

霓虹招牌

Discovering Signs : A Study of Cantilever Neon Signage as a Post-war Urban Vernacular Heritage of Hong Kong

by

Elson Cheng

Student no.: 2006991835

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Conservation at the University of Hong Kong

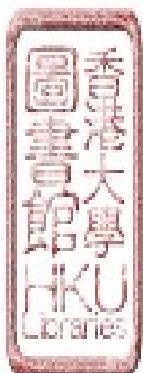
May 2009



Abstract

The emergence of Cantilever Neon Signage has accompanied with the grown-up of Hong Kong urban development after World War II. This enormous steel frame covered with bent neon lights has been erected onto the external wall over the streets of Hong Kong city in the past few decades. Its image has been firmly imprinted on every citizen's memory by its multi-colored and eye-catching gesture. The signal itself embodies part of the social and urban development history of Hong Kong. However, its role in this city has been fading out following with the city's renewal and advancement in information technology. It is afraid that the Cantilever Neon Signage will end up with a calamitous fate one day as all of them will be eradicated from our city. Throughout this dissertation, we tried to unveil some hidden stories behind this mysterious mask by unravelling the development history and exploring this fading industry in person throughout face-face site visits. The results were astonishing as less people would commit to this handicraft driven industry and it coupled with austere statutory controls which have inevitably halted further potential successors to enter into the industry.

Key Words: Cantilever Neon Signage, Urban Development, Urban Renewal, Handicraft.

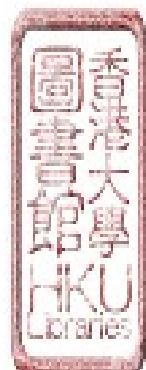


Declaration

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a dissertation, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification. All illustrations (maps, drawings and photographs) reproduced in this dissertation, except where due acknowledgement is made, are the original work of the author.



Signed _____
Elson CHENG



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Personally, I would like to thank my friends who have given me advice and support. I must also thank my mother who gave birth to me which leads my present living. More importantly, I am grateful to my wife Cloudy who has sleeplessly supported my study and encouraged me to persist no matter how many times I intended to give up. Lastly, I must pay my tribute to my Almighty GOD and thank HIM for his endless love and forgiveness. I should also thank HIM for giving an invaluable gift to me – my little daughter Justin.

Conservation is definitely my interest and I consider it as my future career route. I would like to devote more time and effort to participate in more interesting conservation projects in foreseeable future. I am pleased to have studied in ACP course and I am proud to be part of this course.

Elson Cheng
May 2009

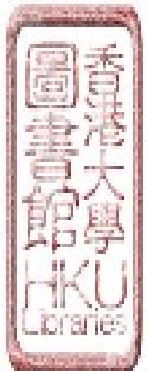
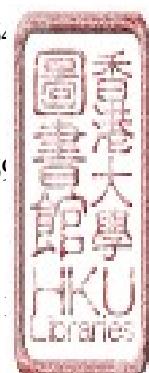


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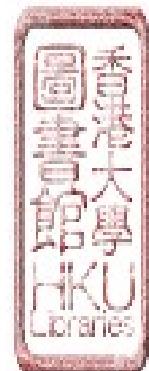


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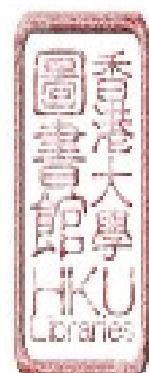


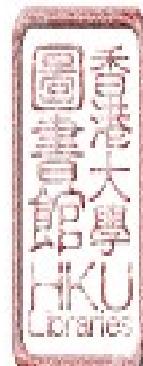
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Chapter 1

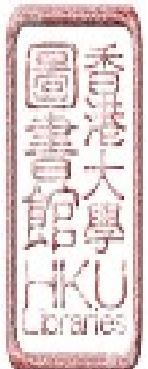
OUTLINE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Introduction

Hong Kong has long been a street-oriented city since its takeover by Britain nearly 150 years ago. People agglomerated along a place which eventually enhanced street development from one place to another place. Same as other conventional urban developments as described in the text books, Hong Kong urban sprawl followed along streets extending from sea front to inner land.

It was patent to realize that one of the historical roles of the street in Hong Kong was to transform clusters of fishing village along the seashore to a grid-type cityscape same as nowadays. Since then, Hong Kong began to open its port as well as its trades to outside world as more people found their livings which led to population increase. Streets became more important as it was an essential component of transportation mode which drove the economy rise during that moment. Suffice to say, more and more people dwelled along the streets and more living activities therefore happened there. Those activities varied ranging from daily necessities to entertainment, etc. One of the significant artificial features, the cantilever neon signage, was then well articulated with the streets and people. A unique, charming and glamorous streetscape therefore was born in Hong Kong.

There is no doubt that the neon signage is carrying a long glorious history of Hong Kong urban development from the past till now. It would be highly intriguing to unveil the past glory of Hong Kong from the mystery of the signage. This dissertation aims at unraveling the functions and historical value of the Cantilever Neon Signage in Hong Kong.



Kong since the post war era and shed a practical light from a conservation point of view to the signage.

1.1. Research Focus and Proposed Title

Focus:

It is hoped that the following items can capture the focus of this research entirely and be able to address all the issues vividly:-

Research theme: Vernacular Streetscape of Cantilever Signage in Hong Kong.

Research subject: Cantilever Signage and its tradition

Research case: Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants

Research context: The identities of Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants which erected after post-war era in Hong Kong.

1.2. Aims and Objectives

Aims:

The Aims of this dissertation are to explore the significance of Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants and the importance of the signage trade tradition to Hong Kong's urban development, and to document the tangible and intangible findings of its subsequent influence.



Objectives:

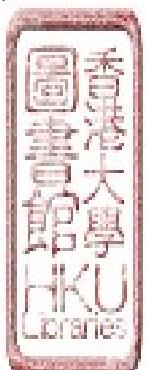
Apart from the Aims, it is also hoped to achieve the following objectives in this dissertation:-

- To outline the emergence of the Cantilever Neon Signage in Hong Kong after the Post-war time till nowadays.
- To address the practical use as well as its historical value of the Cantilever Neon Signage.
- To explore the rise and fall of the use of the Cantilever Neon Signage in Hong Kong.

1.3. Background and Issues of Research

Prior to going deep into our discussion, it would be conducive to have a quick glimpse of the background of the study and any critical issues relating to the topic:-

- 1.) People are used to finding places by recognizing prominent signage of common known business. Even today the street numbering system is still prevalent.
- 2.) Cantilever Neon Signage (CN Signage), which have been very popular since post war period, is a character defining element of Hong Kong urbanization and streetscape. CN Signage featured in postcards and travel books reflected the trades and industries of Hong Kong, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. No matter visitors and Hong Kong citizens, people identify their destination by recalling the CN Signage.
- 3.) ‘Yum Cha’ (飲茶) is a local eating culture in Hong Kong and ‘dim sum’ (點心) is famous in the world.
- 4.) Chinese Restaurants are places for social gathering including daily life of community, wedding and birth ceremonies. In thi



connection, the business names or locations of the Chinese Restaurants may be familiarized by the community.

