

**Heritage Appraisal of Lui Seng Chun,
119 Lai Chi Kok Road, Mong Kok, Kowloon**

Located at 119 Lai Chi Kok Road in Mong Kok, Kowloon, **Historical Interest** Lui Seng Chun (雷生春) is a four-storey *tong lau* (literally meaning Chinese-style building (唐樓), the local term for Hong Kong shophouse typology)¹ located on a triangular site. It was built in 1931 and owned by Lui Leung (雷亮, 1863-1944), one of the founders of The Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (“KMB”). The Lui family ran a Chinese medicine shop named “Lui Seng Chun” on the ground floor and resided on the upper floors. Lui Seng Chun has been revitalised into a Chinese medicine and healthcare center since 2012. It is a testimony to the history of a well-respected family, including the economic activities of their Chinese medicine shop around the Second World War.

Lui Leung, alias Lui Hung-wai (雷鴻維), was born in a family of Chinese medicine practitioners in Taishan (台山), Guangdong. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1922 and set up a trading company in Western District in partnership with Lui Wai-shun (雷維信) from the same hometown. Lui Leung purchased a piece of land at Kowloon Inland Lot No. 2792, i.e. 119 Lai Chi Kok Road, on 11 March 1929 and appointed W. H. Bourne, a local architect, to design Lui Seng Chun.

The building was constructed in 1931. After the house was fitted out and furnished in 1934, the Lui family moved in. Lui Leung opened his Chinese medicine shop on the ground floor, while the upper floors were used by his family as living accommodation with the elders on the first floor and younger members on the upper floors. The shop’s name “Lui Seng Chun” was embedded in a couplet,² which had an allegoric meaning of curing people by medicine produced by the Luis. Since a large plaque inscribed with the shop’s name is erected

¹ The term *tong lau* (唐樓), will be used in the appraisal to refer generally to this kind of shophouse buildings in Hong Kong.

² The couplet installed at the Lui Seng Chun medicine shop reads “雷雨功深揚灑露，生民仰望藥回春”。It was a gift from a friend of Lui Leung congratulating him on the opening of the shop.

at the top of the building, the building is also commonly referred to by the shop's name.

According to the Lui family, Lui Seng Chun only produced and sold one kind of bone-setting medicated wine.³ Its principal function was to aid the setting of broken bones. As the herbal medicine business was non-profit-making, there was neither mass production nor publicity. Lui Leung only wished to bring benefits to the community through the medicated wine. In fact, from purchase of herbs, production and packaging of the medicated wine to distribution, all were done at Lui Seng Chun by the family members. The medicated wine, however, won good reputation with its popularity not just confined to the neighbourhood. There were constant demands from his hometown, and the Taishan communities in overseas, such as the United States, Australia, Southeast Asia, and even as far away as Peru. The medicated wine was exported to these markets through Lui Leung's trading company named Man Sun Long Kam San Chong (萬信隆金山莊).

A few years after Lui Leung's death in 1944, the medicine shop was closed as no family member was interested in continuing the medicine business. The Lui family rented the two shops facing Lai Chi Kok Road on the ground floor to two men's tailor shops, i.e. Yan Wo (仁和) and Tai Tung (大同) until 1972.

In the 1960s, as the family size became bigger, there was a growing pressure for living space. The Luis finally moved out from the building and the upper floors were used by their friends and relatives from their hometown. In 1972, some members of the Lui family set up the Kiniland Investment Company Limited (金利源置業有限公司) which purchased the remaining shares of the building from other shareholders. Lui Seng Chun thus came under the sole ownership of the aforesaid company.⁴

³ Although different names and functions were mentioned on the cartons and advertisements of the medicated wine, such as "Liquid Chinese Herbal Medicine Curing Broken Bones and Wounds" (八寶跌打刀傷藥露), "Liquid Chinese Herbal Medicine Curing Staunching Blood" (八寶跌打刀傷止血水), and even the function to cure abscesses on gums, they all referred to the same product.

⁴ According to the will of Lui Leung, Lui Seng Chun was inherited by his sons. Lui Fook-hong (雷福康), Lui Lai-tong (雷禮唐) and Lui Ki-yung (雷祺庸), sons of Lui Leung,

In 2000, the family decided to donate the building to the Government for preservation. The transfer of ownership was completed in 2003. Lui Seng Chun was revitalised successfully into a Chinese medicine and healthcare center by the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2012.

Lui Seng Chun was designed by W. H. Bourne. It is one of the few remaining distinctive *tong lau* from the 1930s. The building was used as residence on the first to third floors while shops on the ground floor. While the majority of the standard *tong lau* in pre-war years were designed and constructed by local builders using a “pattern-book” approach, Lui Seng Chun was individually architect-designed according to the client’s order.

