蔡	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$600</li> <li>• Surety bond: \$2,000</li> <li>• Keep the market clean, dry, and free from nuisances of any kind</li> <li>• Ensure no unwholesome food is sold in the market</li> </ul>
Eastern Market	1 October 1844 (the market was destroyed by fire on 24 May 1845)	1 year	Fung Attai 馮亞帝	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$60</li> <li>• Surety: \$500</li> <li>• Keep the market in good repair and ensure a plentiful supply of food</li> <li>• Ensure no person with misconduct can freely enter the market</li> </ul>
	15 October 1845	5 years	Fung Attai 馮亞帝	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly duty: \$50</li> <li>• Surety: \$2,000</li> <li>• Build a substantial market within a year</li> <li>• Ensure the buildings are in good repair</li> <li>• Lay down proper and convenient passages and make suitable drains to keep the market dry and clean</li> <li>• Ensure no unwholesome food is sold in the market</li> </ul>

Market	Lease Commencement	Leasing Period	Market Farmer/ Licensee	Conditions
Western Market	23 August 1844	5 years	Loo Aqoi 盧亞貴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly rent: \$200</li> <li>• Surety: \$5,000</li> <li>• Construct a substantial marketplace under the inspection of the Land Office</li> <li>• Spent \$2,500 in fitting up the market</li> </ul>
	1 November 1849	5 years	George Duddell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly rent: \$255</li> <li>• Surety: \$2,000</li> <li>• Compensate Loo Aqoi \$2,500 for the market construction cost</li> </ul>

### 1.3 Licensing of Public Markets from 1858

#### *Discontent Towards Market Monopoly*

Only a few years after occupying Hong Kong, Britain recorded a significant trade deficit with China. In 1845, the import of goods to China from English ships equalled \$16,073,682, but the export from China to England and British India was as high as \$26,697,391.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Hong Kong was no longer considered a good place to do commercial transactions by many British and Chinese merchants. Given these circumstances, the House of Commons appointed the Select Committee on Commercial Relations with China in 1847 to investigate the causes of the decline in exports. The committee called upon many British officials and merchants to testify.

In his testimony, Alexander Matheson of Jardine, Matheson & Company attributed the decay of Hong Kong's position in the region to how the government raised its revenue.<sup>46</sup> Hong Kong was a free port up to 1843, but since then, the colony's unrestricted freedom had been interfered with by the local government. To cover local expenditures, the Davis government imposed various excessive fees and taxes. To make things worse, the revenue farming system led to the monopoly of major businesses. As a result, respectable Chinese, who showed a disposition to settle in Hong

Kong, had all left, and the trade formerly passing through the Hong Kong harbour had ceased.

Matheson explained the operation of the farming system to the Select Committee, using the market as an example: “A Chinaman farms the marketplace; the stalls are all let to his own immediate dependents, and they share the profits among them, in a way which nobody can understand.”<sup>47</sup> A monopoly was thereby created against the residents. Matheson further explained, “A stranger, for instance, to the farmer, coming to Hong Kong with provisions, would not be allowed perhaps to get into the market with them; he would interfere with parties connected with the farmers who had the same sort of things to sell.”<sup>48</sup> As a result of the market monopoly, food provision had risen in price considerably, and Matheson complained that the poor labouring people could not afford to live in the colony as they did formerly. Moreover, the food provisions in Hong Kong were of lower quality than in Guangzhou.<sup>49</sup>

### *Public Markets and Public Nuisances*

From 1842 to 1847, all public markets in Victoria were managed by local Chinese (first by the Chinese superintendents and overseers and then by the Chinese farmers). The police would intervene only in the market affairs in case of robberies, thefts, assaults, and other serious crimes and accidents.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, the poor management from the Chinese farmers turned Central Market into a hotbed of crime in Victoria. Gang fights, larceny, rowdyism, extortion, and even riots were the norms in Central Market.<sup>51</sup> Numerous records also revealed that several stallholders and their families lived or slept in Central Market, and some of them were the heads of criminal gangs.<sup>52</sup>

Central Market was a major public building in Victoria. Unlike other public buildings, such as schools, churches, and magistracies, where Chinese inhabitants seldom visited, Central Market was closely related to people’s everyday lives. It also occupied a prominent location along Queen’s Road, close to both the Upper and the Lower Bazaars. Such a landmark position

made Central Market an easy target to attack. For instance, in October 1843, the government pulled down some mat sheds that harboured a gang of ruffians. In revenge, these ruffians set the government coal depots on fire and attempted to burn Central Market. The next day, they entered Central Market again, armed with knives, threatened citizens all around, wounded a European policeman, and then walked away unmolested.<sup>53</sup> Central Market was also a target for vandalism when the tension between the Chinese and British authorities ran high. In 1847, the incumbent governor, John Davis, sent a troop to bombard Guangzhou after foreigners there had been assaulted. His action triggered a series of counterattacks from the Chinese in Hong Kong, including an arsonist's attempt to burn down Central Market.<sup>54</sup>

### *An Ordinance for Licensing Markets*

To prevent disorders and monopolies in the public markets, the colonial government replaced the market farming system with a licensing system in 1847. Through the promulgation of *An Ordinance for Licensing Markets and for Preventing Disorders Therein 1847*, the government imposed three major controls on Hong Kong's markets.

First, the government required all markets to be licensed. No one could establish or operate a market without the government's permission. Anyone who wished to operate an existing market or build a new one would have to apply to the Colonial Secretary for a market license, and any unauthorized markets would be pulled down and removed by the police as a public nuisance.

Second, the government officially put all licensed markets under the superintendence of the Chief Magistrate of Police, who was required "to take all requisite measures to prevent disorders and preserve peace and tranquillity."<sup>55</sup> The police could pull down any buildings encroaching upon crown lands and the seashores, made with inflammable materials that put the town of Victoria in grave peril, and inhabited by persons of ill reputation.

Third, the government began to control the quality of market buildings. The ordinance stipulated that all markets must be built with

stones or bricks according to a plan approved by the Surveyor General. This requirement also applied to existing markets that were dilapidated and needed repairs and reconstruction.

The 1847 ordinance did not end the monopoly of markets at all: markets in Hong Kong continued to be controlled by a handful of monopolists who successfully obtained the licenses. Instead, it ended the domination of Chinese farmers. Under the ordinance, anyone, foreigners or Chinese alike, could apply for a license to erect or run a market, thus opening the door for foreign merchants to join the market business. For instance, Western Market was leased to a Chinese farmer Loo Aquí from 1844 to 1849 with a monthly fee of \$200. After Loo's five-year lease expired, the government auctioned Western Market to a British businessman George Duddell, who offered to raise the monthly payment to \$255. Duddell held the Western Market lease from 1 November 1849 for five years.<sup>56</sup>

Since the licensing system's enforcement in 1847, at least three new markets were erected on land owned by the licensees. This included the market erected in 1847 by a wealthy Chinese landlord and contractor, Tam Achoy 譚亞才, on the eastern end of the Lower Bazaar. Tam named his market under his firm's name Kwong Yuen 廣源號.<sup>57</sup> After leasing Western Market in 1849, George Duddell obtained another license in 1850 to erect a market on his Marine Lot No. 65. Similarly, Abdoollah Hareem obtained a license to establish a market on his Inland Lot No. 330 for two years from 1 January 1851.<sup>58</sup>