- 5.) Restaurant signage, in terms of design, materials and construction, is undergoing major changes in the early 21st century. The existence of cantilever neon restaurant signage reflects the socio-economic and technological circumstances of Hong Kong in a changing period.
- 6.) Urban streetscape is a sight for the world to identify a place of cultural city. The city of Hong Kong develops in South East Asia after Post War. The Hong Kong's socio-cultural characters were formed and developed over time. A number of businesses and their advertisement including the shop front and the hanging signage that form the streetscape of early Hong Kong was memorized by the world and tourists. Then its evolution to present was also impressed by Hong Kong citizens.



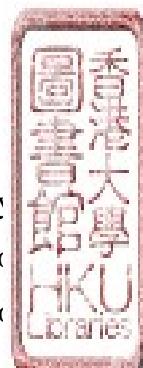
Photo 1:
Street Sight of Hong Kong
(Signage is a CDE of Hong Kong
Citylife)

Photo 2:
Restaurant Neon Signage in night
(Neon Restaurant Signage is lighting
since 60s or before)

Photo 3:
New Restaurants' Signage
(City is changing)

(Source: Photos taken by Author on a period between Sep/Oct, 2006)

- 7.) In present, most of the cantilever signage is not classified legally as architectural elements. They are now just fabric attached to buildings and not under building control unless they are not safe to



public. However, the enforcement of building regulations to ‘Unauthorized Building Works’ is being misused extensively. The cantilever signage will disappear if we don’t understand the cultural significance.

1.4. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

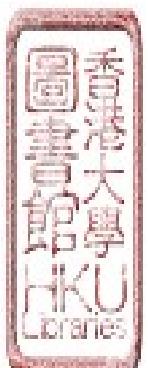
Theoretical Background

Quoted from Robert Venturi in his well-known book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, (Venturi, 1977) he stated that “The time has arrived for a scholar to write a doctoral dissertation on signs. He or she would need literary as well as artistic acumen, because the same reason that makes signs Pop Art”.

Signage is an important element of a city urban vernacular and as stated by Mitzi Sims in *Sign Design*, ‘Signs are environment details, but they are essential to our understanding of our increasingly complex built environments and important because on the whole they are permanent and imposed’. In addition, ‘Signs are also subtle indicators of attitudes and change within society. “ If a society cares about trivialities such as either saving or creating a fine piece of lettering, it will probably care about the building it is on, and care about the street that it is in, and care about the country itself” (Alan Bartram, 1975)’.

Furthermore, Australia ICOMOS, *Guidelines to the Burra Charter* (1988): Cultural Significance, materialized the theory of the establishment of cultural significance in a more solid background as follows:

“...in establishing the cultural significance of a place it is necessary to assess all the information relevant to an understanding of the place and its fabric. The task includes a



report comprising written material and graphic material. The contents of the report should be arranged to suit the place and the limitations on the task, but it will generally be in two sections: first, the assessment of cultural significance and second, the statement of cultural significance..."

Hypothesis

The Cantilever Neon Signage plays a significant role in urban development as it signifies a city centre hub for urban expansion.

1.5. Research Methodology

Research Framework

One of the most prominent locations for installing the Cantilever Neon Signage is the façade of the Chinese restaurants. Traditional Chinese restaurants in Hong Kong used to have several storeys which had a huge vertical façade facing the street. This façade was generically considered as a part of streetscape. A big Cantilever Neon Signage was then protruded from this façade to the main street perpendicularly for an advertising purpose. Most of the signage were magnificently built and became an iconic symbol of a particular location.

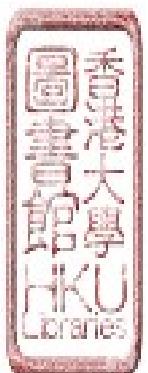
As a result of this, the restaurant signage could be further studied as they all played a top role in Hong Kong street signage history. In this research, we therefore focus mainly on these signage because of their importance in streetscape as well as their historic weight in urban development. To conclude, we tend to build up the methodology for this research by following the framework as follows:



- 1.) To explore of the establishment of the Chinese restaurants after World War II.
- 2.) To define ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’ and outline its physical characteristics.
- 3.) To summarize and illustrate all selected Chinese restaurants with ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’.
- 4.) To exam the of design, materials, construction methods and procedures from client’s brief to erect of the Cantilever Neon Signage in relation to the socio-economics and the technology of that time.
- 5.) To conclude and establish the statement of significance.

Methods of Collecting Information:

- Literature search of the statutory document relating to signage control (Unauthorized building works and relevant guideline for application requirements)
- Literature search of secondary sources: books, leaflets, and photo record etc.
- Site visits and field studies in Hong Kong
- Interviews with the signage providers and the restaurant operators for their views about the Cantilever Neon Signage.



II. Chapter 2

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE TRADES OF SIGNAGE AND CHINESE RESTAURANTS RISING IN HONG KONG

Background

There is an interlocking triangular relationship amongst people, trades, and a city as three of them will generate social development and urbanization to a place. Theoretically, people from poorer areas migrate to better places and settle down to start different trades for making their livings. These business activities invigorate the city and let people make their profits along with the city expands. Soaring economic base therefore gives better life style and a sense of belonging to people. Hong Kong is a world famous city which benefits to her economic freedom and geographic advantages. It acts as one of the major trading harbours for China and south-east Asia since post-war era. Hong Kong was growing rapidly from 60s to 80s as it performed as a general business platform for various business developments. Nowadays, the emphasis on manufacturing sector has been shifted to finance and service industry as Hong Kong becomes a world class financial centre nowadays. Without any doubt, Hong Kong which is acclaimed as the ‘Pearl of the East’, will keep on transcending and changing in a unbelievable pace.

In connection with this fast-paced development, the streetscape of Hong Kong city is under a tremendous thrust to reface and modifications. Since a street is mainly composed of many small businesses, it is believed that the form of existence and physical appearance would be highly adjusted under the influence of the urban renewal.



Small Businesses in Hong Kong

Hong Kong has a long reputation for its rapid economic development. The pace of life is fast and the change is rapid. Its development deeply influences our social values and lifestyles. Such rapid rhythm and changes may lead us to forget the values and identities that have been around us for years. After World War II, the developments of Hong Kong shifted from the North to the South. Such changes brought a lot of capital, skills and manpower to Hong Kong. It created a solid foundation for Hong Kong to develop a great variety of industries including Chinese restaurants and signage providers.

Chinese Restaurants

The culture of Dining Out is an invaluable heritage of human life. Chinese people always talk about four basic necessities: Clothing, Eating, Living, Traveling (衣，食，住，行). Eating is one of the daily necessities and ‘Yam Cha’ (Photo 4) is a local eating culture and represents the Chinese eating habits in Hong Kong. ‘Dim sum’ (Photo 5) and the Chinese dishes are famous in the world. Chinese Restaurants are our daily destinations and their ‘Signs’ are attractive, directory, and they also impose to us.



