



STEPS THROUGH TIME

Old Photo Exhibition
(c.1870-1925)

21.03 - 05.05 2019

THE POTTINGER
HONG KONG

中環 · 石板街酒店



INTRODUCTION

Just as The Pottinger welcomes you today, Hong Kong has welcomed visitors for many years. Hong Kong's story is one of constant change and re-development. Join us to step back in time, with historic photos from 150 years ago, to explore what it was like for the early visitors.

THIS EXHIBITION OF RARE PRINTS CELEBRATES THE 5TH YEAR OF THE POTTINGER ON THE HISTORIC STEPS OF CENTRAL.

The "Look closer ..." prompt on selected photos invites you to probe into some of the hidden details with a magnifying glass.

THE THEMES

The neighbourhood – the surrounding places

We are standing at the heart of old Hong Kong, in one of the first areas to be developed after the British landed in 1841. A map from 1845 already shows Queen's Road, Pottinger Street, and Stanley Street all clearly marked at the centre of the new city.

The neighbours – the people and everyday life

A city is nothing without its people, so who would those early visitors have met on the streets? We'll get an idea from this selection of photos, taken locally in the 1860s, 70s, and 80s.

Further afield – exploration of Hong Kong

There was plenty for a curious visitor to discover nearby, but eventually they'd want to explore beyond Central.

The last set of photos show some of the sights that awaited the visitor who ventured further afield.



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

1. Queen's Road, Central (c.1873)

Photographer: Lai Afong

This photo was taken from very near to The Pottinger, looking west along Queen's Road.

Public transport was limited to chairs at that time. The original caption lists the ordinary street chair, mountain chair for ascending heights, and sedan chair for ladies.



Look closer ...

- If this was the centre of town, where were all the people?
- What clues pinpoint the photographer's location?
- What was that tall building in the distance?



2. Queen's Road, Central (c.1885)

Photographer: Lai Afong

The photographer was looking west from near the junction with Ice House Street.

The sunlit building on the left was at the corner of Duddell Street. It housed the Chartered Bank, forerunner of today's Standard Chartered.

On the right side of the road, the four-storey building in the distance was the Hong Kong Hotel, standing at the corner of Pedder Street.

Public transportation had been transformed since the previous photo, by introduction of the rickshaw, which had quickly became very popular.

3. Hong Kong from the Harbour (c.1925)

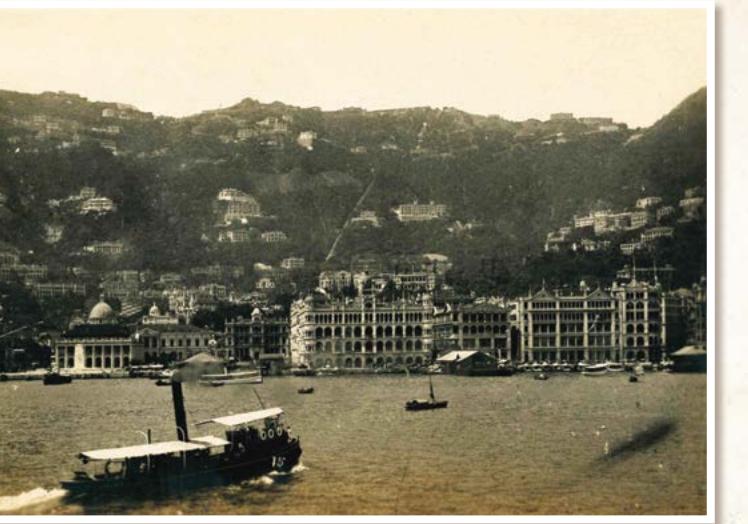
Photographer: Mee Cheung

We started with Queen's Road, but that wasn't visitors' first view of Hong Kong. Whether in the 1870s or the 1920s, their first view was from the sea as their ship sailed into the harbour.



Look closer ...

- What were some of the landmarks along the 1920s seafront?