As operating a market yielded a massive profit, there was keen competition among businesspeople in the application for the market license. Many Chinese applicants paid cumshaw to the Chinese compradors who worked for the colonial officials to ensure their successful application. A well-documented bribery scandal concerned the Central Market farmer Wei Aquí and the Colonial Secretary's comprador Lo Een-teen 羅見田. To secure the Central Market lease, Wei agreed to pay a monthly cumshaw of \$150 to Lo and allowed Lo to select meat and produce from the market without payment. After Wei Aquí died in 1847, his brother Wei Afoon (who shared the same name as their father) wanted to succeed the Central



Market lease. Apparently, Lo used the Colonial Secretary's name to threaten Wei to continue paying the monthly cumshaw. Unwilling to pay the bribe, Wei Afoon informed William Tarrant, the Clerk of Deeds in the Surveyor General's Office, about Lo's extortion. Subsequently, Tarrant brought the allegations to the attention of the Governor. However, an official inquiry concluded that the allegations were groundless. Instead, the government put Wei Afoon and Tarrant on trial before the Supreme Court for conspiracy to injure the Colonial Secretary's reputation, causing Wei Afoon to lose his market and Tarrant his job.<sup>59</sup> The scandal was widely reported in the press.

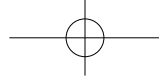
#### 1.4 The 1858 Market Ordinance and Market Construction Program

##### *Abolishing the Monopoly of Markets*

Hong Kong's economy slowly recovered in the early 1850s. During the Taiping Rebellion, a revolt against the Qing Court in China from 1850 to 1864, many Chinese fled to Hong Kong, bringing capital and labour to the British colony. From 1853 to 1859, Hong Kong's Chinese population increased from approximately 40,000 to roughly 86,000. Amid the Taiping Rebellion, John Bowring, an advocate of free trade, became the Governor. During his tenure from 1854 to 1859, Bowring was committed to abolishing the market monopoly in Hong Kong.

Governor Bowring described the licensing of markets as a "vicious system" because "the prices of all kinds of food were kept up by the monopolists, who rented the market property under leases from the Government while at the same time a very inadequate revenue was derived from this source."<sup>60</sup> He complained:

The system under which the markets are let is in all respects so objectionable that it was long been decided to change it. The exclusive privileges created by the existing state of things are extremely onerous to the people—bringing all the costs and annoyances of a monopoly



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pressing upon the privacy articles of subsistence—which the portion which the revenue receives of the large taxation levied on the consumers is comparatively inconsiderable.<sup>61</sup>

Bowring also noticed that some market licensees earned a significant profit by subletting their markets to someone else. For example, a market for which the government received \$637.10 per annum in 1855 was immediately sublet to an undertenant for \$1,625 a year.<sup>62</sup> Seeing all these problems, Bowring was determined to replace the monopoly system with one of free competition, lower the food prices by introducing more independent traders, and induce a fair addition to colonial revenue as the colonial property would justify.<sup>63</sup> His ideas led to the formulation of *The Market's Ordinance* in May 1858.

As stipulated in the ordinance, only those markets published in the government gazette would be deemed authorized markets. Any unauthorized markets would be deemed a common nuisance. The ordinance ordained the Surveyor General to oversee the construction, registration, and leasing of the markets. No buildings, other than shops, stalls, standings, houses for market porters, and *lans* (wholesale depots) or entrepôts, were allowed to be built on the market ground.<sup>64</sup> All the buildings had to be constructed of stones or bricks, and shops or stalls had to be fitted with stone or wooden dressers or counters suitable for trade. No market stall was allowed to cover a surface larger than seven ft.

The ordinance put all the markets from farmers' and licensees' control back to the government. The Surveyor General numbered and registered each building and stall in every market.<sup>65</sup> The buildings and shops in the markets were let to the highest bidder by public auction for a rental period of one year. Without the Surveyor General's permission, no one could occupy or hold more than one building in a market, which prevented the markets from being monopolized by private individuals. The market stalls and *lans* were let to tenants by the month at a fixed monthly rent. Every month, the Surveyor General would draw lots to rent out the stalls and *lans*.<sup>66</sup> To avoid bribery and corruption, public servants and their families

could not have a direct or indirect interest in any market stalls, market buildings, or slaughterhouses.

The ordinance clearly specified the acceptable practice of food selling inside and outside the markets. At the markets, the sale of food was restricted at the stall or in a shop. Registered stallholders could sell any food usually sold in a public market. They could not sell unwholesome food nor slaughter any cattle in the market. The butchering of cattle was only allowed in a licensed slaughterhouse.

Selling food outside the markets faced much more stringent control. Only a few people were allowed to sell food outside the markets. A licensed victualler or a keeper of a boarding house, coffee house, or cook shop could supply cooked food to customers. A licensed hawker was allowed to hawk only green vegetables, fruit, bean curd, congee, confectionary, soup, and salted fish. If someone wanted to sell food on their premises, they could only sell bread, milk, congee, confectionary, soup, and salted fish. In other words, the sale of raw meat and fresh fish outside the markets was strictly prohibited, with the exception that boat people could sell fish from their boats to the crews or occupants of other ships only if they were far from the shore by at least 300 ft.

### *Registered Markets in Hong Kong by the Late Nineteenth Century*

As Hong Kong's population increased rapidly, Governor Bowring pointed out that it would be necessary to provide more markets to keep off nuisances in the public streets from the general sale of perishing and sometimes putrid food.<sup>67</sup> Following the enforcement of *The Market's Ordinance* in 1858, the government reserved £15,000 for the Surveyor General's Office to improve existing markets and construct new ones.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, six government markets were rebuilt or erected in 1858: Central, Western, Eastern, Tai Ping Shan, So Kon Po, and Wan Chai.<sup>69</sup> Between the 1860s and the 1870s, three more markets, namely Sai Ying Pun (1864), Shau Kei Wan (1872), and Shek Tong Tsui (1875), were added. Altogether, these nine markets were gazetted and were deemed authorized public markets in the colony (Fig. 1.05).

Colonial Secretary's Office, Victoria, Hongkong, 29th June, 1858.

No. 59.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.

It is hereby notified, that His Excellency The Governor in Council has been pleased to establish, and declare open, for Public use, the undermentioned Markets:—

CENTRAL MARKET.  
 WESTERN MARKET.  
 TAIPINGSHAN MARKET.

EASTERN MARKET.  
 WANCHI MARKET.  
 SOOKUNPOO MARKET.

By Order,

W. T. BRIDGES.  
*Acting Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Victoria, Hongkong, 2d July, 1858.

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Fig. 1.05. Six markets were gazetted in 1858 as the authorized public markets in Hong Kong.

("Government Notification No. 59," *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, 29 June 1858.)

Among the nine markets gazetted, Central Market and Western Market were rebuilt on their original sites. However, Eastern Market was rebuilt at the newly reclaimed Bowring Praya at the junction of present-day Hennessey Road and Arsenal Street. The other six markets were new additions to the colony. Without a doubt, these nine markets were erected where the population was concentrated. Interestingly, these nine market locations followed the district division in Hong Kong at that time. Since May 1857, the government divided the colony into nine districts, including Victoria, Shau Kei Wan, Sai Wan, Shek O, Tai Tam Tuk, Stanley, Heong Kong (today's Wong Chuk Hang), Aberdeen, and Pok Fu Lam. The heart and the most populated district of the colony, Victoria, was further divided into seven sub-districts.<sup>70</sup> The following year, the government extended Victoria's boundary and added a new sub-district, Shek Tong Tsui, making the total number of sub-districts eight.<sup>71</sup> In each of the eight Victorian sub-districts, a market was established (Table 1.4). Unfortunately, no record

has been found to explain whether the distribution of one market in one Victorian sub-district was a government intention or a mere coincidence. Outside the boundary of Victoria, a market was erected in Shau Kei Wan, the second most populated district of the colony.