Photo 4 : Eating “Yum Cha”
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 5 : Eating “Dim Sum”
(Source: Photo taken by Author from the book *hearts and hands: Hong Kong’s Traditional Trades and Crafts*, Bamboo-steamer p.216)

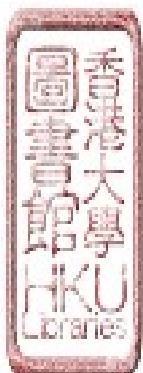


With the influence of the long history of the Chinese eating cultures and the rapid population growth, loads of Chinese restaurants appeared in Hong Kong. At the very beginning, there were two types of Chinese restaurants – “Cha Kue” (茶居) and “Eateries” (食肆). “Cha Kue” served dim sum and tea in the morning whereas “Eateries” served rice and dishes for dinner. With the influence of the economic growth such as high land value policy, the opening hours of the “Cha Kue” and “Eateries” extended longer and longer – “Cha Kue” started serving lunch, afternoon tea and even dinner while “Eateries” started providing lunch, afternoon tea and even dim sum in the morning. The competition between these two trades led them merge together and the Chinese restaurants nowadays were formed.

In fact, the Chinese names of Chinese restaurants have changed from time to time and reflected the social life of certain periods of time. The following Chinese characters are usually used as the names of the Chinese restaurants (中式食肆) in the name-changing process: 茶居 (Cha Kue/Ju), 茶室 (Cha Shi) , 茶樓 (Cha Lau/Lou) , 酒樓 (Jiu Lau), and 酒家 (Jiu Jia).

The Chinese characters “茶 (Cha)” means tea while “居 (Kue), 室 (Shi) , 樓 (Lau)” stated the spatial area means veranda, house, and storey building respectively.

For the Chinese character “酒 (Jiu)” is the abbreviation of “banquet (酒席/宴會)” which serves wine for guests in the Chinese Restaurants, the places of social gathering.

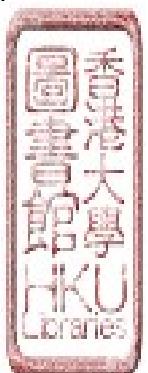


Signage Providers

Signage provider is a unique industry which is exclusive from advertising and manufacturing industries under the classification of Hong Kong Economical Annual Report. Although it is not a mainstream industry, the establishment has played a key role in supporting the mainstream industries by erecting their names and brands over the streets conspicuously. The signage itself does not only serve as an advertisement, but also helps with voicing out different messages for the diverse industries in a highly competitive market. The signage providers started naturally in line with the developments of Hong Kong.

Messages from the Signage

Each industry has its own characteristics and economic values to the society and it is hardly valued by means of our cognitive ability and conventional understanding. Each industry has its own path of development and it is totally distinctive from others. It is highly inconceivable for an outsider without a throughout understanding to its distinctive traditions and economic stance in the development history. We should admit that there is not enough knowledge and study to these street-type businesses. Nevertheless, we can understand the social and economic developments of Hong Kong through a study of the language of the tangible signage, by tracing the hidden stories behind different industries.



III. Chapter 3

DEFINING THE 'CANTILEVER NEON SIGNAGE OF CHINESE RESTAURANTS' AND SCOPE OF STUDY

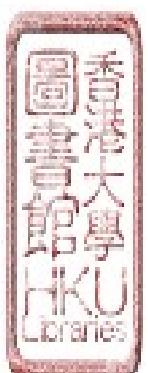
Definition of Signage

A throughout study of the meaning of 'Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants' would clearly outline the focus of this research. Firstly, signage is a broad and diverse message board which can cater for mass pedestrian in a community. Since different trades and industries have their own traditions derived from their business developments, they are used to letting people know those tangible values and intangible characteristics by promoting their brand names or products' images through the 'Signage' at prominent locations in front of their shops. There is no doubt that shop owners do want their brand identities and product specialities to be recognized and memorized by customers deeply in their minds. Hence, they consider 'Cantilever Neon Signage' as their official signatures rather than only using their name boards inside the shop or at the shop front. In order to understand more about the functions and values of the 'Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants', it is essential to have a clear meaning on the terminology and classification of signs.

3.1 Terminologies of 'Signs' and 'Signage'

3.1.1 A Study of Sign

In order to unravel the meaning and value of a 'sign' in a place, 'sign' can be classified into the following descriptions.



'The environmental graphic designer(s) plans, designs and specifies sign systems and other forms of visual communication in the built and natural environment.' (by SEGD, The US Society of Environmental Graphic Designers)

Cobuild Dictionary defines 'sign' as a piece of wood, metal, or plastic with words or pictures on it, giving information or instructions. According to BS6110-1.0:1999, 'sign' has two definitions. 'Sign (1)' being defined as 'graphic presentation of a message' while 'Sign (2)' is 'device on which a sign (1) is conveyed'.

Hanging Signs (Cantilevered Signs):

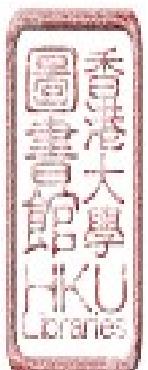
Signs are originated and developed for the need of conveying information. Hanging signs are amongst the oldest forms of advertisement, which can be dated back to Roman trade and guild signs.



Photo 6 : Hanging Signage for Showrooms of Alex Ross & Co., Salisbury Road, Hong Kong, 1920
(Source: Photo taken by Author from the book *Passing Shadows: Hong Kong* (2003) by Peter Moss, p.101)

Commercial Signs

Signage is a kind of advertising agent. It acts as 'Commercial sign' in a city naturally. Hence, Signage can also be defined as any kind of graphics created to display information on streets, usually from the



outside of buildings to greet a particular audience, typically for the purpose of 'way-finding'.

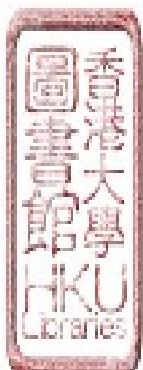
In a commercial society, signs identify a business or similar entity. The erection of signs assists in way-finding (direction indicating) and attracts customers. Such signs in societies of fast economic competitions are representing the business images rather than words. But the most direct way to express the brand to the public is to use literacy. The signs usually include the name of the company in local language and/or target customers' language, and with the famous product of the business, often in the form of a logo.

Architectural Signage

Architectural signage is a kind of 'Sign (1)' or 'Sign (2)' presented in an urban area in the form of 'Symbols or Words' whose function is to provide directions, identification, information, and/or orientation. For some other architectural signage systems, they may also catch the attention of the audience to the end for warnings, regulations or restrictions. In principle, the architectural signage occurs under the design of architecture or urban planning. The participations of the retail shop owners were rare and limited in large scale projects.

Neon Sign

Neon is a kind of gas in a fluorescent tube to provide attractive lighting. The Signage factory bends the graphical lettering or logos by using neon light tubes. Then the tubes are fixed on the cantilever signage to light up the night of the streets of Hong Kong.



Neon Sign is a kind of external sign. According to the classification of Unity Ltd., there are three types of External Signs/Signage. They are Billboard, Lightbox, and Neon light Signage.