4. Central Praya, looking West (c.1925)

Photographer: Lai Afong

The Praya was the name for a road along the seafront. In this scene, the road is today's Connaught Road. In the picture, we see the three major piers of old Hong Kong starting with Queen's Pier in the foreground, which was used by visiting royalty and dignitaries, and was also the pier where new governors first landed in Hong Kong.



The boat at the next pier had a familiar shape – can you tell from the symbol on the ship's funnel? This was the Star Ferry pier. The third was Blake Pier. It was where most visitors would have first stepped ashore.

S. Pedder Street (c.1925)

Photographer: Mee Cheung

Pedder Street ran from Blake Pier to Queen's Road, so this was a natural route for our visitors to take.

We're looking south, across Pedder Street's junction with Des Voeux Road Central. The Peak rose up in the background.

The building on the left was the Hong Kong Hotel, where the Landmark stands today. Facing us at the end of the street was the Asiatic Building, later renamed to "Shell House", and in the foreground on the right stood the old Jardine House.

The 1920s caption-writer also highlighted one of the cars: "In the foreground is seen one of Hongkong's taxicabs." Perhaps this was a chance to show off modern Hong Kong to his readers.

Look closer ...

- Which of these buildings is still standing today?
- What was the policeman doing – the one in the centre, with his back towards us?





6. Wyndham Street (c.1924)

Photographer: Mee Cheung

At the top of Pedder Street, a right turn led us into Queen's Road, with a view of Wyndham Street climbing uphill on the left. Wyndham Street used to be called Flower Street, after all the flower sellers who had stalls there.

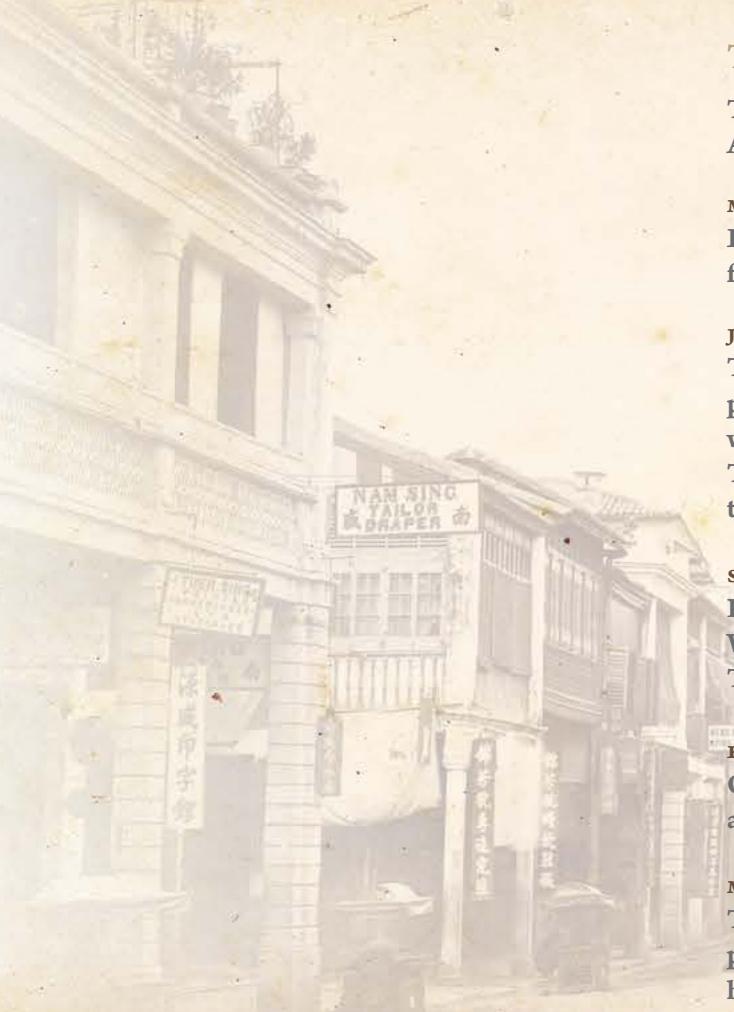
Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Gandy also visited Hong Kong at this time. A keen artist, he made sketches and paintings instead of taking photographs. One of his paintings captured this scene, and brought the colourful display of flowers to life.



