

Historic Building Appraisal

Shek O Bus Terminus Building, Shek O, Hong Kong

The building at Shek O Bus Terminus was constructed in 1955. It was formerly used by the China Motor Bus Company Limited (中華汽車有限公司, “CMB”) as a bus terminus, a watchman’s quarter and garage. The earliest bus service to Shek O commenced operation in the 1920s, when the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels Limited (香港上海大酒店) operated a bus route between the Hong Kong Hotel (香港大酒店) and Big Wave Bay (大浪灣) in Shek O. In June 1933, even though the CMB gained a franchise to operate bus service in Hong Kong Island, it did not takeover the said bus route.

***Historical
Interest***

Shortly after the Second World War, with the permission of Hong Kong government, the Shek O Residents Association started to operate a bus service by their own for Shek O villagers. This bus service was started in March 1947. At the time, the bus fare for regular passengers and students were \$30 per month and \$25 per month respectively. The fare for occasional passengers was \$0.5 per trip. This bus line, running between Shek O and Shau Kei Wan, continued to be operated by the Shek O Residents Association until the CMB extended their service to Shek O by operating a new bus route No. 9 in 1951.

The new bus route No. 9 was formally started on 16 April 1951. At the start, there were only 4-scheduled buses in weekdays and 9-scheduled buses in the weekends daily. The regular bus fare was \$0.7. More buses were arranged in summer time when a lot of residents would go to the beaches in Shek O. The New World First Bus Services Limited (NWFBS) took over the No. 9 bus route from 1 September 1998 until now. The Shek O Bus Terminus building serves as a terminus for one of Hong Kong’s last remaining rural bus routes, namely, the No. 9 bus route from Shau Kei Wan MTR station.

Shek O Bus Terminus is designed by Hsin Yieh Architects (興業建築師) which was founded by a well-known Chinese architect Su Gin Djih (徐敬直). It is a two-storey utilitarian building of reinforced concrete frame with beams and columns which support the first floor slab, the cantilevered balcony, and the mono-pitched flat roof. The use of RC framing allows hollowed-out spaces for the bus shelter, open balcony and stairwell creating the illusion of a floating box. A rear staircase provides access to the first floor from the car park. built in the Modernist or International Modern style. This style of architecture is generally accepted as having originated in Germany at the Bauhaus school of art in the 1920s.

***Architectural
Merit***

The elegantly composed volumes together with the cantilevered first floor slab and roof slab give the building a sticking elegance and lightness. The horizontal emphasis derives from the prevalent International Mannerist of the time. Natural organic materials are used in the masonry plinth, the end flanking walls and the stacked stonewall at the NW and the stack stone wall at the NW end which anchors the building to the ground. The use of stone cladding in this way possibly derived from so-called “organic architecture” that is visually and environmentally compatible and closely intergraded with the site. There are a number of examples of this style to be found in Hong Kong, but the most famous was Frank Lloyd Wright’s.

Fallingwater (Kaufmann House), built in 1935-39, has been described as arguably the most important twentieth-century house in the United States. The use of natural materials contrasts with the plain man-made concrete structure and is said to symbolize both the romance of nature and the triumph of man. The playful use of Art Deco lettering on the balcony fascia and the chevron shaped ventilation holes in the shelter wall of Shek O Bus Terminus Building are typical of 1950s decorative art and give the building a cheerful and appealing look. This unique character and appearance is a great reminder of a certain period of history in Hong Kong.

The small bus terminus is possibly unique in Hong Kong and should be considered to be a rare piece of iconic 1950s architecture with built heritage value. It has retained its authenticity although some windows and a doorway in the rear elevation have been blocked up and the staircase balustrading replaced. Doors and windows to the ticket office and quarters have also been replaced. These alterations are considered to be easily reversed.

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

Shek O Bus Terminus has been a landmark building in Shek O Village. It has served the community for over 50 years and therefore has considerable social value. Local residents and tourists have used it over the past decades and it is therefore has a great deal of local interest. The bus terminus also offers an opulent ambience of an outdoor wedding photography which takes place from time to time.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The social value of Shek O Bus Terminus will also lie in the role it plays in the film heritage and entertainment industry. For example, it will be featured in a Hollywood film titled “Contagion” conducted by Steven Soderbergh (史提芬蘇德堡) and starred by Matt Damon (麥特戴蒙), Jude Law (裘德洛) and Josie Ho (何超儀). This example reflects the scenic character of the site.

Shek O Bus Terminus contributes to the visual quality of its vicinity and its modernist appearance blends in well with the neighbouring school and clinic built in early post-WWII times, that is, the nearby Shek O Man Sun School (石澳文新學校) and the Shek O Health Centre (石澳健康院) together with its memorial archway (*pai-fong* 牌坊) that is inscribed with the calligraphy of R.C. Lee (利銘澤) (1905-1983). Thus, Shek O Bus Terminus is one of a building cluster of harmonious design and style, exhibiting the development of modernist architecture in this part of Hong Kong Island. **Group Value**

The bus terminus building could possibly be converted into a small shop or tourist information office, but whatever use the building is put to, fitting out and alternation works must be controlled so as not to lose the unique character of the building. **Adaptive Re-use**