Billboard (Photo 7) is a front lit type advertising signboards. It is easy to maintain and can be built up to any sizes. Lightbox (Photo 8) is a backlit type advertising signboards. Fluorescent tubes are installed to provide significant view. While Neon light signage (Photo 9) is the most attractive kind of signage, they have different colours which can be chosen as per client's preference. (Source: www.unityltd.com)



Photo 7 : Billboard Signage
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 8 : Lightbox Signage
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 9 : Neon Light Signage
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

3.2 Signage form a streetscape of a place

A street can also be contemplated as a void lying between two rows of buildings. Streetscape is a cultural sight of a place. The individual signage fills the empty space of a street and they are considered to be part of the streetscape. They enrich the content of the street and reflect the local cultures of a place. Understanding individual signage, signage type or the change of streetscape can enable us to understand the history and culture of a certain place.

Individual signage, signage types and streetscape in Hong Kong change over time and this change is of historical, cultural, social and anthropological interest. It is also essential to the art of architectural and urban planning as the messages may be different during development. Understanding the messages from signage in Hong Kong and the nature of its change may enhance our sense of identification with the social environment and the Hong Kong life-style. Furthermore, it helps our next generation to understand their past generations in such a fast pace city.

3.3 Definition of 'Cantilever Neon Signage'

Summarizing from the above meanings of signs, 'Cantilever Neon Signage' is a kind of attracting sign providing direction and identification on streets for commercial purposes.

The focus of neon signage in this research is cantilever type which is attached to a building in a perpendicular position and supported by metal frame and fixed in diagonal wire.



3.4 Definition of targeted Vernacular Shops

The targeted vernacular shops in my research are ‘Chinese restaurants’ in which those restaurants serve Chinese style food and Chinese tea to customers with more than forty-five years in the history of Hong Kong.

Scope of Study

The scope of this research is to unveil the values of Cantilever Neon Signage existing in the community for the trades of Chinese restaurants and Signage providers.

Through surveys, findings and analyses, it is hoped to establish a preliminary model for documenting the details of ‘Signage’ of different trades and industries and assess the value of Cantilever Neon Signage for future application considerations. In this case, we will focus on ‘Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants’ as our study model. The aim is to understand these Hong Kong’s historic shops and their identities in the cultural, social and vernacular architecture development of Hong Kong.



IV. Chapter 4

'CANTILEVER NEON SIGNAGE' AS A CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENT OF URBAN HONG KONG

The Story of 'Cantilever Neon Signage'

In Hong Kong, there are many 'Cantilever Neon Signage' scattering around the streets. Over the last few decades, many businesses used 'Cantilever Neon Signage' to attract customers. It was known that Hong Kong economy rapidly rebounded after World War II. The commercial activities accelerated the erection of 'Cantilever Neon Signage' naturally in Hong Kong. Benefiting from the development of technology, 'Many sign companies made electric flags during World War II, "Cash in on the spirit of patriotism which is engulfing the country," one company urged.' (*Let There Be Neon*, p.43) (Photo 10) and 'Signs' appeared on the front cover of the Times magazine in March 1942.

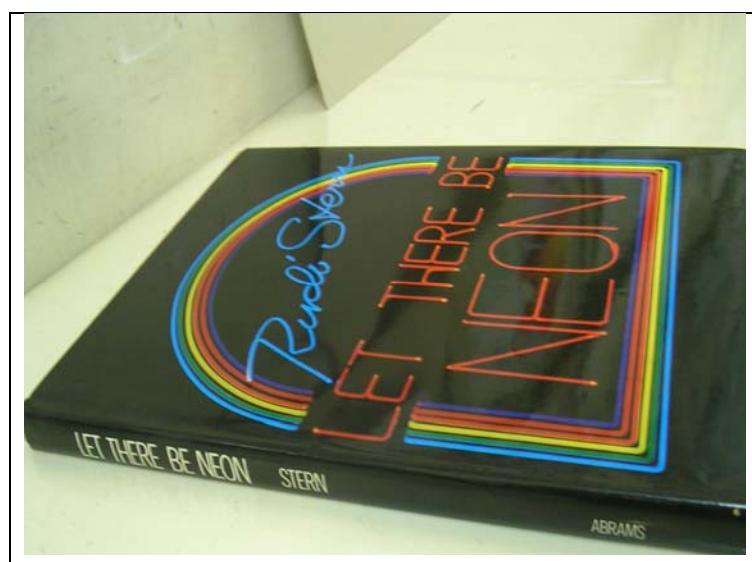
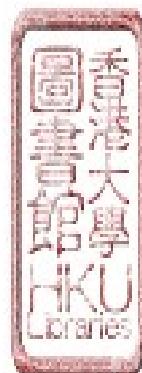


Photo 10 : The book “*Let There Be Neon*” by Rudi Stern (1980)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



"Before the Second World War, Hong Kong was relatively unknown to the rest of the world. At that time Hong Kong Architecture could be divided into three types. First was the indigenous architecture dating to the Qing Dynasty; Chinese farming villages, ancestral halls and temples. The second type was the vernacular urban architecture, simultaneously developed in Canton and Shanghai. The ground floors were shops with residential dwellings on the upper floors." Vernacular Shop Signs have then been erected over the ground floor of the street in Urban Hong Kong.

From one of the figures between p.170 and p.171 for the chapter of Land and Housing in *the annual report of Hong Kong in 1958* (1959) (Photo 11), it stated that "Hong Kong by night presents a spectacle unrivalled by few cities of the world. Both Victoria and Kowloon are gaily illuminated, and the light themselves and their reflections in the water provide a fascinating show from almost any point within the harbour area. The reds, blues, greens, and ambers of neon predominate, Chinese characters lending themselves particularly well to this form of illumination on shop facades and sky signs."