7. Wyndham Street (c.1924)
Artist: Henry George Gandy



- Look closer ...**
- There is a banner with writing in the background. What does it mean?



THE NEIGHBOURS

The following series shows some of the people those early visitors would have met. As you look through the portraits, you'll notice these patterns:

MOSTLY MEN

Early Hong Kong had a lot more men than women. According to the 1881 census figures for British residents, there were about 15 times more men than women.

JUST TWO SIZES

Though the photos spanned three decades, they were all one of just two sizes: the smaller photos in the “carte de visite” size and the larger “cabinet card” size which were worldwide standards. The smaller photos were also cheaper to buy and easier to mail. The benefits caused a boom in photography and spurred the love of sending portraits to friends. The selfie started from the Victorians!

STUDIOS GALORE AT THE ADDRESS OF THE POTTINGER

From the addresses, we see that the studios were all near this area. In particular, Wing - Chong Studio was on 74 Queen's Road, having the same street number as The Pottinger. This location would have been a perfect spot for Victorian people-watching.

ENHANCEMENT

Olden days photoshop was referred to as enhancement. Photographers in the past could also help make their clients look more attractive.

MILITARY MARKINGS

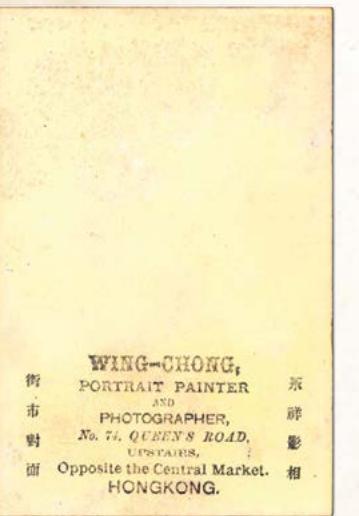
The soldiers and sailors were rightly proud of their achievements and rankings, and the photographers made sure to catch their various stripes and badges. The army and the navy had to differentiate, so the stripes on the sailors varied from the soldiers'.

8. Wing - Chong Studio

(c.1885)

Photographer: Wing Chong

This example of the back of a carte de visite shows that Wing-Chong Studio was at 74 Queen's Road, same street address of The Pottinger today, though the numbering system might be slightly different then.



9. British sergeants

(c.1885)

Photographer: Wing Chong

Studio: 74 Queen's Road,
"Opposite the Central Market"

Look closer ...
• What do the soldiers' uniforms tell us?



10. British soldier

(c.1885)

Photographer: Wing Chong

Studio: 74 Queen's Road,
"Opposite the Central Market"



11. Captain of the 10th Regiment

(c.1872)

Photographer: William Pryor Floyd

Studio: Wellington & Wyndham Streets



12. British sailor

(c.1880)

Photographer: Hung Cheong Shing

Studio: 32 Queen's Road, "Opposite Messrs. Lane, Crawford & Co's"



13. Unknown man

(c.1865)

Photographer: Kai-Sack

Studio: 109 Queen's Road,
"Opposite Stag Hotel"



14. Unknown man
(c.1867)
Photographer: Hing Cheong

Studio: 54 Queen's Road,
"Opposite the Oriental Bank"



15. Unknown man
(c.1872)
Photographer: Lai Afong

Studio: 54 Queen's Road



Look closer ...

- Can you spot which portrait has been enhanced?