**Table 1.4. Distribution of Public Markets Erected after the Enforcement of *The Market's Ordinance* in 1858**

District	Market	Completion Year
Victoria Sub-district No. 1: Sai Ying Pun	Sai Ying Pun Market	1864
Victoria Sub-district No. 2: Tai Ping Shan	Tai Ping Shan Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 3: Sheung Wan	Western Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 4: Central	Central Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 5: Ha Wan	Eastern Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 6: Wong Nai Chung	Wan Chai Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 7: So Kon Po	So Kon Po Market	1858
Victoria Sub-district No. 8: Shek Tong Tsui	Shek Tong Tsui Market	1875
District 2: Shau Kei Wan	Shau Kei Wan Market	1872

### *Building Public Markets in Kowloon*

In 1860, China ceded Kowloon to Britain under the Convention of Peking. Unlike the bustling town of Victoria across the harbour, Kowloon consisted mainly of small villages with approximately 800 people.<sup>72</sup> Immediately after Kowloon's concession, the British troops occupied Tsim Sha Tsui as a military stronghold and forced the villagers there to resettle in Yau Ma Tei.<sup>73</sup> In the mid-1870s, the government sold the marine lots in Yau Ma Tei and demanded that the lot holders undertake the reclamation of the seashore.<sup>74</sup> Gradually, Yau Ma Tei was developed into a new town of boat-building businesses and related trades.

As Yau Ma Tei's population multiplied, in 1879, the colonial government established a government market there, the first of its kind in Kowloon.<sup>75</sup> Yau Ma Tei Market had 30 stalls selling pork, beef, fresh fish, salted fish, poultry, and vegetable, providing the government with \$60 of rent per month (Table 1.5).<sup>76</sup> The government remarked that the erection of Yau Ma Tei Market was merely "a sanitary measure than a source of revenue."<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, only three years after its establishment, by April 1882, Yau Ma Tei Market had grown into the fourth largest market in terms of the average daily quantity of produce, only behind Central Market, Western Market, and Sai Ying Pun Market.<sup>78</sup>

**Table 1.5. Types of Stalls Available at Yau Ma Tei Market by 1879**

Stall Type	Number	Monthly Rent
Pork	7	\$2.5 (same as in Central Market)
Beef	3	\$2.5 (same as in Central Market)
Salted Fish	3	\$2.0
Poultry	2	\$2.0
Vegetable	5	\$2.0
Fresh Fish	10	\$1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>\$60.0</b>

(“Yau Ma Tei Market,” 1879, 170191, Carl Smith Collection, Public Records Office, Hong Kong.)

Yau Ma Tei Market remained the only public market in Kowloon for the subsequent decade until the government erected Hung Hom Market in 1889. Interestingly, the streets where Yau Ma Tei Market and Hung Hom Market stood were both named “Market Street,” even though there was another Market Street in front of Tai Ping Shan Market (completed in 1858) on Hong Kong Island. This means that in the 1880s, there were altogether three “Market Streets” in Hong Kong, which reflected that a market was not merely a public building but also a neighbourhood landmark. When Tsuen Wan Market was built in 1936, the street where it abutted on was, once again, named Market Street. Today, only the Market Street in Yau Ma Tei and Tsuen Wan remained, but to avoid confusion caused by the name duplication, the one in Tsuen Wan was renamed Tsuen Wan Market Street. Meanwhile, Market Streets in Tai Ping Shan and Hung Hom were renamed Po Hing Fong and Wuhu Street respectively.

### 1.5 The Design of Public Markets After 1858

Since the promulgation of *The Market’s Ordinance*, the Surveyor General’s Office completed 10 markets from 1858 to 1879. Unfortunately, these 10

markets were poorly documented, and one can only get a glimpse of their design from some textual records, historic maps, old photographs, and architectural drawings. The limited evidence shows that at least three types of markets were erected in this period: market compounds, enclosed market houses, and open-type market sheds (Table 1.6).

**Table 1.6.** Types of Public Markets Erected from 1858 to 1879.

Completion Year	Market	Market Compound	Enclosed Market House	Open-Type Market Shed	Design Unknown
1858	Central Market	•			
1858	Western Market	•			
1858	Eastern Market	•			
1858	Tai Ping Shan Market		•		
1858	Wan Chai Market		•		
1858	So Kon Po Market	•			
1864	Sai Ying Pun Market				•
1872	Shau Kei Wan Market			•	
1875	Shek Tong Tsui Market			•	
1879	Yau Ma Tei Market	•			

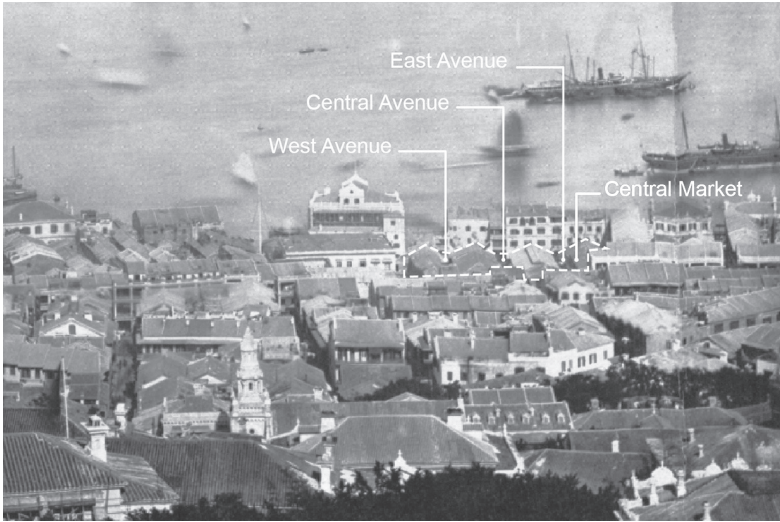
### *Market Compounds*

Central Market, Western Market, Eastern Market, So Kon Po Market, and Yau Ma Tei Market were all developed in the form of a market compound, having a large market ground with several buildings. The first four were among the six markets erected in 1858 in response to the enforcement of *The Market's Ordinance*, whereas Yau Ma Tei Market was the earliest public market in Kowloon.