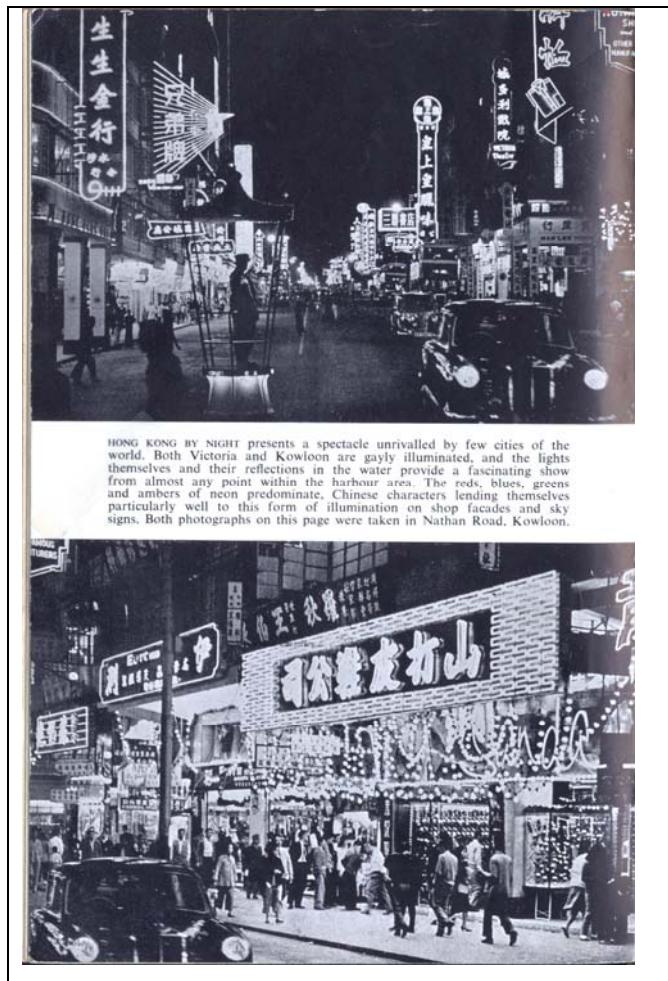
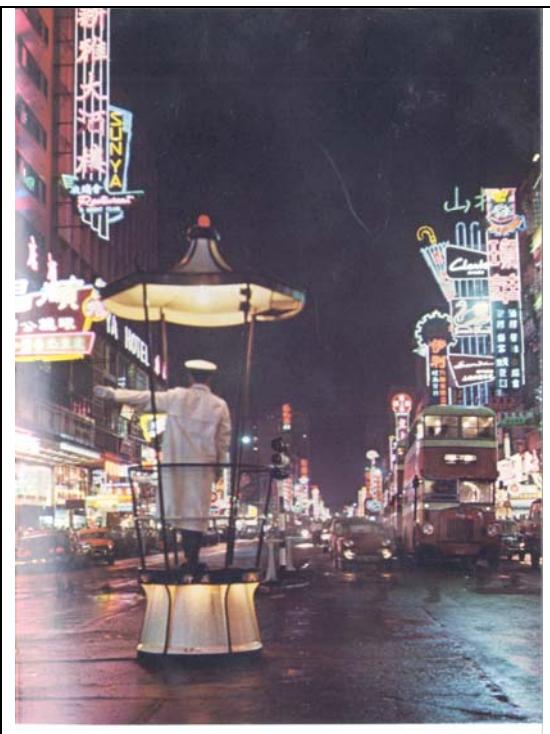


Photo 11 : Pictures in Annual Report of Hong Kong 1958
(Source: Photo taken by Author from the figure page in the *Hong Kong Annual Report 1958*, between pp.170-171)

Night screen and Streetscape

In parallel to the fast pace of social and economic development in 1960s, “Hong Kong by night has a magic that is all its own. A million neon signs light the streets, proclaiming their messages in every colour.....in squared-off English or Chinese characters. And in the midst of it all stands the traffic policemen on his “pagoda”, a lonely figure despite the traffic and the crowds all around him.” (Photo 12)





Hong Kong by night has a magic that is all its own. A million neon signs light the streets, proclaiming their messages in every colour . . . in squared-off English or giant Chinese characters. And in the midst of it all stands the traffic policeman on his 'pavilion', a lonely figure despite the traffic and the crowds all around him.

Photo 12 : Picture in Annual Report of Hong Kong 1964

(Source: Photo taken by Author from the figure page in the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1964*, between pp.48-49)

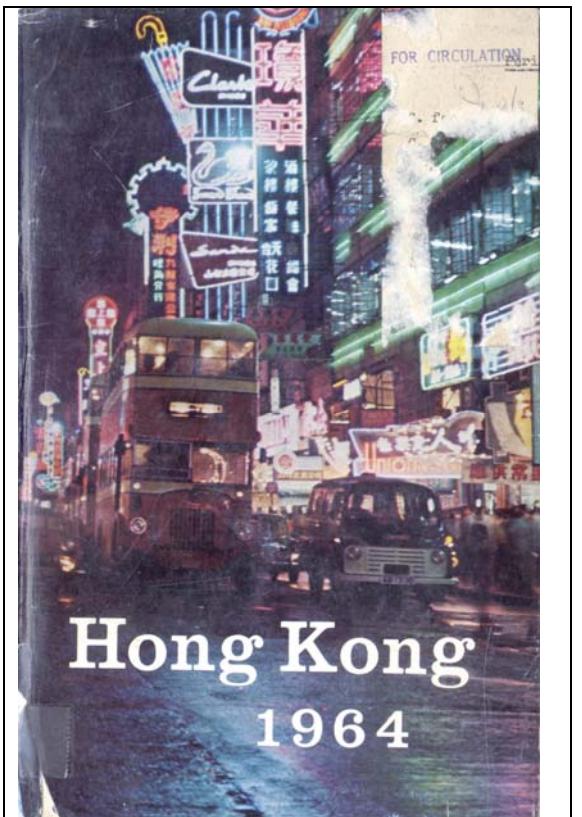


Photo 13 : Cover of Annual Report of Hong Kong 1964

(Source: Photo taken by Author from the Cover of the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1964*.)

The critical value of ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’ has been recognized by the Hong Kong Government. Moreover, the Hong Kong Government even made use of this to promote tourism to the world by showing them the dynamic vibrancy of city life. This can be truly reflected from the cover of the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1964* (1965). (Photo 13)

Dramatic City of Life

As Hong Kong Citizens are proud of the achievement and reaping the benefits from our economic success, ‘Pearl of the East’ has reflected the hardworking spirits of Hong Kong people in the past decades. The ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’ became a well-known and recognised image as the ‘City of Life’ thereafter.

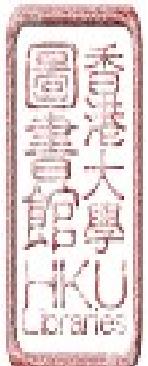




Photo 14 : Picture in Annual Report of Hong Kong 1964

(Source: Photo taken by Author from the figure pages in the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1964*, between pp.48-49)

Hong Kong population increased tremendously after World War II and therefore the city areas, particularly the streets, were cramped with shops and signage.(Photo 14). Amongst various types of signage, the signage of Chinese restaurants is the biggest. For ‘Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants’ (Photo 15), they represent the fruits of our achievement as Chinese want to share our success with family and friends by a meal. This enjoyment traces and evolves from the dinner of Winter Solstices for the Chinese to enjoy their harvest after autumn. Although Hong Kong people are easy to lose the identity for the past of Hong Kong in the fast pace of changing, we try to recall our tradition by this transitional meaning of ‘Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants’. The electric flag, in the field of communications, is a code of the transmitted message which indicates that the following characters are a controlled code but not data. It means that the signage are showing and reflecting the traditional meaning of the trades. Not only the trades but also our society started from farming in Mainland and local fishing harbour. Eating is definitely our culture, tradition, and intangible heritage.