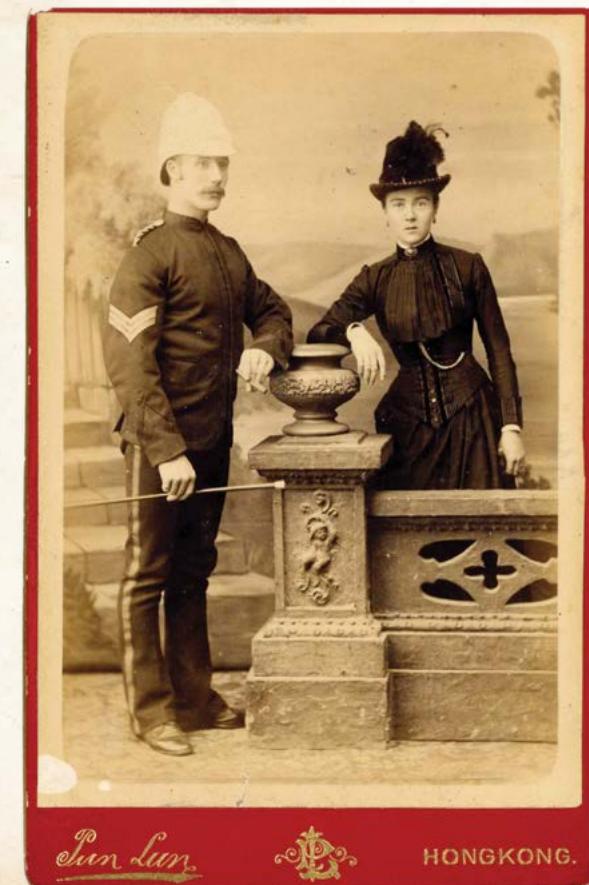


16. Unknown men
(c.1875)
Photographer: Lai Afong

Studio: Queen's Road
(no number given)



17. Unknown couple (c.1889)
Photographer: Pun Lun
Studio: 76 Queen's Road



The previous portraits had no names recorded, so unfortunately they must remain anonymous. Luckily we know who the last three were, starting with baby Maggie.

18. Maggie Watson Bain (c.1884)
Photographer: Lai Afong
Studio: (No address given)

Maggie's father, William, was another long-term resident. In 1884, he'd been in Hong Kong for just over 10 years, as co-owner and later manager of the Hong Kong Ice Works. But the next year, the family left Hong Kong and returned to Scotland. 1880s Hong Kong wasn't a very healthy place to raise a family, so Maggie's arrival likely prompted the move.



We know how few women there were in Hong Kong, so this couple stood out. At a time when few westerners stayed in Hong Kong for more than 5 years, they were remarkable for how long they lived here. Over 20 years after these photos were taken, records showed the couple were still living in Hong Kong.



19. Mr G. Holmes (c.1872)

Photographer: Emil Riisfeldt

Studio: Hongkong Photographic Rooms,
Corner of Wyndham & Wellington Streets



20. Mrs G. Holmes (c.1872)

Photographer: See Tay

Studio: 26 Queen's Road

21. Hawkers & labourers (c.1925)

Photographer: Mee Cheung

One last pattern of those early photos is that there weren't any Chinese faces. That wasn't surprising - the western and Chinese communities didn't really mix in the 19th century.

For a glimpse of some of our Chinese neighbours, we'll turn to Mee Cheung again. These photos all share a connection to a humble icon of early Hong Kong, the shoulder pole.

The man delivering poultry (B), and the women unloading the boat (D) used shoulder poles to carry their loads. Then look at the Sugar Cane Hawker (A), and see how his display was shaped to fit neatly on the end of a shoulder pole.

The outdoor restaurant (C) too - it would all be packed into those baskets and carried away on a shoulder pole at the end of the day.

Though Mee Cheung's captions mention the introduction of modern motor trucks, taxicabs, and trams, it would be several decades before the older, people-powered transports completely disappeared from Hong Kong's streets.



(A)



(B)



(C)



(D)