Central Market completed in 1858 was the second generation of a public market erected on the Queen's Road site. It was a market compound with several elongated buildings covered by pitched roofs (Fig. 1.06). They were planned regularly on the market ground. As shown on a map produced in 1887, three internal avenues (namely, Eastern Avenue, Centre Avenue, and Western Avenue) penetrated through the site of Central Market (Fig. 1.07).<sup>79</sup>

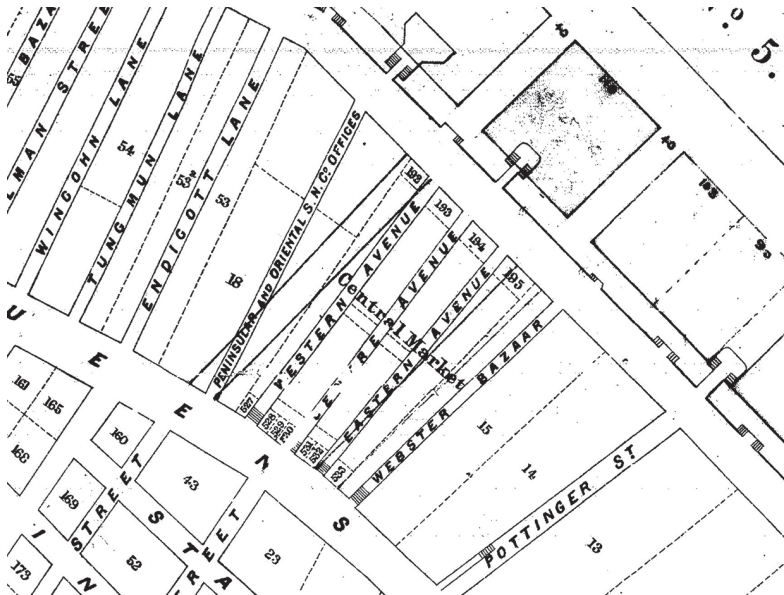


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**Fig. I.06.** Central Market was a market compound consisted of multiple elongated buildings within a network of internal avenues.

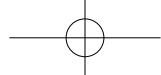
(Hong Kong, n.d., photograph, CO 1069-917-02, The National Archives, Kew.)



**Fig. I.07.** Three internal avenues penetrated through the Central Market ground, as shown on a map in 1887.

(Map of Central and Western Victoria [1887], 1887.)





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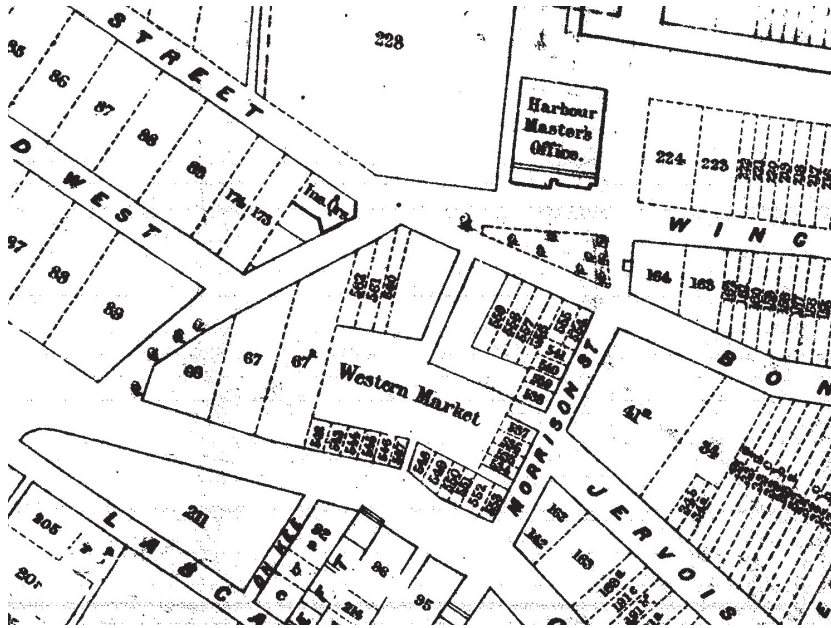
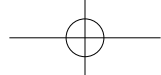


Fig. 1.08. Western Market was hidden in a network of alleyways.  
 (Map of Central and Western Victoria [1887], 1887.)

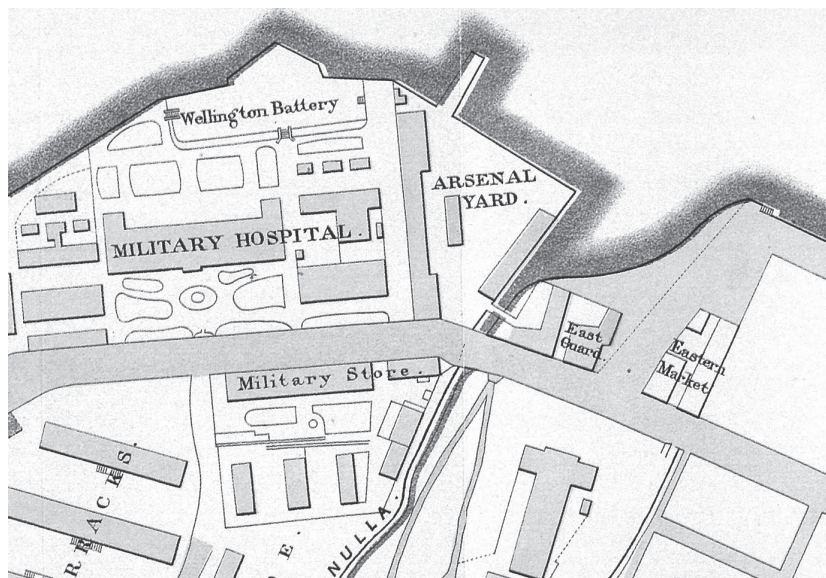
According to the government's record, Western Market reconstructed in 1858 consisted of several small primitive sheds and shops. The market ground "was almost entirely enclosed by privately-owned buildings" fronting Queen's Road, Bonham Strand, and Morrison Street, and the market could only be accessed through narrow alleyways (Fig. 1.08).<sup>80</sup>

Historical maps indicate that both Eastern Market and So Kon Po Market were small market compounds. The original Eastern Market was located along Queen's Road. Upon its reconstruction in 1858, the market was relocated to the Bowring Praya. The market compound consisted of three buildings of varied sizes. One of the buildings was long and traversed the whole site (Fig. 1.09).<sup>81</sup> By contrast, So Kon Po Market had a pair of identical market houses and a latrine.<sup>82</sup> The market was located on a land lot enclosed by four public streets, including Jardine's Bazaar (Fig. 1.10).

Like So Kon Po Market, Yau Ma Tei Market also consisted of a pair of identical market houses. It was erected in 1879, much later than the



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**Fig. 1.09.** Western Market was a small market compound with three buildings of varied sizes.

(Osbert Chadwick, *Mr. Chadwick's Reports on the Sanitary Condition of Hong Kong; with Appendices and Plans* [London: George E.B. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1882], facing 58.)

market compounds mentioned above. Yau Ma Tei Market was located on a site abutting on Market Street, Shanghai Street, and Temple Street. It could be accessed from Market Street through a flight of curtail steps or the side entrances on the two sides of an open yard between the two market buildings (Fig. 1.11). The two market houses were enclosed by brick walls with white plaster and covered with a big hip roof with tiling.

