

## Historic Building Appraisal

### Shophouses

No. 149 Third Street,

Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong

The exact year of construction of these shophouses cannot be ascertained, but it is believed that they are post-war buildings constructed in the 1950s when the first property transactions took place. The subject buildings are very characteristic of the shophouse. The upper floors are residential while shops occupy the ground floor. The shops on the ground floors of Nos. 145, 147, 149 and 151 are still in use while the shop at No. 153 is abandoned.

*Historical  
Interest*

Shophouses are commonly known as *tong-lau* (唐樓). They were usually built in contiguous blocks and range from 3 to 5 storeys with verandahs or balconies facing the street. Shophouses were used for both commercial and residential purposes. The ground floor was usually devoted to family businesses while the upper floors were for residential purpose. This kind of building is being replaced by high-rise buildings and the number of shophouses has declined sharply in recent years.

Sai Ying Pun (西營盤) district has a long history of wholesale trading going back to the early days of Hong Kong. There was a main street forming the nucleus of this centre. This main street was named as Centre Street (正街). Also, there were several streets parallel to Queen's Road West (皇后大道西). The first, second and third streets parallel to Queen's Road West were then named as First Street (第一街), Second Street (第二街) and Third Street (第三街) respectively. With reference to the map provided by the book, *Mapping Hong Kong*, Third Street already existed in the year of 1889.

These five shophouses may be classified as **Balcony Type Shophouses**. They are built side by side in pairs, each pair sharing a central circulation core or staircase. The architectural style has been described as **Bauhaus** but this is debatable. **Art Deco** influence is evident in the vertical streamlining of the staircase enclosures. The shop frontages are narrow and the floor plans elongated to suit the building lots. The shops are five stories high with narrow cantilevered balconies projecting over the pavement. Ornamental ironwork balcony balustrading and latticed security gates can be seen. The roofs appear to be flat with unauthorised roof structures. The architectural composition of the front façade cannot be clearly seen due to numerous excrescences. The condition of the interiors is not known but the upper floors are used for residential purposes whilst the ground floors are used as shops.

*Architectural  
Merit*

Shophouses are becoming rarer each year due to redevelopment. These shophouses in Third Street therefore are valuable pieces of built heritage. Unfortunately the appearance and authenticity of the facades has been spoilt by unsympathetic treatment.

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

The social value of the shophouse lies in the contribution it has made to urban development. The shophouse has evolved through several types. These particular shophouses are of the later post-war type and are part of the historical urban fabric of Sai Ying Pun. They are however probably only of interest to historians and conservationists.

***Social Value  
& Local  
Interest***

Some historic buildings, such as St. Louis School (聖類斯中學), King's College (英皇書院), Kau Yan Church (救恩堂), Old Tsan Yuk Maternity Hospital (舊贊育醫院) and Old Lunatic Asylum Chinese Block (前華人精神病院) are found nearby.

***Group Value***

As Sai Ying Pun was one of the oldest districts in Hong Kong, an urban renewal project has been conducted since the 1980s. Proposals for urban redevelopment of Third Street have had to be postponed due to lack of co-operation from owners. It is doubtful with this attitude that any proposals for adaptive re-use would be considered either.

***Adaptive  
Re-use***