***Architectural
Merit***

Located at the junction of Lai Chi Kok Road and Tong Mi Road, Lui Seng Chun adopts a curved design to the main front elevation with a rectangular frame and a row of decorative balustrades. It is a building of neo-classical style mixed with Art Deco elements which are often characterised by sweeping horizontal lines and robust classical elements. The mixed style was commonly found in *tong lau* in the 1930s. With eight granite columns on the ground floor, the verandah extends over the public pavements forming arcades. This kind of shophouses is classified as Verandah Type. The deep verandahs above the arcades provide sufficient natural light and ventilation for the interior whilst providing shelters for users of the pavements.

The interior of the upper floors adopts an open-plan, i.e. no fixed partitions constructed. Each floor was equipped with a kitchen and a bathroom with flushing toilet. There is a separate staircase running from the ground floor to the upper residences and the roof terrace. Therefore, it was not necessary for the family members to pass through the shop when they went out and returned home.

Lui Seng Chun has retained much of its original architectural ***Authenticity***

were the directors of the Kiniland Investment Company Limited which paid \$794,000 to purchase the remaining shares of Lui Seng Chun from other shareholders.

form and most of the distinctive architectural features despite internal refurbishments, alterations and additions carried out in the past. After officially taking over Lui Seng Chun, the Government carried out basic repairs including removing modifications, restoring the original open-plan design and conducting reinforcement works.

In 2011, the alteration and addition works to revitalise Lui Seng Chun to a Chinese medicine and healthcare Center started. The revitalisation of the building involved the addition of a staircase as fire escape route, a lift for barrier-free access, and toilets also suitable for people with disabilities, restoration and reinforcement of the existing structures and elements, addition of glass enclosures along the verandahs, installation of drainage, fire safety, electrical and air-conditioning facilities, etc. The works followed the principle of minimum intervention to maintain the authenticity and the integrity of the building whilst meeting the contemporary needs. Although new facilities were installed, maximum reversibility was ensured. To minimise the intervention to the facade and integrity of the building, the project team thoughtfully built a new outdoor steel and glass staircase next to the rear verandahs, used a special type of glazing to enclose the verandahs, and camouflaged the solar water heater, fire service water tank and air conditioner system on the roof level.

Major features of the Lui Seng Chun medicine shop which were originally located at the curved corner area on the ground floor have been retained. These include, for instance, the wooden tablet of Lui Seng Chun, the shop windows with their window shutters, and the glass panel of the main entrance with Lui Seng Chun's advertising logo on it. The original features and elements reinforce the authenticity of the building.

Lui Seng Chun is uncommon among the *tong lau* of the pre-war years in Hong Kong as it, unlike most of the *tong lau* in Hong Kong which were usually designed and constructed by local builders using a "stereotype" approach at that time, was specially designed by an architect according to the site condition and views of the owner. In addition, most of the original features and elements like granite columns with decorative capitals, flooring tiles, timber doors and

Rarity

windows, iron grilles and terrazzo exterior walls and staircase are well preserved. Flushing toilet in residential building is another rare facility in Hong Kong in the pre-war years. Apart from the distinctive architectural form, Lui Seng Chun is a rare example in Hong Kong as it embodies the early history of a local well-respected family and reflects the economic activities of a Chinese medicine shop in an earlier era.

Lui Seng Chun is socially significant in many ways. First, it is an exceptional landmark in the district. Second, it was a well-known Chinese bone-setting medicine shop which served the locals in Mong Kok as well as Sham Shui Po in the past. The medicated wine produced by the Luis was even exported overseas through Lui Leung's trading company. Although the medicated wine and the medicine shop no longer exist, the building named "Lui Seng Chun" is a remarkable reminder of the product and the medicine shop.

***Social Value &
Local Interest***

In 2000, the Lui family offered to donate Lui Seng Chun to the Government on a totally non-remunerated basis for conservation purpose. The donation was unprecedented in Hong Kong. The generous offer from the Lui family demonstrates the support given by a family to heritage conservation in Hong Kong.

In 2008, Lui Seng Chun was included in Batch I of the "Revitalising Historic Buildings through Partnership Scheme" launched by the Development Bureau. Hong Kong Baptist University revitalised the building into a Chinese medicine and healthcare center in 2012 and has been operating it since then. The revitalisation allowed Lui Seng Chun to resume its medical services to the community. Lui Seng Chun has become an attraction to both local and overseas visitors after its revitalisation. The project was well recognised by the design and architectural professionals and was awarded the winner of the "2012 Special Architectural Award – Heritage & Adaptive Re-use" by The Hong Kong Institute of Architects in 2013.

Lui Seng Chun is within walking distance of other historic buildings, such as the Old Kowloon Police Headquarters (舊九龍警察總部, Grade 2), Nos. 190 to 204 Prince Edward Road West, Nos. 210 and 212 Prince Edward Road West (all Grade 2), Nos. 177 and 179 Prince Edward Road West (Grade 3), Nos. 1 and 3 Playing Field Road (Grade 3), No. 729 Nathan Road (Grade 3) and No. 1235 Canton Road (Grade 3). These historic buildings collectively witnessed the socio-cultural development of Mong Kok. The various historic *tong lau*, including Lui Seng Chun, also exhibit the characteristics of *tong lau* architecture, especially *tong lau* in pre-war years.

Group Value