

Historic Building Appraisal
Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary
No. 137 Yee Kuk Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon

Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary is two-storey medical building constructed in the 1930s to replace an old clinic in the same area (a site next to the Tin Hau Temple at No.182 Yee Kuk Street (醫局街)). The history of which can be traced back in the early twentieth century (*circa* 1911) when the community members of Sham Shui Po initiated a plan to establish a public clinic due to the lack of medical care facilities for local residents. The project was coordinated by Lau Chu-pak (劉鑄伯), Chairman of Chinese Chamber of Commerce for 1906-1920. Fund-raising campaigns were launched and the government supported the proposal by granting crown land for building site. The clinic received good reputation by the locals but its space was inadequate to handle the increasing patients' load. *Historical Interest*

In view of the above, a large landowner in Sham Shui Po named Wong Yiu-tung (黃耀東), together with local residents, donated the construction cost of the existing Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary. The dispensary was managed by the Sham Shui Po Kaifong Welfare Association before the Second World War, and had served as a day-time medical centre cum meeting hall of the Kaifong Association at night. Later, it was handed over to the government.

In order to remedy the drug abuse problem in Sham Shui Po and with the introduction of the Methadone Treatment Scheme in 1972, the dispensary also provided the methadone treatment service. In other words, the dispensary had continued to serve the community with dual functions for many years. Its outpatient service moved to Cheung Sha Wan Government Office in June 2001. After that, the dispensary fully offers methadone treatment service, including medical examination and methadone preparation, guidance and counselling by social workers, referral to other service agencies. As such, the dispensary is also known as Sham Shui Po Methadone Clinic (深水埗美沙酮診所).

The dispensary is a two-storey building and is a remarkably good example of Art Deco architecture which is very rare in Hong Kong. The front facade facing Yee Kuk Street is strongly symmetrical and projects over the pavement on columns to form a covered walkway or arcade. The open verandahs at first floor level are protected by metal security grilles. The facade exhibits strong unity and verticality in the use of giant stylised grooved columns flanked by tall narrow flattened archways. Stylised mouldings are used as decorations and the end elevations of the first floor verandah are particularly interesting. *Architectural Merit*

featuring scroll brackets, ornamental ironwork and other bizarre features. The parapet showing the dispensary's name in Chinese (深水埔公立醫局) has a low stepped profile. The other elevations are much plainer in comparison but the use of stylised mouldings is continued on window heads and cills. Further Art Deco features can be found internally in the entrance hall, staircase and some of the first floor rooms.

There are not many surviving examples of Art Deco architecture in Hong Kong so that Sham Shui Po Public Dispensary is a rare piece of built heritage. The front facade appears to have retained its original appearance, but internally some of the authenticity has been lost due to fitting out alterations, replacement of windows, security arrangements, building services installations, etc.

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

The social value of the dispensary lies in the important services it has provided to the Sham Shui Po community for over seventy years. Due to its remarkable facade it is a local landmark. The dispensary well represents Yee Kuk Street – a street name literally means “street of a medical institute”.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

The dispensary is within walking distance of other historic buildings, such as Nos. 269 & 271 Yu Chau Street (汝州街, Grade 3), No. 170 Yee Kuk Street (Grade 2), Tin Hau Temple (天后廟, Grade 3) at the same street, and Mo Tai Temple (武帝廟, Grade 3) behind it.

Group Value