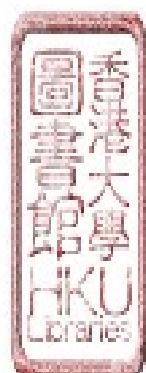


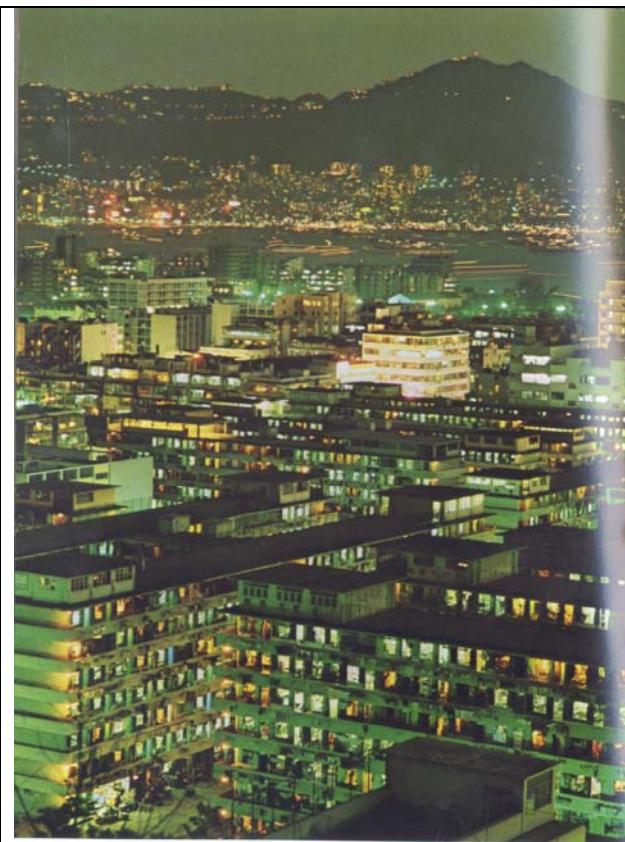
Photo 15 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants on the Waterloo Road, Kowloon.

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

Time is of the Essence

“...if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged... Tradition is a matter of much wider significance... It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.” (*The Sacred Wood*, T.S. Eliot (1920), pp. 48-49)





The lights of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island illustrate in a new and dramatic way the Colony's problem of people. For as dusk falls and the lights come on, first in hundreds, then in thousands, and finally in hundreds of thousands, it becomes obvious that here in this tiny place live people by the millions.

Photo 16 : Picture in Annual Report of Hong Kong 1964
 (Source: Photo taken by Author from the figure page in the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1964*, between pp.48-49.)

Individuality and Diversity

From the figure in the chapter 'Industry and Trade' of the annual report of Hong Kong in 1964 (Photo 16), it stated that "The lights of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island illustrate in a new and dramatic way the Colony's problem of people. For as dusk falls and the lights come on, first in hundreds, then in thousands, and finally in hundreds of thousands, it becomes obvious that here in this tiny place live people by the millions." Hence, the neon lights form the night pattern of the city and each light is unique and individual. The lights represent different families and shops. The diversity of their characters is defined by the scene and pictures. Hence, the lights of 'Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants' is a Character Defining Element of Urban Hong Kong. (Photo 17, 18, & 19)

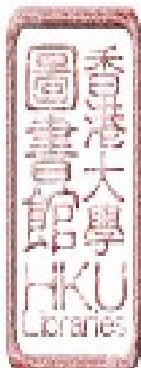




Photo 17 : Cantilever Neon Signage for view of Nathan Road looking south from Argyle Street in 1963.

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula* (2007) p.95)

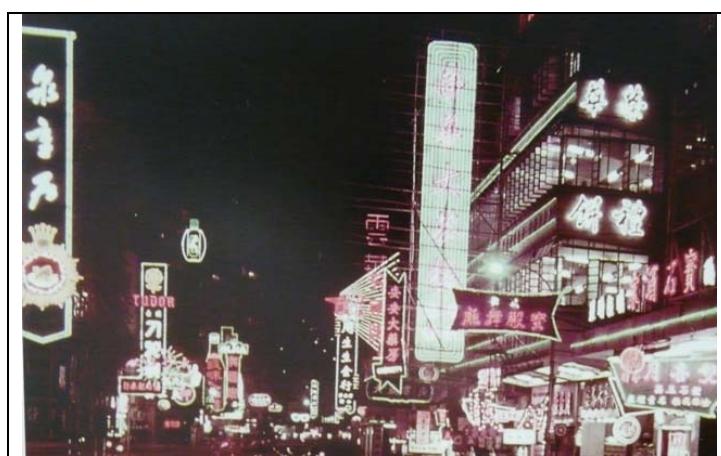


Photo 18 : Cantilever Neon Signage for view of Tai Po Road from Pei Ho Street in 1962.

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula* (2007) p.124)



Photo 19 : Cantilever Neon Signage for view of Nathan Road from Soy Street in 1960.

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula* (2007) p.92)

V. Chapter 5

THE REALITY OF 'CANTILEVER NEON SIGNAGE OF CHINESE RESTAURANTS' IN HONG KONG

'Cantilever Neon Signage' is a Character Defining Element of Hong Kong Urban development; however, we can only find those in pieces in the pictures of different books as 'Cantilever Neon Signage' is always neglected and seldom used as the main research area. The history and the value of our vernacular restaurants, either they still exist or have lost, can only be found through the oral report from the elderly, the pictures of Cantilever Neon Signage in different books, and the broadcast programme piece by piece.

In addition, some famous vernacular shops have lost in our city owing to the rapid economic development. Therefore, a systematic documentation of recording those valuable vernacular shops is needed for us to understand the sustainable development of our society before they vanish.

According to the definition targeted 'Chinese Restaurants' and the book '*Early Hong Kong Eateries*' (2003), the following list is scheduled for fundamental information of this research.

Ref.	Early Chinese Restaurants of Hong Kong	Year of business (since)	Age (over 45 years)
1.	Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)	1918 / 1889	91 / 120
2.	Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)	1933	76
3.	Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)	1942 / 1930s	67 / >80
4.	Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)	1948	61
5.	Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)	1950	59

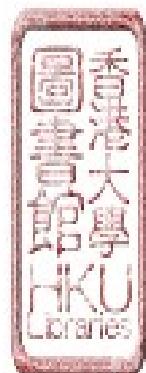


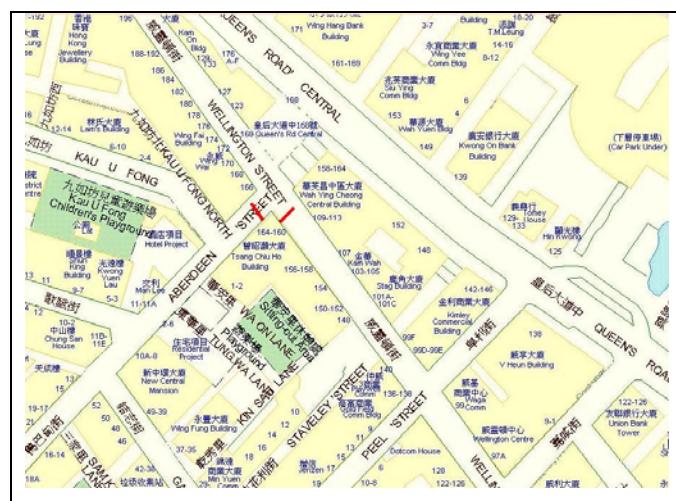
6.	Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)	1950s	>60
7.	Fung Shing Restaurant (鳳城酒家)	1930s	>80
8.	Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)	1918	91
9.	Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店)	1960s	>50
10.	Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)	1940s	>70
11.	Shun Hing (信興茶樓)	1936	73
12.	Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)	1940s	>70
13.	Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)	1959	50

Thirteen targets of 'Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants' for record are listed below:

5.1.1 Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)

Lin Heung Teahouse is located at G/F, 160-164, Wellington Street, Central, Hong Kong nowadays. This is the most extent early restaurant in Hong Kong and very famous. It has been widely published in many magazines and is always viewed as the representative of the early eateries. The owner said, "The original site of Lin Heung Teahouse was at the same district. Its second relocation was due to expiry of tenant agreement twenty years ago." In 1980s, the second generation of Lin Heung Teahouse was located at 117, Wellington Street where is the former Sam Dor Teahouse, Tai Cheong Teahouse, and Kam Tong Teahouse and this is just opposite to the third generation of Lin Heung Teahouse now.





