

Female Participation Pioneer

Sr Serena Lau's extensive experience and knowledge of the property developments in Hong Kong and mainland China has shaped her approach to valuation and management. The managing director of RHL International was the first female president of the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (2011/12).

Wilson Lau



“Seize the current opportunities to learn as much as you can as the property market is thriving”

Both Sr Serena Lau and her father Sr Francis Lau are general practice surveyors. “We specialise in the comprehensive solution related to real estate. My professional education was also focused on the wide scope of general practice surveying,” Lau notes. Lau senior is also a past HKIS president.

After graduating with a degree in land economics from the University of Technology, Sydney from Australia, Lau spent two years working in the valuation department at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia in Sydney. “That was my basic training. I then returned to Hong Kong and joined RHL in 1992.”

In the early 1990s – heady days of rapid property development in mainland China – Lau was put in charge of many projects in the region, overseeing project coordination, sales and marketing. “I became familiar with the mainland market before Hong Kong,” she explains.

The property market in Hong Kong was equally buoyant before 1997. As an independent valuer, RHL was involved in land acquisitions initiated by the Land Development Corporation (LDC, Predecessor of the Urban Renewal Authority). With her valuation training acquired overseas, Lau started working at the grassroots level and developed an in-depth insight in the local real estate market. “After LDC made the offer, Independent valuer helped individual landlords with fair and professional property valuation. Many of the buildings were dilapidated low-rises and many landlords were elderly.”

“When we are approached to conduct valuation, we ask the clients do they know why they need it. From my perspective, it is important that clients know what they want so that we can tailor our services to their specific requirements. Valuation encompasses effective liaison works, and communication is a vital soft skill to arrive at fair compensation. It does not mean much to the landlords if we just give them a number. We should provide analysis and give them a picture of what is going on in other buildings in their neighbourhood. Sometimes we come across some difficult landlords who need more patient detailed explanation.”

In its operation expansion on the mainland, RHL established joint-venture and wholly owned offices in various Chinese cities. Lau took up the responsibilities of staff training and management. “The mainland experience is important. I think my achievement is in properly managing multiple projects in various cities simultaneously,” she says. “Each city has its unique attributes. The differences are not just limited to real-estate projects; there are cultural distinctions among the people in different cities. I think I have excelled in my management responsibilities. A main part of my responsibility on the mainland is to optimise the combination of professionals in teams. I take into account not only individual employees’ technical skills and professional knowledge, but also their individual approaches to project implementation. For the offices in different cities, I have recruited individuals with varied attributes to cater to the specific requirements of clients in these

particular cities. I honed my management skills in China.”

Lau has drawn on her connections and experience accumulated on the mainland for projects in Hong Kong. “Because many of our clients have business interests on the mainland, it has become easier for us to work for them when we have had exposure to the market in China. There are many great ideas originating from China which can be applied back to the local market,” she points out.

Although Lau is busy with projects both in Hong Kong and across the border, she has participated in public organisations in an advisory and board decision-making capacity over the years. She has been motivated by her thirst to learn from others and make contributions to the community. “I always benefit through the interaction with other professionals. It always inspires me when I am involved in different cases,” Lau notes.

At the time she was board member of the Estate Agents Authority, she observed that a good chairman and members have created a positive synergy. “The chairman was determined to improve the image of estate agents. She recognised that the authority needed to put efforts in building credibility. The authority achieved that through multiple measures, such as disciplinary action and promotion,” she says. “When the leader sets a clear direction and communicates it to all, everyone will be united and understand their individual roles and fulfil their duties accordingly.”

Lau is also a member of the Hong Kong Housing Society, which has thrown its weight behind the elderly housing. The organisation has promoted the idea of Ageing-in-place in the market in cooperation with the government. “There are always pros and cons in the implementation

of different projects. For example, some critics will say the recent elderly housing project serve the wealthier group. I think Hong Kong Housing Society has a wide enough spectrum and we all face the ageing population issue. The Hong Kong Housing Society has gone on field trips to study how similar projects were designed and executed overseas and then applied it in Hong Kong.”

Lau’s involvement in public bodies helps her recognise the difficulties in making decisions, as she is exposed to the diverse opinions and interests of different stakeholders. “But when you are able to make a decision by taking into account the diverse opinions and interests,” she notes, “the final decision will invariably be a good one. I have learned to see things from multiple perspectives.”

While general practice encompasses a wide spectrum of knowledge, Lau says she always comes across issues that require in-depth analysis with specialised fields of knowledge. “If I have the opportunities, I would like to focus on the study of specialised areas. I am interested in exploring some issues in greater depth.”