### *Enclosed Market Houses*

Some historic photographs and postcards show that Wan Chai Market and Tai Ping Shan Market, both erected in 1858, were designed in the form of an enclosed market house. Wan Chai Market occupied a corner at Queen's Road East and Wan Chai Road. It was erected in front of the Kuhlan Monument, an obelisk to commemorate the British and American sailors

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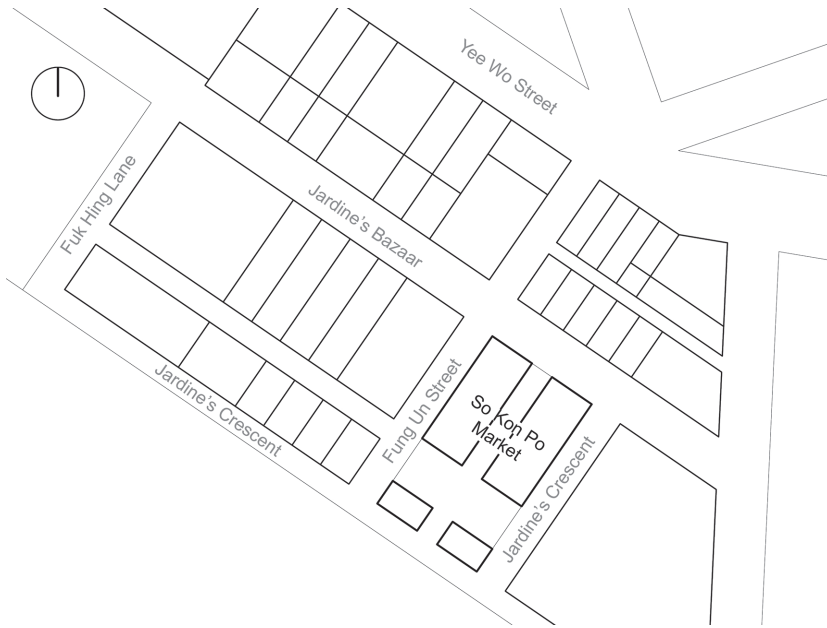


Fig. I.10. So Kon Po Market consisted of a pair of identical buildings.



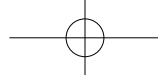
Fig. I.11. Yau Ma Tei Market was a small compound with two longitudinal market houses.

and marines killed in action during a combined operation against a large piratical fleet near Kuhlan. The market was a small rectangular building, with the longer side facing Queen's Road East (Figs. 1.12 and 1.13). It had a pitched roof covered with tiles and a vent on the rooftop to let in natural light and air. The market was enclosed by brick walls finished with white plaster. Hence, food could be sold in a completely indoor and weather-resistant environment. Two semi-circular porticos supported by Tuscan columns were erected, one on Queen's Road East and the other on Wan Chai Road. The PWD expanded Wan Chai Market in 1904 by covering the open space facing Queen's Road East in front of the market (Fig. 1.14).

In contrast to the Wan Chai Market, which was decorated with Western architectural motifs, Tai Ping Shan Market resembled the traditional Chinese courtyard house and blended well with the commoners' dwellings in the Tai Ping Shan District. The market was a compound of three houses with two courtyards in between (Fig. 1.15). Each house was covered by a pitched roof with pan-and-roll tiling. To fit the sloping topography of Tai Ping Shan District, the market was divided into two blocks located on two levels.



Fig. 1.12. Wan Chai Market at the junction of Queen's Road East and Wan Chai Road.



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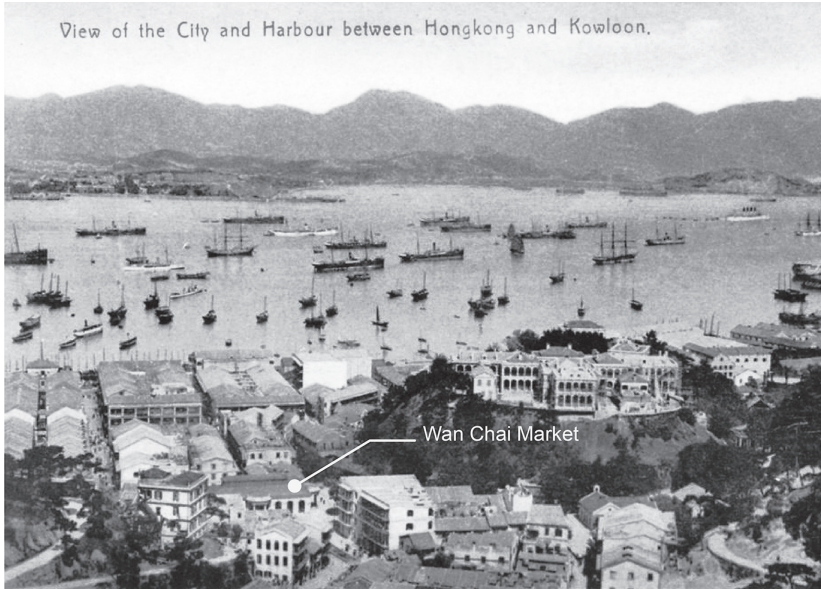
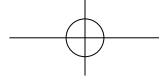


Fig. I.13. A postcard showing the view of Wan Chai around 1890. Wan Chai Market was located at the foot of Morrison Hill. The semi-circular portico, round-headed windows, and pitched roof with a vent can be clearly seen in this postcard.



Fig. I.14. Wan Chai Market after the expansion in 1904. The semi-circular portico facing Queen's Road East was demolished to make way for the expansion.



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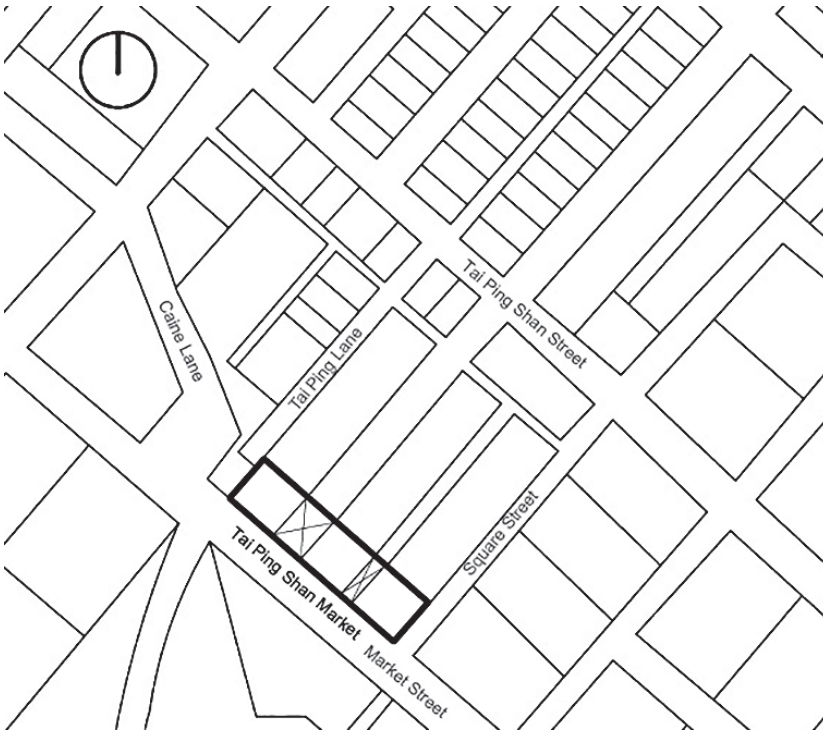
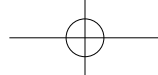


Fig. 1.15. Location plan of Tai Ping Shan Market.