22. Rickshaw and Sedan Chair (c.1925)

Photographer: Mee Cheung

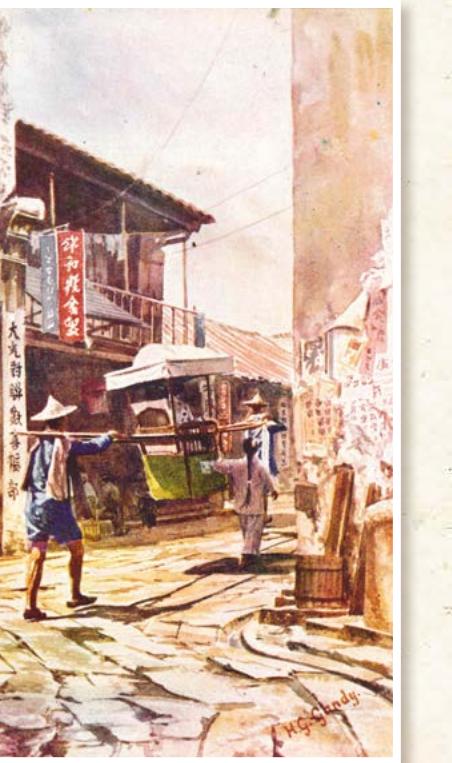
This scene shows two local businessmen, one in a western suit, and one in traditional clothing.

It also shows that though the rickshaw was popular, the sedan chair was still in use. Rickshaws were great on flat roads, but a journey up Hong Kong's steep slopes still needed the extra muscle-power of the sedan chair's second man.

**23. Sedan Chair (c.1924)**
Artist: Henry George Gandy

A sedan chair was also the better choice when the ground was uneven like this.

It's a pity Gandy's title doesn't tell us more about the scene. Who was riding in the sedan chair while the girl walked alongside? Perhaps her mother and a baby, or a grand-parent?

**24. "Native Transport" (c.1925)**

Photographer: Mee Cheung

Original caption from the photographer:

The four pictures here depict some of the more common means of transport, (A) and (C) giving the two main means of passenger transportation, while (B) and (D) show modes of goods conveyance, namely, junks anchored at the Praya wall, and coolie drawn hand trucks. The latter method is happily giving way to the motor truck.



FURTHER AFIELD

25. Happy Valley (c.1869)

Photographer: William Pryor Floyd

There were several reasons to visit Happy Valley. The racecourse was the obvious one, but surprisingly the valley's cemeteries were another attraction. They were considered pleasant grounds for a stroll.

Or visitors might have passed through Happy Valley on the way to explore the southern side of the island. Before roads were built around the island's coast, one of the main routes to the south of the island climbed up and over the hills behind the photographer.

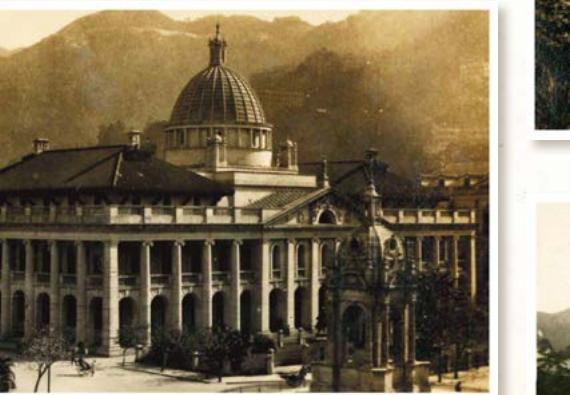
Look closer ...



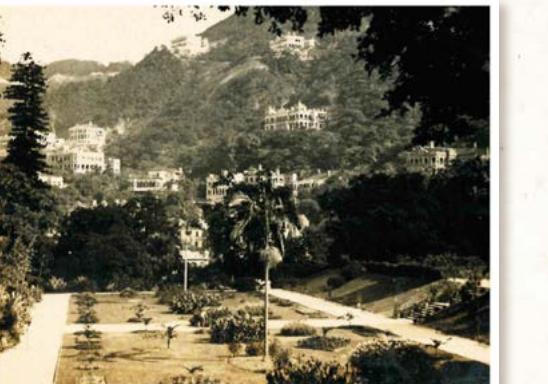
- What are those roofs in the foreground, and the big hill in the distance?



