

Study on Industrial Heritage of Kowloon East and its Potential for Public Art/ Urban Design

Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO), Development Bureau, HKSAR Government

Executive Summary

Prepared by

Culture and Development Consultancy Limited

in collaboration with

Wang Weijen Architecture (WWA) (Architecture)

Kenneth To & Associates Ltd (KTA) (Planning)

Heatherwick Studio, UK (HSUK) (Strategy)

Lau Chi-pang (History)

Kacey Wong (Public Art)

Richard Engelhardt (Heritage)

June2014

Executive Summary

Spirit of Creation – The Past and future of Industries in Kowloon East (KE)

The story for the success of Hong Kong began with how Hong Kong changed from an entrepot into an industrial city in the mid-1950s which happened together with the development of the KE area into an industrial town. The Kwun Tong industrial area witnessed the rise of Hong Kong with the influx of labour and capital from the Mainland into a major industrial city in South East Asia. Many enterprises grown into famed international brands and corporations have leveraged on the unique position of Hong Kong in the world market. Even as Hong Kong evolved into a service-oriented economy in the global market, the different types of economic activities in KE have remained crucial to how the city could transform itself further to face the challenges of the 21st century.

To meet societal needs, KE has gradually transformed from a manufacturing base to a service-oriented cluster in the last decade. Many old factory buildings as well as some unique architectural features are gone due to the continuous redevelopment and conversion of existing industrial premises to office space. A consultancy consisting of a team of multi-disciplinary professionals including architects, art designers, historians, urban designers and planners has thus been commissioned by the Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO) to capture and document both the architecture and history of the industrial heritage in Kwun Tong and Kowloon Bay Business Areas (KT/ KBBA) for the memory and enrichment of our humanistic and cultural landscape for the younger and future generations, and to come up with strategies to incorporate these collective treasures of Hong Kong into the process of urban place making and transformation through urban design.

History and Development of KT/KBBA

Kwun Tong was once one of the four biggest salt-beds in Dongguan Province until the salt industry disappeared in the 17th century. It then served as a dumping bay for refuses from the 1930s to the beginning of the Second World War. Kwun Tong Business Area (KTBA) currently covers an area of approximately 70.7 hectares of land bounded by Kwun Tong Road to the north, King Yip Street to the east, Hoi Bun Road to the south and Shun Yip Street to the west. Wai Yip Street was subsequently added to connect KT and KB. Chinese names of many streets in Kwun Tong like Shing Yip Street, Tsun Yip Street, Lai Yip Street, Wai Yip Street, Tai Yip Street, Hoi Yuen Road and Hung To Road etc. carry meanings of creating wealth, prosperity and good business. Kwun Tong was planned as an industrial area in 1954 and its industrial development can be summarized into 4 stages:

Beginning: 1950-65

Reclamation started at the eastern end near the former oil depot (now Laguna City) extending westwards towards Kowloon Bay and was carried out in three stages between 1954 and 1962 (Please refer to appendix 2 for the Reclamation Phasing of KTIA).

In the early stage, the land was auctioned at comparatively large size (ranging from 200 000 to 9 000 sq ft) at prices as low as HK\$5.60 per sq ft in the 1950s. As the reclamation progressed, the size of the subdivided land lots had become significantly smaller to better suit the needs.

To support industrial development, the Government provided housing in the area, e.g. the Garden Estate and Kwun Tong Resettlement Estate completed in 1959; electricity, water and telephone lines had also been steadily improved since 1960; transportation network was established

throughout the course of development, e.g. first bus line in 1958, Kwun Tong Pier moved from Ngau Tau Kok in 1960 and MTR Kwun Tong Line opened in 1979.

Among the pioneers in the Kwun Tong Industrial Area were cotton mills, thermal flasks, electrical appliances and plastic factories. Many of the first generation factories were purpose-built for their specific production, some of them have been demolished or altered and not many of them are preserved intact at present.

Heyday: 1965-85

In 1961, a record identified about 100 factories and 15,000 workers in Kwun Tong. By 1970, the number of factories and workers were about 800 and 72,300 respectively, and further increased to 7,000 and 200,000 by 1985. The number of factories and workers in Kwun Tong increased by 70 and 13 folds respectively from 1961 to 1985. Textiles and clothing was still the dominant sector, hiring about 40% of the total work force in the area by 1980s, followed by rubber and plastics in the second place. Notable metalware and food and beverage factories also moved to Kwun Tong during this period. It was during the late 1960s that electronics became an important industry with the number of factories doubling within a decade. In 1980s, 18% of Hong Kong's industrial output was produced by the district, illustrating its importance to the overall economy.

With the rapid growth of industries in the area, shortage of labour became acute and competition to recruit workers was keen. Factory owners had to provide various benefits and attractions in order to keep their workers – some installed air conditioning in their premises while it was common to provide canteens or organized catering for lunch as well as tours and picnics as bonus.

Factory life in the heyday of Kwun Tong was memorable in many ways: from listening to radio with phone-in requests for music broadcast such as the RTHK programme “Postman in the Air” to socializing and courtship among workers strolling to bus stops and ferry terminals after work.

Transformation: 1985-2000

The opening of the Mainland in the early 1980s provided a golden opportunity for Hong Kong Industrialists to relocate labour-intensive production to the cheaper land and lower wages of the Pearl River Delta. Many of the first generation owners of Kwun Tong factories began to move their factories across the border to the north while the premises in Kwun Tong were converted to headquarters and showrooms to support worldwide business.