Location Map 1 : Map of Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)



Photo 20 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

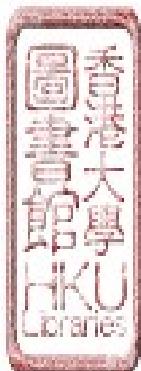




Photo 21 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



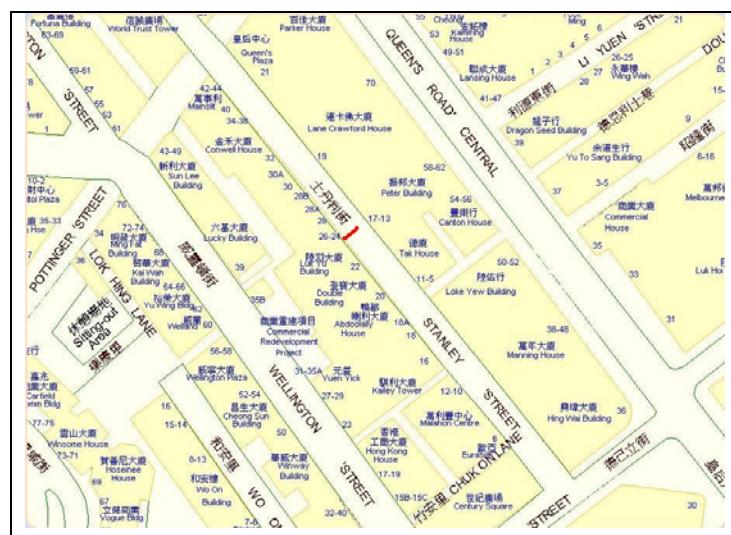
Photo 22 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓) in night
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

As Lin Heung Teahouse is now located at a corner site between Wellington street and Aberdeen street. There are two identical 'Cantilever Neon Signage' of Chinese characters 'Lin Heung' (蓮香) in white with 'Grass line boundary' of green background. They are hanging over perpendicularly to attract customers from all directions. The 'Lin Heung' Chinese characters are turn to red-orange inside the illuminated green 'Grass line boundary' in the night time. (Photo 20, 21, & 22)

5.1.2 Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)

Luk Yu Teahouse starts their business in 1933. Now it has been located at 24-26 Stanley Street, Central, Hong Kong since 1976. It is popular with many local tycoons. The Cantilever Neon Signage is moved from the old address and served the Teahouse over decades (Photos 23 & 24). However, its Cantilever Neon Signage was not erected at the Stanley street in May, 2008. (Photo 25)





Location Map 2 : Map of Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)

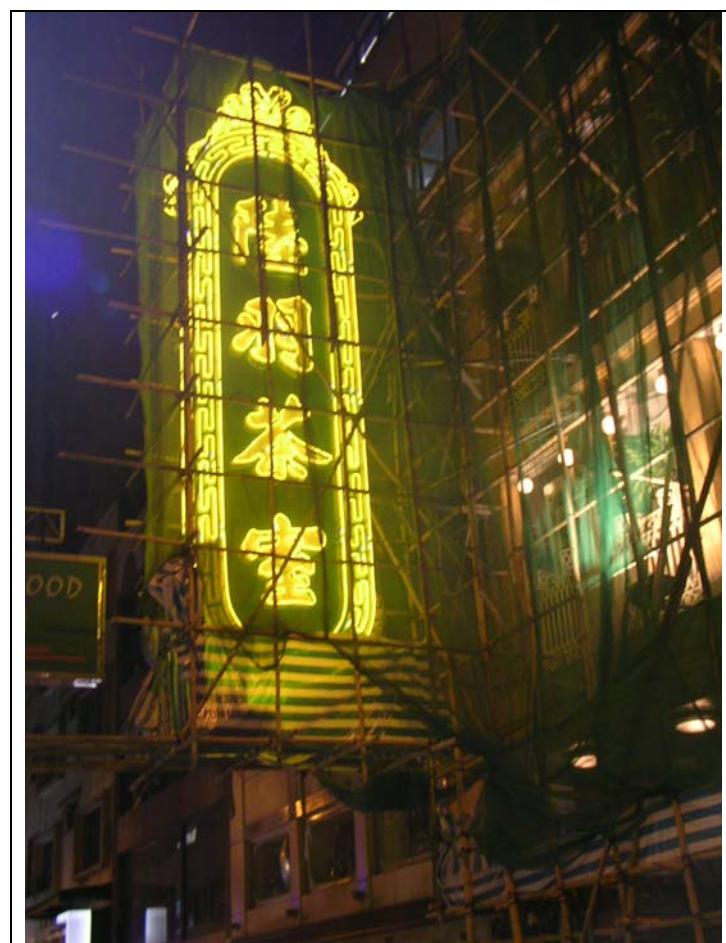
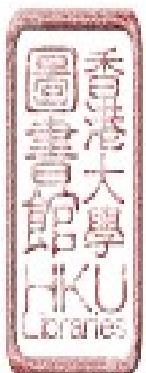


Photo 23 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



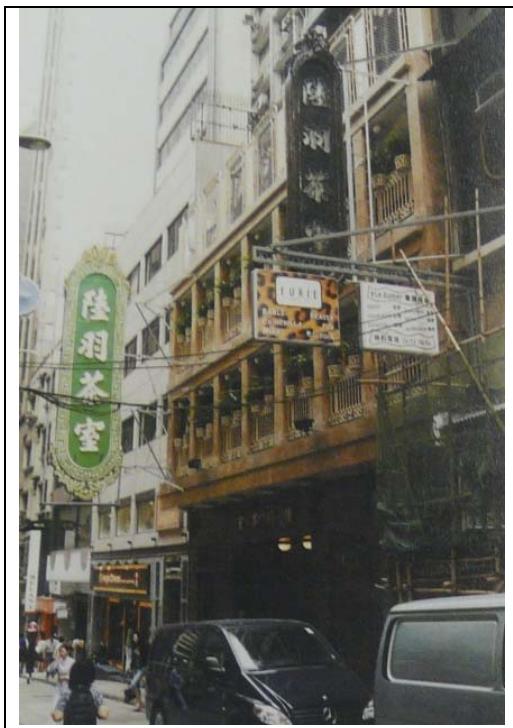


Photo 24 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)

(Source: Photo taken by Author from the book 《港島大搜舊》(2008) p.58)



Photo 25 : Cantilever Signage of Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室) in May, 2008

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

5.1.3 Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)

Yung Kee Restaurant is located at 32-40 Wellington Street, Central, Hong Kong.