Her advice for young surveyors is that they should seize the current opportunities to learn as much as they can as the property market is thriving. “The unique expertise and edge of surveyors in Hong Kong is that they are able to deliver projects of fine quality even though the construction is completed on a tight schedule. By contrast, many projects in developing countries may have been completed quickly at the expense of quality. Hong Kong surveyors’ expertise to achieve sustainable good quality is likely to be highly sought in the region in the foreseeable future”

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女性參予先驅

劉詩韻測量師對本港及內地物業發展的熟悉及豐富的工作經驗，致使她對估值及管理自有一套心得。劉女士現任永利行國際董事總經理，亦是香港測量師學會首位女性會長(2011/12)。

Wilson Lau

劉女士與父親劉紹鈞都是產業測量師。「我們專注於提供綜合房地產解決方案。我的主修亦是涉獵範疇相當廣泛的產業測量工作。」劉紹鈞先生亦曾擔任香港測量師學會會長。

她在澳洲悉尼科技大學取得土地經濟學位後，曾在悉尼的澳洲聯邦銀行估價總部任職兩年。「我在那裡奠定了基本功，隨後於一九九二年返回香港加入永利行。」

九十年代初正值內地房地產發展蓬勃、熱火朝天之際，劉女士出任內地多個項目的負責人，監督項目的統籌、銷售及推廣工作。「我熟悉內地市場早於香港。」

九七年前，香港的物業市場同樣暢旺。永利行作為獨立評估師，參與由土地發展公司（市區重建局前身）推行的土地收購工作。劉女士從低做起，憑藉在外國學到的估值知識，培養出對本地房



地產市場的精準眼光。「土地發展公司提出收購要約後，獨立評估師會為個別業主提供公平專業的物業估值服務及建議。許多樓宇都是殘舊失修的低層建築，業主亦以長者為主。」

「客戶請我們進行估值時，我們會詢問他們是否了解要估值的原因。我認為，客戶務必了解自己的需要，我們才能因應他們所需提供服務。有效聯繫是估值過程的一部分，而溝通能力是達成公平賠償的關鍵。如果我們只給業主一個銀碼，這對他們意義不大。我們應該提供分析，讓客戶了解同區樓宇的情況。有時我們會遇到一些難纏的業主，則需要更加耐心地詳盡解釋。」

永利行擴展內地業務期間，在中國內地多個城市設立合資及獨資辦事處，劉女士負責培訓及管理員工。「我在內地的經歷十分重要。我認為我的成就在於同時管理好不同城市的多個項目。每個城市各有特點，不單房地產項目有所不同，不同城市的人亦存在文化差異。我自問擅於管理工作。我在內地的主要職責之一，是盡量組合最佳專業團隊。我不僅要考慮各人的技能及專業知識，亦要顧及他們執行項目的處事風格。我為各地辦事處招聘不同特性的員工，以迎合各地客戶的要求。在中國工作期間，我提升了管理能力。」

劉女士將她在內地積累的人脈和經驗應用到香港的項目中。「我們許多客戶都在內地有生意，而我們在內地市場的經驗，對我們服務客戶不無幫助。內地的很多意念都可以應用回本地市場。」

劉女士雖忙於打理香港及內地項目，多年來仍一直參與公營機構的諮詢及董事會決策工作，志在向他人學習並回饋社會。「與其他專業人士交流令我受益良多，為我參與的不同項目提供靈感。」

在地產代理監管局出任董事局成員時，她注意到，出色的主席和成員可相輔相成。「主席決意提升地產代理的形象。她認同監管局需要致力推動地產代理建立信譽，而當局為此落實了多項操守處分及推廣措施。上層若能設立清晰指引，傳達予所有成員，大家就能團結起來，明白自身的角色，履行相應責任。」

劉女士亦是香港房屋協會會員，支持協會參予發展長者房屋，與政府攜手推廣“居家安老”項目。「推行不同項目必然有利有弊。例如，部分批評人士會說，房協最近的長者房屋項目是為富裕人士服務。我認為香港各階層市民都面臨著人口老化的問題，房協服務需面向各階層。香港房屋協會已進行實地考察，研究國外如何規劃及實施同類項目，以供香港借鑒。」

劉女士面對著不同持分者的意見及利益，而參與公營機構的經驗，令她更加認識到決策的難處。「但是，如果你作決定前衡量過不同的意見及利益，那麼最終決定必定不會錯。我學會了從不同角度看事情。」

產業測量雖涉及廣泛的知識，劉女士卻經常遇到需要運用專業知識進行深入分析的問題。「如果有機會，我會專注研究專門知識。我有興趣更深入地探討某些問題。」

有見物業市場蓬勃發展，她建議年輕測量師應該把握學習機會。「即使工期多緊，香港測量師仍然能夠仔細妥善完成項目，這是他們獨有的專長及優勢。相比之下，發展中國家的很多項目可能很快完工，卻犧牲了質素。香港測量師專於完成具可持續性的優秀項目的本事將是區域市場未來最渴求的。」

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