As a result, factory spaces in Kwun Tong as well as other industrial districts in Hong Kong experienced the hardest time in terms of property value. The Government in 1989 introduced Industrial/Office (I/O) buildings, which was a new land use designation where offices ancillary to industrial use are allowed within the “I” zones. It was during this period that developers began to cast their eyes in Kwun Tong for vacant premises for redevelopment.

Prospect: Post-2000

Since 2000, manufacturing industries has reduced its share of GDP and employment in Hong Kong, and many factory owners have downsized their local operation as well as spatial usage. In 2001, the Government rezoned the “I” sites in Kwun Tong and Kowloon Bay to “Other Specified Uses (Business)” and conversions of existing industrial buildings to a much wider range of uses or construction of new office buildings could then be carried out within the former Industrial zones. Redevelopment is also easier to materialize when the land lots are held under single or less fragmented ownership. The ‘Revitalization of Industrial Buildings’ Policy in 2010 allows landowners to convert and upgrade their industrial buildings into commercial uses for the lifetime of the buildings without paying any premium.

However, that does not mean these enterprises have lost their edge in terms of manufacturing business in either the region or the world. A number of industries originally located in Kwun Tong

have now grown into important global businesses employing tens of thousands of workers over 30 countries, while there are still one or two industries operating in their original purpose-built factories. Since these companies have no financial burden with the property, they are not keen to dispose of or convert their building premises under the new climate of redevelopment and would most likely hold on to their original state as anchors of industrial heritage spots in the district.

Meanwhile, since many cultural and creative industry companies and entrepreneurs have moved to Kwun Tong, they have built up a network and culture in the area that might also persist along with transformation and changes in the neighbourhood. Today's Kwun Tong is characterized by a vibrant mix of industrial trading, commercial, cultural and leisure activities.

Architectural Interest and Characteristics in Urban Fabric

Industrial buildings aim for high efficiency in terms of land use, planning and building design. Landowners tend to maximize the permitted gross floor area in the lot. The building types are also dictated by the building regulations at the time. Architecture in KT/KBBA can be classified into 7 types, namely Gallery Block, L-block, Simple Extrusion, Staggered Tower, Podium Tower, Machine as Building and Face-lifting. They also reflect the development history of Kwun Tong with more L-Block types concentrated in the first phase of reclamation. The 'Machine as building' is purposely-built factory building fitting with specific function, with most of them concentrated in the waterfront area which is of most architectural interest. Typical examples are Kowloon Flour Mill and the warehouse at No. 167-169 Hoi Bun Road.

Back lanes are one of the characteristics of KTBA. The back lane network, together with the building setback of 10 feet on ground floor with a headroom clearance of 15 feet required under leases, provided the loading/unloading space for daily operations and also for pedestrians who prefer less crowded walkways. Another characteristic is the factory canteens that exist due to the limited 'commercial' sites in the industrial area. However, there are many restrictions to the factory canteens - for example, canteens on ground floor are not allowed to have direct access to main roads, no advertising signs are allowed, and they could only serve the factory employees of that particular building.

Potential of Industrial Culture for Urban Design

The main features of the industrial culture and design identified above are developed into a set of design principles and guidelines for Public Spaces (Park/ Open Space, Back Lanes, Paving), Public Facilities (Seating, Switch Box, Public Art, Railing, Drainage Cover, Signage) and Public Buildings to set out the philosophy and recommended practices to assist architects, designers and planners in implementing public projects in KE.

A discovery map is proposed that links up spots of interest with historical, architectural and cultural values to help both local and overseas visitors to appreciate the history and development of Kwun Tong. Three zones are identified in the discovery map. Zone I is characterized by the concentration of the earliest development of Kwun Tong factories that were founded in the 1950s. It is also a popular zone that is enlivened by vibrant cultural and creative industries. Zone II is characterized by the concentration of some important factories that are still active in manufacturing perhaps at a global/ regional scale. Zone III includes industries by the waterfront. Many buildings in this zone have unique architectural features that derive their forms from functions such as large balconies for lifting of bulky goods. 'Other spots of interest' outside these three zones are also identified.

An advocacy statement is also developed to encourage the private owners and developers in KT/KBBA to incorporate industrial cultural elements in their future redevelopment or conversion and to participate in the discovery map initiatives showcasing the history of the building, which will also in return enrich the discovery map and hence visitors' interest and continue the "Spirit of Creation" in the future.

To crystalize the design principles and guidelines, six elements are proposed along/near the trail of the discovery map to add flavour of industrial heritage to the urban design. They are 1) exhibition of the "Spirit of Creation" at Tsun Yip Street Playground Phase 1; 2) special paving with logo; 3) decoration of switch boxes with old newspaper clippings and products; 4) public art as way finder to the waterfront; 5) transformation of back lanes; and 6) public features with industrial character.

The transformation of Tsun Yip Street Playground Phase 1 with Industrial Heritage installations is the first project showcasing how findings and recommendations of the study can be integrated into the design of improving our public space. These installations and designs tell stories of the lives of people who brought the city to its present stage representing the "Spirit of Creation" that is the essence of industry and development in Hong Kong. Continuation of the legacy of this creative spirit needs your participation.