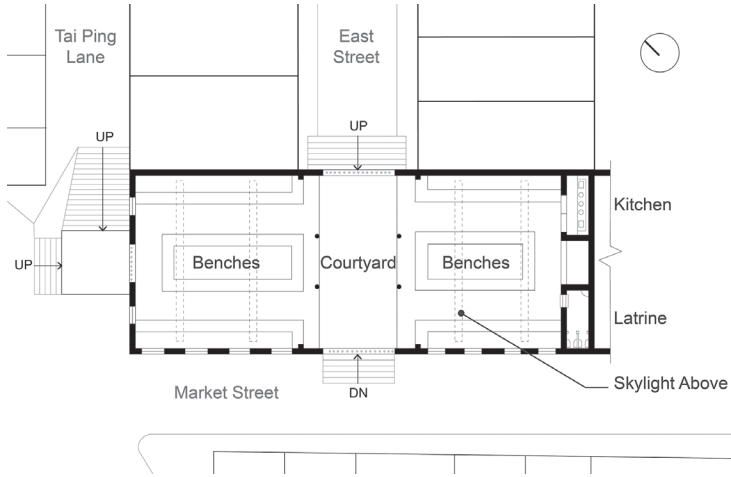
The lower block, which consisted of two market houses and a courtyard, was erected on a terrace higher than Tai Ping Lane but lower than Market Street. It could be accessed from the terrace connected to Tai Ping Lane through stairs or from the courtyard to Market Street and East Street and also through stairs. The upper block was erected on the same level as Market Street and could be accessed directly from there. It consisted of a house and a courtyard facing the back wall of the lower market. Viewed from Market Street, the gables and walls of the two blocks employed a consistent design. Thus, the Tai Ping Shan Market resembled a single building complex rather than two separate markets. Bull's-eye windows and round-headed windows were opened on the gables and external walls (Fig. 1.16).



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**Fig. 1.16.** A rare photograph of the Tai Ping Shan Market (the left one with a pitched roof) taken by British explorer Isabella Bird in 1895 amid the Bubonic Plague. (Isabella Bird, *A Street Depopulated by the Plague in Hong Kong*, 1895, gelatin silver print, Royal Geographical Society)



**Fig. I.17.** A partial plan of Tai Ping Shan Market showing the lower block.

(Based on "Tenders for Repairs of Tai Ping Shan Market: Estimate of Costing Attached," HKRS149-2-710, Public Records Office, Hong Kong.)



**Fig. I.18.** Shau Kei Wan Market was an open-type market shed.

(P1973.454, n.d., photograph, Hong Kong History Museum.)

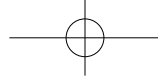


A sketch drawn in 1875 demonstrated the layout of the lower block (Fig. 1.17).<sup>83</sup> The two market houses were supported by brick walls and timber posts. People could freely move from one house to another through the courtyard as there was no wall between the houses. Benches for selling food were placed along the edges and at the centre of the house. Skylights were opened on the roofs to let in sunlight. At one end of the compound, a toilet and a kitchen were provided.

### *Open-type Market Sheds*

Shau Kei Wan Market (1872) and Shek Tong Tsui Market (1875) were freestanding open sheds without enclosing walls. The former was located along Shau Kei Wan Main Street East. The market was a rectangular shed supported by evenly distributed, square columns and covered by a hip roof with tiling (Fig. 1.18). The shed accommodated 30 stalls. Each stall included only a simple bench for displaying the food. Open channels were created along the periphery of the market for drainage. A separate kitchen was provided next to the market (Fig. 1.19).

Shek Tong Tsui Market was completed three years after Shau Kei Wan Market. Shek Tong Tsui was included as a sub-district of Victoria in 1858, but the market was only erected in 1875 on Hill Road, near an open nullah. The market contained only 30 stalls and was plausibly the smallest one among the 10 markets analysed. Although it was a simple open-type market, it had a sophisticated design and was decorated with architectural details (Fig. 1.20). The market was rectangular and supported by square panel columns on plinths and decorated with simple capitals. Coupled columns were used at the four corners of the building. On top of the columns was a deep entablature. The market was topped by a hip roof with pan-and-rolled tiles.



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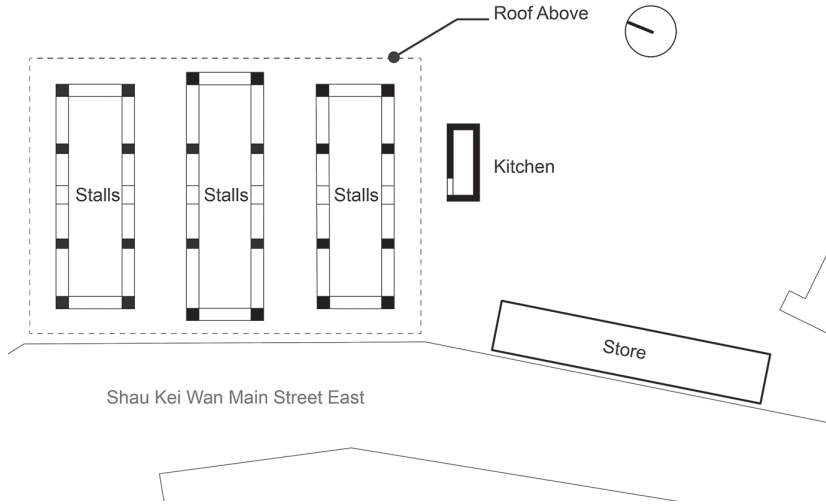


Fig. I.19. Plan of Shau Kei Wan Market. The open shed accommodated 30 stalls.



Fig. I.20. Coupled columns were used at the four corners of Shek Tong Tsui Market. (P1973.411, n.d., photograph, Hong Kong History Museum.)

## 1.6 Conclusion

The colonial government's original intention to develop public markets in Hong Kong was to eliminate food hawking, which created inconvenience for traffic and threatened social order. During the 1840s and 1850s, the government sold the franchise of public markets, first through a farming system and then through a licensing system. In this manner, the government obtained higher revenues from public markets and, at the same time, transferred the responsibilities of building, managing, and repairing the markets to the franchise holders. Before 1858, except for Central Market, almost all the public markets in Hong Kong were in fact erected by the franchise holders. The Surveyor General was only responsible for verifying if the markets erected or repaired by private initiation were up to an approved standard. Little was known about the required building standard of public markets in this period, except that there was a clear intention from the government to replace all mat sheds with permanent brick or stone market buildings and provide adequate drains to keep the markets dry and clean.

Nevertheless, the franchise system led to the monopolization of food selling in Hong Kong. Outsiders found it difficult to enter the market business. Without competition, food provision in the markets was not satisfactory and food prices were high. The public markets were often poorly managed by the franchise holders. As the police would intervene only in the market affairs in case of serious crimes and accidents, the public markets became a hotbed of crime.

The monopoly was finally abolished in 1858 when the government enforced *The Market's Ordinance* and took back control of public markets. The ordinance gave the Surveyor General the managerial role of the public market. The Surveyor General's Office took charge not only of the design and construction of the markets but also of the registration and leasing of market stalls, as well as the collection of rent from stallholders. The public markets developed after 1858 included market compounds, enclosed market houses, and open-type market sheds.