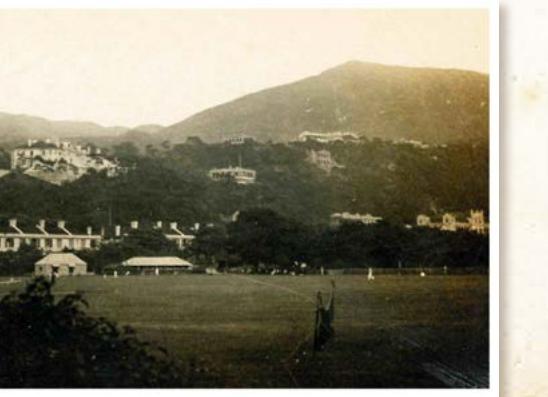
(A)



(B)



(C)



(D)

26. Happy Valley, etc. (c.1925)

Photographer: Mee Cheung

Mee Cheung's caption writer had a fourth reason to visit Happy Valley, calling it the "foremost Sports Ground of the Colony".

As a memorial to those who fell in the Great War, Hongkong erected a replica of the London Cenotaph (A).

An impressive ceremony was held here every Armistice Day. The Hongkong Supreme Court was shown in photo (B). The foremost Sports Ground of the Colony was somewhat appropriately known as "Happy Valley", a corner of which was pictured in (D). Hongkong's

Botanical Gardens, which were approached from Garden Road were well laid out and formed a restful retreat from the noise of the City (C).

27. View east from
The Peak (c.1925)
Photographer: Mee Cheung

No visit to Hong Kong is complete without a trip to The Peak to admire the view. Here the photographer faced east, looking out over a major reclamation that was in progress off the Wanchai seafront.



Look closer ...
• There was a railway built on the reclamation.

Can you find
the railway lines?



28. View south from The Peak
(c.1875)
Photographer: Lai Afong

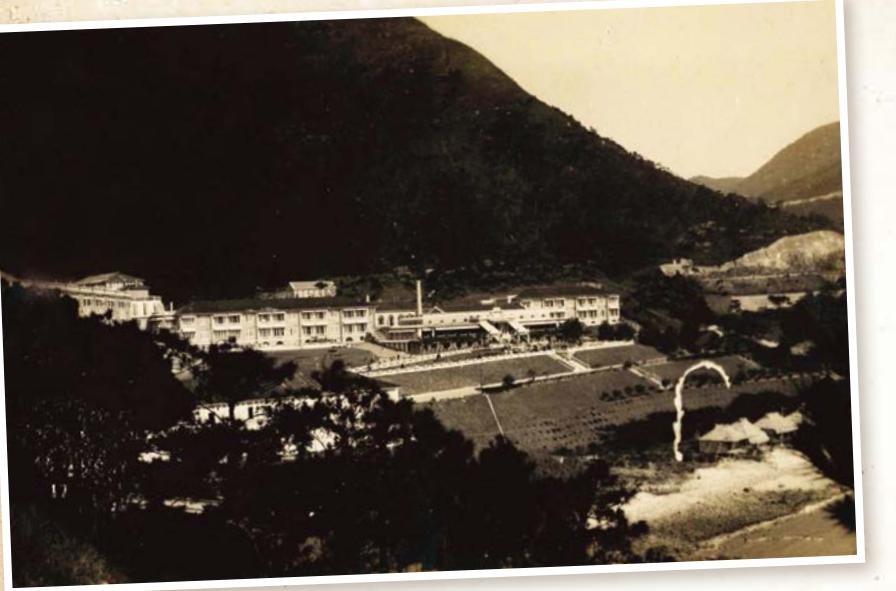
Photos looking out from the north side of The Peak changed dramatically over the years. Repeated reclamation shrunk the harbour, and ever-taller buildings crowded the view.

But look south instead, and progress has been much gentler. If you see this view today, you'll find that the main landmarks are just the same as they were in 1875: Pokfulam Reservoir, with Lamma Island in the distance.



Look closer ...
• Can you find a large building under construction, and a castle?





29. Repulse Bay (c.1925)
Photographer: Mee Cheung

A popular excursion for visitors in the 1920s was to drive around Hong Kong Island, stopping off at Repulse Bay along the way.



- Which of these are still here today:
the hotel, the beach huts, or the hotel's garage?



30. Farewell (c.1924)
Artist: Henry George Gandy

We've reached the end – a visit to Hong Kong is always over too soon! The last picture shows the visitors' liner in the distance, firing up its boilers and getting ready to depart.

