Historic Building Appraisal

Nos. 172, 174 and 176 Queen's Road Central (Nos. 123, 125 and 127 Wellington Street), Central, H.K.

Historical Interest

The row of three shophouses have frontages facing Nos. 172, 174 and 176 Queen's Road Central and also shops at the back facing Wellington Street. The ground floor shops on Queen's Road have housed a tailor's shop, a shop for oriental arts and crafts, a snack shop and a jewelry shop, for instance, while those facing Wellington Street have been used as a showroom, a photographic studio, a leather goods shop, boutiques, etc. The upper stories are vacant or used for storage.

The building at No. 172 Queen's Road Central was the first shop of the department store named The Sincere & Co., Ltd. (先施公司) which commenced operation in Hong Kong on 8 January 1900. The Sincere & Co., Ltd. was founded by an Australian Chinese Mr. Ma Ying-piu (馬應彪, 1864-1944) who purchased No. 172 in 1899 for the eventual opening of the store. In late 1900, a very severe typhoon in Hong Kong caused extensive damages to the upper floors of No. 172. Fortunately, the foundation remained intact, and repairs of the building were fully completed in 1904. It is believed that the typhoon had damaged Nos. 174 and 176 as well, since government records dated 1902 regarding the building works of the two buildings can be identified.

The Sincere & Co., Ltd. is not only the first Chinese-owned department store in Hong Kong, but also the first of this kind to establish a fixed-price policy, to insist on issuing receipts for every transaction, and to hire women in sales positions. Commencing with a capital of $25,000 in 1900, it grew to be one of the most famous retail groups in Asia before World War II. No. 172 remained the retail outlet of 'Sincere" before a six-storey new department store was opened at Nos. 173-179 Des Voeux Road Central in 1917.

Architectural Merit

The three verandah-type shophouses were built around 1900. The facades facing Queen's Road Central were built to a trabeated (beams & columns) classical design with square columns, and balconies featuring ornamental balustrades. The front balconies project over the pavement on columns to form an open arcaded verandah. The shops are three stories high at the front over the pavement and four stories high over the shop areas.

The facades of the shops facing Wellington Street are rendered and painted with tall windows to the upper storeys of each shophouse. Segmental arches can be identified at Nos. 172 and 174 Queen's Road Central and Nos. 123, 125 and 127 Wellington Street. Timber purlins together with planking are also retained in the three shops at Wellington Street. The shophouses are stepped to follow the incline of the street.

Rarity, Built Heritage Value & Authenticity

Shophouses are tenacious survivors from the past and becoming quite rare, most having been demolished. The three shophouses complement each other with their similar architectural style and old fashioned charm. The facades facing Queen's Road Central are very typical of the arcaded verandah-type shophouses of pre-World War II period. All the timber windows have been replaced with modern aluminum ones and most of the balconies have been enclosed. Despite that, some segmental arches, ornamental balustrades, and timber purlins and planking are still identifiable, with the overall character as pre-war shophouses retained. Besides, the use of No. 172 Queen's Road Central as the first shop of the well-known The Sincere & Co., Ltd. in Hong Kong merits significant historical interest.

Social Value & Local Interest

The western end of Queen's Road Central, where Central District and Sheung Wan meet, has been a traditional Chinese commercial-cum-residential area. The shophouses, especially the first store of The Sincere & Co., Ltd., are significant in the evolution of Hong Kong's socio-economic development.

Group Value

The row of shophouses at No. 172 Queen's Road Central (No. 123 Wellington Street), No. 174 Queen's Road Central (No. 125 Wellington Street) and No. 176 Queen's Road Central (No. 127 Wellington Street) are within walking distance to other historic buildings, such as No. 120 Wellington Street (Grade 1), Nos. 26A- C Graham Street (Grade 3) and Pottinger Street (Grade 1).

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