## Timeline of Market Construction in Hong Kong (1841–1879)

Year	Event	Market Erected	Remarks
1841	British occupation of Hong Kong		
1842		Central Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by George Malcolm</li> <li>A market compound with several buildings and mat sheds</li> <li>Demolished and rebuilt in 1858</li> </ul>
		Eastern Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by John Ouchterlony on the land he owned</li> <li>An open-type market shed</li> <li>Resumed by the government in 1843</li> <li>Destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1845</li> </ul>
1843	Hong Kong was officially ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Nanking		
1844	The position of the Surveyor General was created	Western Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by Loo AQUI</li> <li>Demolished and rebuilt in 1858</li> </ul>
	Market farming system implemented		
	Chinese lot holders of the Upper Bazaar were removed to the Tai Ping Shan District		
1845		Eastern Market (rebuilt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebuilt by Fung Attai</li> <li>Demolished and rebuilt on the Bowring Praya again in 1858</li> </ul>
1847	Market licensing system implemented	Kwong Yuen Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by Tam Achoy on his own land</li> </ul>
1850		Market on Marine Lot No. 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by George Duddell on his own land</li> </ul>
1851		Market on Inland Lot No. 330	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erected by Abdoollah Hareem on his own land</li> </ul>
1858	<i>The Market's Ordinance</i> enforced	Central Market (rebuilt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A market compound with several buildings within a network of internal streets</li> <li>Demolished in 1887</li> <li>Rebuilt in 1895</li> </ul>

Year	Event	Market Erected	Remarks
1858		Eastern Market (rebuilt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market compound with three buildings</li> <li>• Year of demolition unknown</li> </ul>
		Western Market (rebuilt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market compound with several buildings</li> <li>• Demolished in 1911</li> <li>• Replaced by two markets: Western Market (North Block) completed in 1906 on Des Voeux Road Central and Western Market (South Block) reconstructed on its original site in 1913</li> </ul>
		Tai Ping Shan Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A series of market houses and courtyards</li> <li>• Demolished after the resumption of the Tai Ping Shan District in 1894</li> </ul>
		Wan Chai Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market house with a tiled roof</li> <li>• Expanded in 1904</li> <li>• Demolished in 1935</li> <li>• Rebuilt on the other side of Wan Chai Road in 1937</li> </ul>
		So Kon Po Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market compound with two identical buildings</li> <li>• Demolished in 1961</li> <li>• Rebuilt in 1963 and renamed Tang Lung Chau Market</li> </ul>
1860	Kowloon was ceded to Britain under the Convention of Peking		
1864		Sai Ying Pun Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demolished in 1930</li> <li>• Rebuilt on the other side of Centre Street in 1932</li> <li>• The original site was redeveloped into Centre Street Market</li> </ul>
1872		Shau Kei Wan Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An open-type market shed topped by a hip roof with tiling</li> <li>• Demolished in 1970</li> <li>• Rebuilt in 1972</li> </ul>

Year	Event	Market Erected	Remarks
1875		Shek Tong Tsui Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An open-type market shed with a pan-and-rolled tile roof</li> <li>• Demolished in 1972</li> <li>• Rebuilt on Queen's Road West in 1974</li> </ul>
1879		Yau Ma Tei Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A market compound with two identical buildings</li> <li>• Extended in 1884</li> <li>• Demolished in 1953</li> <li>• Rebuilt on Reclamation Street in 1957</li> </ul>

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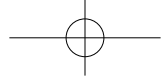


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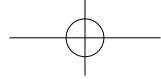
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## EPILOGUE

Markets may be the type of public building most frequented by people in their daily lives. Since the British occupation of Hong Kong, the government has erected at least one public market in each urban district to meet the needs of residents. As Hong Kong relies heavily on the importation of food and its limited arable land is far away from the urban centres, the provision of public markets by the government ensures that urban dwellers can obtain food regularly and easily. Because public markets are so common in Hong Kong—there is always a public market near one's home—their historical, social, and architectural value is often overlooked. Studying public markets allows us to trace how everyday architecture has responded to social changes alongside Hong Kong's growth from a small British colony known as Victoria to a densely populated metropolis. Throughout the years, the management, distribution, architectural design, and use of public markets have changed per the needs of society in different periods.

### *Public Markets Responding to Social Needs*

Apart from the obvious reason to provide a designated venue for food trading, public markets were developed in colonial Hong Kong for three purposes. First, the colonial government wished to reduce public nuisance



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created by street peddlers. Ever since the British set foot in Hong Kong, they were deeply troubled by the traffic congestion, unsanitary conditions, and fire risks caused by street hawking. The colonial government had always wanted to remove peddlers from dirty and windswept streets to indoor marketplaces. Unfortunately, after more than a century of British rule, Hong Kong still could not effectively restrict street vending activities. Street peddlers constantly competed with food vendors at public markets for customers. It was only in the 1970s that the colonial government was able to suppress street hawking.

Second, the colonial government hoped to ensure food safety through the monopolization of fresh food trading. Before the 1950s, freezing perishable food was still an uncommon practice in Hong Kong. As fresh food spoils quickly, the government had to ensure that food vendors would not sell unwholesome food and endanger their customers' health. To easily and effectively maintain vigilance regarding food safety, the government prohibited the operation of private markets in urban areas and at the same time restricted the sale of raw meat and fresh fish to government-run public markets. Outside the public markets, food vendors such as licensed hawkers, food shops, and boarding houses could only sell green vegetables, fruit, bean curd, salted fish, and cooked food. Nevertheless, such a monopoly of raw meat and fresh fish selling in public markets was broken in the early 1950s; private food shops, if equipped with refrigerators and other equipment as required by the government, could obtain official fresh provision shop licenses to sell perishable food.

Third, the colonial government wished to reduce the cost of living and retail food prices. From the 1910s to the post-WWII period, the unstable global economy and China's political turmoil damaged Hong Kong's economy and affected people's livelihoods. High inflation during this period led to a sharp rise in the cost of living and food prices. The government believed that building more public markets and thus bringing in more competition was an effective way to fight surging food prices. Stressing that the rents for food stalls were only barely sufficient to keep the market running, the government hoped that such a low-rent policy would help keep

retail food prices affordable for most Hong Kong residents. In summary, public markets were not only places for food trading. They were official institutions that allowed the government to monitor food safety and quality, stabilize food supply and costs, and control the means of acquiring food.

### *The Modernization of Public Market Design*

Like most government buildings, public markets designed by the Surveyor General's Office and later the PWD—whether open-type market sheds or enclosed market houses—adhered to the Western architectural forms. Notably, after the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in 1894, the PWD erected a group of four multi-storey markets in the Edwardian architectural style. This group of public markets, including Central Market, Western Market (North Block), Tsim Sha Tsui Market, and Western Market (South Block), surpassed all the previous markets in Hong Kong in terms of scale, sanitary standards, and architectural merit. The sophistication of the markets' building form, spatial planning, building materials, ornamentation, and architectural detail indicates that the government considered them important public buildings rather than mere utilitarian structures.

Nevertheless, the design of public markets underwent major changes in the 1910s. Specifically, the changes began in 1913 after the completion of Western Market (South Block). The PWD started using reinforced concrete, which is easy to build with and economically attractive, as the primary building material for new open-type market sheds. The use of concrete propelled the PWD to adopt a simple building design and eschew ornamentation. Consequently, the PWD opted for a minimal open-type market shed design, replacing the brick pillars with ones made of concrete and the tiled hip roofs with flat concrete roofs. Later in the 1930s, the PWD employed standardization and erected several uniformly designed open-type market sheds across Hong Kong. These technological improvements were effective in saving construction costs, time, and manpower.