We hope that you have enjoyed the journey through time we have curated, and will visit us again to relish over Hong Kong's remarkable heritage on one of the oldest streets which is still impacting the city today – The Pottinger.

The exhibition is curated by David Bellis, a dedicated historian of Hong Kong, founder of www.gwulo.com, who has published two books that combine old Hong Kong photos from his collection with more "Look closer..." style story-telling. In 2014, David won the Heritage Preservation Award of SCMP "The Spirit of Hong Kong Awards" for his work on Gwulo.com. If the exhibition piques your curiosity, you are welcome to address any further questions to David at www.gwulo.com.

Jonathan Wattis, owner of Wattis Fine Art, specialises in original, historic maps and photographs of Hong Kong, and supplied many of the items in this exhibition. Their gallery is walking distance from The Pottinger, on Old Bailey Street.

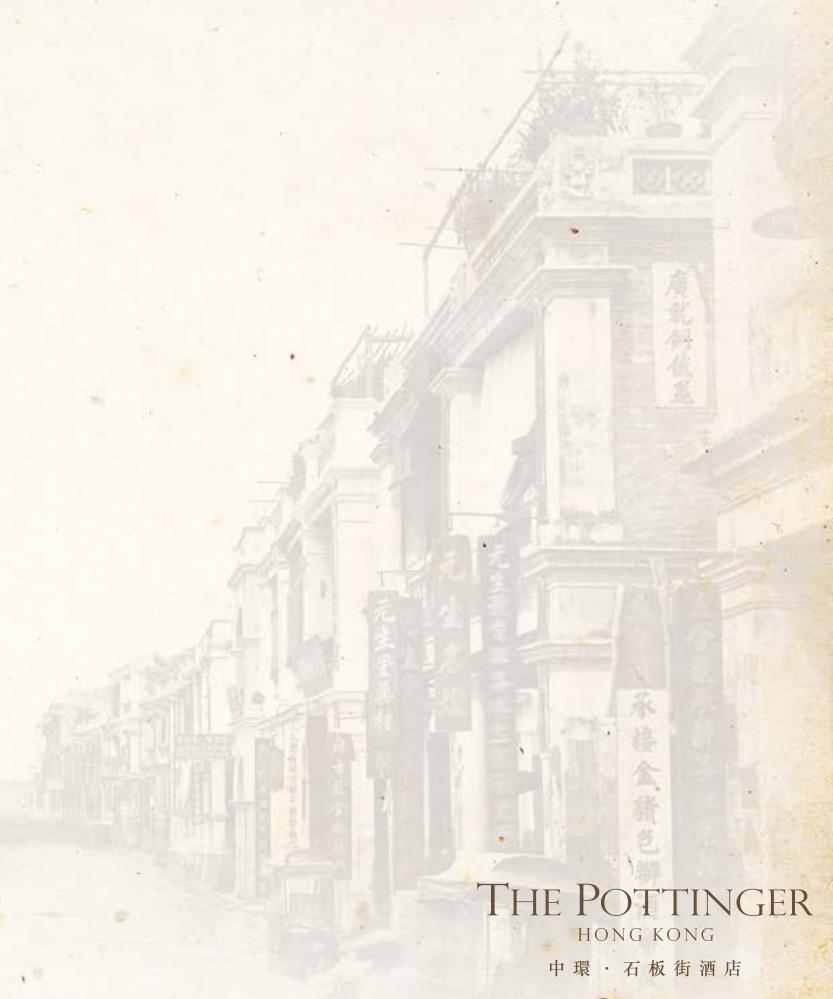
Some other pictures are sourced from Christopher and Pamela Bailey, co-founders of Picture This Limited, one of the largest and longest established fine art photography galleries online, as well as a leading vintage and contemporary poster gallery in the Far East.



Address: 74 Queen's Road Central, Central, Hong Kong
(Hotel main entrance: 21 Stanley Street)

Tel: +852 2308 3188
email: info@thepottinger.com

f @ [thepottingerhongkong](#)



THE POTTINGER HONG KONG

中環 · 石板街酒店

