

Historic Building Appraisal
Chai Wan Factory Estate,
No. 2 Kut Shing Street, Hong Kong

Chai Wan Factory Estate (柴灣工廠大廈) is a 5-storey building with 378 units, built in 1959 by the Public Works Department. Its origin is related to the Shek Kip Mei (石硤尾) squatter area fire on Christmas night, 1953, which alerted the government to the need to tackle the squatter problem. A programme of public housing, resettlement and clearance of squatter areas was eventually put into place. Some of the small factories in squatter areas could be resettled in the ground floor rooms of resettlement estates, but these rooms were unsuitable for the larger concerns and those using power-driven machinery or other processes likely to disturb the residents in the blocks. It was to provide for these concerns that resettlement factories were built. *Historical Interest*

The programme of resettlement factory construction provided flatted factory blocks of 5 to 7 storeys in which small industries previously operating in squatter areas and displaced by clearance were allocated units ranging from 198 sq. ft. to 256 sq. ft. The first flatted factory block of this kind, Cheung Sha Wan Factory Estate (now demolished), was built in 1957. Later on, such factory blocks were built in Chai Wan (1959), Jordan Valley (1959), Tai Wo Hau in Tsuen Wan (1961-1966), San Po Kong (1962-1965), Kwun Tong (1966), Yuen Long (1966), Kwai Chung (1966-1973) and Kowloon Bay (1975). These flatted factory blocks were usually built near the resettlement estates for the convenience of factory workers and easy management. They eventually became a familiar part of Hong Kong's built environment.

There were 22 of these flatted factory blocks containing a total of 1,860,000 sq. ft. of working space in 1967. Thereafter, due to the decline of Hong Kong's industries, these factory blocks have been vacant or demolished. First managed by the Resettlement Department (徙置事務處, formed in 1954 with authority over registration, clearance and all the processes of resettlement) and then taken over by the Hong Kong Housing Authority after 1973, Chai Wan Factory Estate is the second oldest and the only remaining H-shaped flatted factory block built under the resettlement factory scheme. It stands as a witness to the socio-economic history of Chai Wan, the development of Hong Kong's industry after World War II, and Hong Kong's metamorphosis from the birth of resettlement estate to conversion till now.

In the main, the flatted factories built by the government are of two types. *Architectural Merit*

The oldest ones (e.g. Chai Wan Flatted Factory) are of 5 storeys and built in the shape of an H. They are similar in appearance to the domestic H-shaped resettlement blocks, e.g. Mei Ho House (美荷樓, Grade 2), but there are important structural differences. The weight is borne on columns spaced at 12 feet intervals. Each floor of each wing consists of 9,000 sq. ft. of open space divided by a staircase and a ramp in the centre, and with additional staircase access at each end of the wings. Each floor is divisible into units of 198 sq. ft. - the clear space between each of the bearing columns - and one of these units is the minimum area which can be allocated into any one concern. The newer ones (e.g. at San Po Kong) are in different shapes (e.g. I- or square-shaped).

Architecturally, Chai Wan Flatted Factory belongs to the Modernist style with their long linear forms and strong horizontal lines formed by their continuous balconies. It is characterized by two identical wings linked by a cross-piece forming the H-shaped plan. The long arms of the H consisted of units arranged back-to-back opening on to the access balcony which ran around the perimeter of each floor to provide access to all units. The connecting link between the two long arms houses communal latrines and wash rooms. There was no lift service in the building for loading goods; therefore, the goods were transported by the ramps between the floors. There was an access staircase at each end of the long arms. The roof of each wing is used for drying space.

Chai Wan Flatted Factory is an authentic and now rare factory block with built heritage value. The H-shaped factory blocks in other areas have been demolished, leaving Chai Wan Flatted Factory as the only remaining example of H-shaped factory blocks in Hong Kong. *Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity*

The flatted factories helped people to make their livelihood following the resettlement and clearance of squatter areas. They played a part in Hong Kong's post-World War II economy and provided employment to a hard working and adaptable work force. It is a link with this period in Hong Kong's history and a testimony of the family-based factories and workshops in Hong Kong. *Social Value & Local Interest*

The Chai Wan Factory Estate is close to Law Uk Folk Museum (羅屋民俗館), which is a declared monument, and graded items such as Salesian Mission House (慈幼會修院) and Old Lei Yue Mun Barracks (舊鯉魚門軍營). *Group Value*

Its layout is mainly open plan and could be adapted for a variety of uses. *Adaptive Re-use*