Although the colonial government's finance was strained during the global recession in the 1930s, the PWD was able to obtain funds through

various public works loan schemes to reconstruct three multi-storey public markets: Sai Ying Pun Market, Wan Chai Market, and Central Market. The PWD employed reinforced concrete as the primary building material and for the first time in the department's history adopted Stripped Classicism and Streamline Moderne in the design of public buildings. These three public markets were boldly decorated with concrete canopies or grooved concrete bands; they had a monolithic appearance with a strong sense of horizontality. The external walls had big windows to let sunlight and air into the interior. Such design arrangements not only changed the way public markets look in Hong Kong, but also made these three public markets the colony's first batch of modern-styled public buildings. Among the three markets, the design of Central Market was clearly influenced by a group of modern markets erected in the Shanghai International Settlement from the late 1920s to the 1930s.

The PWD's preference for Stripped Classicism and Streamline Moderne in public market design was short-term. After WWII, the PWD favoured the utilitarianism and minimalism of modernist architecture over the streamlined building style. Public markets completed in the 1950s, such as Bridges Street Market, Yau Ma Tei Market, and Tang Lung Chau Market, had rectangular or wedged shapes, asymmetrical façades, and a plain appearance with minimal decoration. They had horizontal concrete louvres or egg crate sunshades, giving a strong regularity to their façades. The PWD thoroughly embraced the Modernist style of architecture after WWII and similar preferences could also be found in privately owned buildings.

The evolution of public markets demonstrates how Hong Kong's architecture transitioned from the traditional forms and construction techniques from the past to a new era of modern design. Most importantly, the PWD's total embrace of modernism was not merely an act that followed the architectural trend in the West. From the 1890s to the 1940s, Hong Kong experienced an outbreak of the Bubonic Plague, labour strikes, economic depression, and two world wars. In light of social unrest, the government's financial difficulties, and the shortage of architectural staff, the PWD had to find a way to construct public buildings quickly, economically,



and efficiently. Compared with Western-styled or colonial buildings, modern architecture could better meet the needs of society at that time.

### *The Challenges of Public Markets*

Since the 1980s, the government has ceased building standalone public markets in Hong Kong that only serve as retail markets. Instead, public markets have been integrated into municipal services buildings. Nonetheless, as of October 2019, 35 standalone public markets remain, all managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.<sup>1</sup> These markets face many challenges due to society's changing dietetic and shopping habits. People can now acquire meat and produce from many sources, such as supermarkets and fresh food shops. Frozen foods and canned foods, which can easily be purchased from a wide range of shops, form a major part of the contemporary diet. Moreover, shopping online for food is becoming increasingly easy and common. As a result of the stiff competition from new retail sites, the vacancy rate of public markets stood at around 13 per cent at the end of 2019.<sup>2</sup> Some public markets, such as Mong Kok Market, Shau Kei Wan Market, and Tang Lung Chau Market, have been completely or partially vacant for some time.

Some old, standalone public markets have been lucky enough to be conserved and converted to new uses. The oldest surviving public market building in Hong Kong is the Western Market (North Block), which was completed in 1906 and was revitalized to become a shopping complex in 1991. It is the only surviving public market subscribed to the Western architectural idioms and is the only market designated a declared monument and therefore protected by the *Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance*. On the contrary, modern-styled public markets have not received the same level of recognition from the government. Among the surviving modern public markets, only Central Market, Wan Chai Market, and Bridges Street Market are rated as Grade 3 Historic Buildings by the AAB. The grading of Yau Ma Tei Market is still pending at the time of writing this book (May 2022). In the past, the government's plan to demolish Central Market and Wan



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Chai Market for commercial development faced strong opposition from numerous conservation groups, professional bodies, and neighbourhood organizations. These conservation efforts, which played a crucial role in saving the two markets, show that Hong Kong people are well aware of the historic and architectural value of modern public markets and their significance to the communities.

Besides Western Market (North Block), which has been converted into a shopping complex, three modern public markets erected shortly before and after WWII have also been revitalized to take on new functions. Wan Chai Market, completed in 1937, occupies an important place in Hong Kong's architectural history; it is plausibly the first PWD-designed building to completely deviate from the Western architectural tradition. Unfortunately, as part of the URA's urban renewal scheme, Wan Chai Market and the land where it stood were sold to a private developer for high-rise development. Many conservation groups made a strong plea to preserve Wan Chai Market. Because of community aspirations, the developer agreed to keep the market but at the same time did not want to sacrifice the economic potential of the land. The compromise solution was to construct a residential tower over the existing market building.

Central Market, which was completed in 1939, is the fourth generation of public market erected on its Queen's Road site since 1842. A place of rich history, Central Market has been revitalized by the URA into a cultural and retail hotspot and has attracted many visitors since its reopening in August 2021. Another example, Bridges Street Market, was the first multi-storey public market completed after WWII. With the support of the government's Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme, Bridges Street Market has been transformed into the Hong Kong News-Expo. In both the revitalized Central Market and Bridges Street Market, a few old food stalls are preserved to allow visitors to reminisce about the past. Some regular exhibitions are also held in the markets to let the public understand their history and architectural significance.

Adapting an old market to new use is not a conservation approach unique to Hong Kong. In Taipei, for example, the Octagonal Hall 八角堂

(The Red House 西門紅樓), a public market at Ximending completed in 1908 during Japanese rule, is famous for its unconventional shape and beautiful red brick façade. It was converted to the Red House Theater in 1945. Since then, the market has undergone a series of transformations and ownership changes. Currently, the Red House is a new cultural and creative industries development centre and a performance venue. Xinfu Market 新富市場, also located in Taipei, was completed in 1935 at the later stage of Japanese rule. It was revitalized in 2017 into the U-mkt 新富町文化市場, which provides spaces for catering services as well as education and exhibitions about traditional market culture. Lau Pa Sat 老巴剎, a public market completed in 1894 in Singapore, was converted into a cooked food centre in the 1990s. It is one of the first buildings listed by the National Heritage Board of Singapore as a national monument and is protected by law.

Nevertheless, finding a new use should not be the only feasible plan for old public markets. We have interviewed many food vendors and shoppers of old standalone public markets. They like the convenient location, high ceilings, and abundant natural light of these standalone markets, which are filled with their memories of the old days. Meanwhile, most of them believe the lack of escalators has resulted in a high vacancy rate on the upper floors of these old markets. The absence of air conditioning has also made them unable to compete with their new counterparts and supermarkets. Can we win back customers by upgrading the old markets' equipment and amenities? Can we rejuvenate the old markets by improving their management and operation? For more than a hundred years, the planning, stall design, and management of public markets have been constantly improving to meet changing social demands, and we expect such practices to continue. In recent years, some old markets in Hong Kong have been renovated and renewed; these efforts have proven effective in attracting customers.

Hong Kong residents have always been fond of fresh produce. Hopefully, public markets as a type of everyday architectural structure that exemplifies our culinary culture and habits can be sustained.

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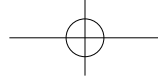
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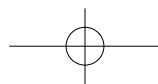
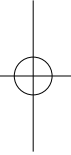
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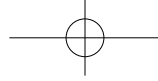


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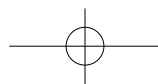
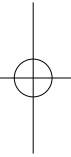
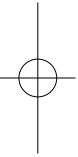
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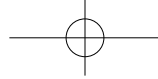
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