Location Map 3 : Map of Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)

Its cantilever neon signage has been renovated and becomes a flashing signage. (Photo 26) It represents a new application of the Cantilever Neon Signage for promotion of vernacular shops. (Photos 27 & 28)



Photo 26 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

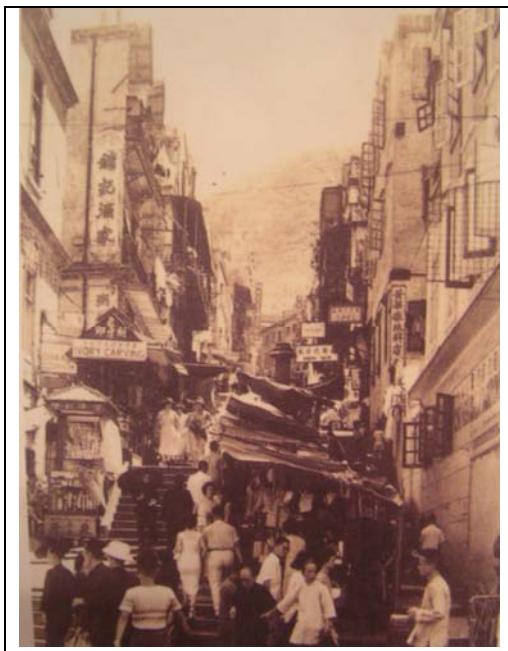


Photo 27 : Signage of Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家) at the Pottinger Street in 1953.
(Source: Photo taken by Author from book Early Hong Kong Eateries (2003) p.127)

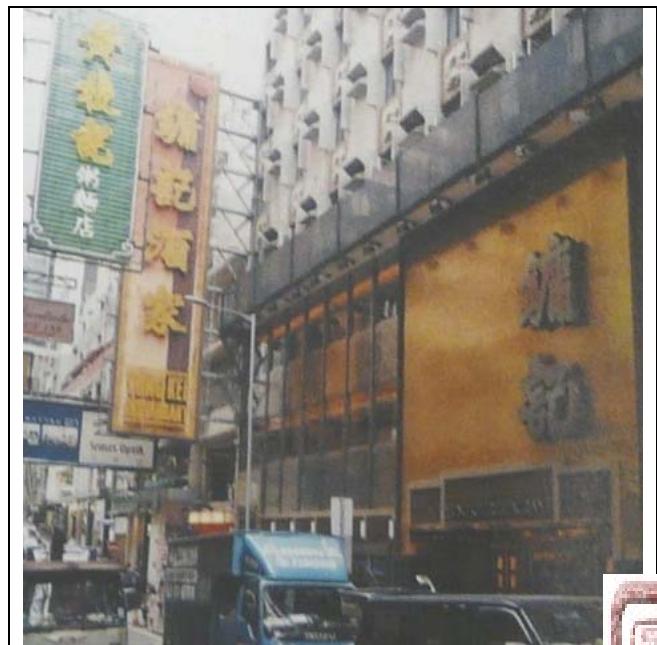


Photo 28 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)
(Source: Photo taken by Author from the book 《港島搜舊》(2008) p.58)

5.1.4 Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)

Lung Moon Restaurant has been located at 130-136, Johnston Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong since 1948 and it has never changed its location. It lies along the tram way. Its brand name has been changed for several times which can be seen from the historical pictures. (see Photo 29)



Photo 29 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong Eateries* (2003) p.42)



Photo 30 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)





Location Map 4 : Map of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)



Photo 31 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

Lung Moon Restaurant erects the CN signage on its own building in Wanchai providing an attractive scene along the tram way in the night of Hong Kong.
(Photo 31)

For the exploration of the CN signage of Lung Moon Restaurant, please refer the case study of Chapter 6 for more information.



5.1.5 Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)

Wing Wah Restaurant has been located at 256 Lockhart Road & 1 Stewart Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong since 1968. Its original business for moon cake, Chinese cake, tea house and restaurant is started in Yuen Long in 1950, and which is still running business over districts in Hong Kong. (Photos 32, 33, & 34)



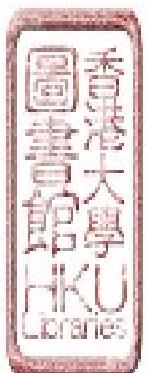
Photo 32 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓) showing at Tin Hau Festival of 1962 in Yuen Long
(Source: Photo taken by Author from book 《歲月留痕》 p.38)



Photo 33 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 34 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)





Location Map 5 : Map of Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)

5.1.6 Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)

There are two branches: One is in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, and the other one is located at Shop E, G/F-2/F., Lisa House, 33 Nelson Street, Kowloon. The Chinese characters are written in a special Chinese calligraphy (草書) and its famous dish – Gold brand salt-baked chicken, is used as the logo of the restaurant. (Photo 35 & 36)

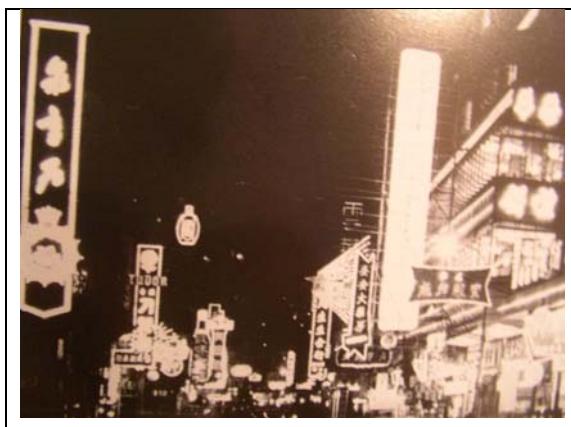


Photo 35 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong Eateries* (2003) p.91)



Photo 36 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店) on Yim Fong Street

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

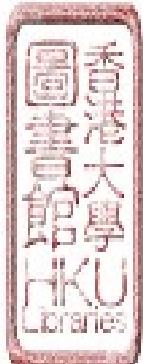




Photo 37 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店) on Nelson Street
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Location Map 6 : Map of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)



5.1.7 Fung Shing Restaurant (鳳城酒家)

Fung Shing Restaurant is located on G/F., No.30, Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. It first started in North Point. Its owners later opened other branches in different districts.



Location Map 7 : Map of Fung Shing Restaurant (鳳城酒家)



Photo 38 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Fung Shing Restaurant (鳳城酒家) on Leighton Road in Causeway Bay
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



5.1.8 Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)

Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant is located at No. 241, Hennessy Road, Hong Kong.

Its characters on CN signage display the company name “東方小祇園” for Tung Fong Siu Kee Yuen Ltd. and “齋菜” show that they provided “Vegetarian Dishes”. (Photos 39 & 40)



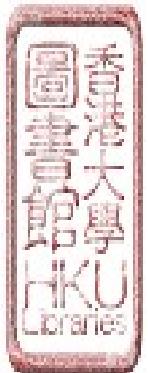
Location Map 8 : Map of Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)



Photo 39: Cantilever Neon Signage of Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 40 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



5.1.9 Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店)

Yau Chai Kee is located on G/F, 9 Mallory Street, Wanchai, Hong Kong. This restaurant is located at a heritage building and its existence supports the tangible and intangible value of there. (Photo 41) However, their business ceased in 2008. (see Photo 42)

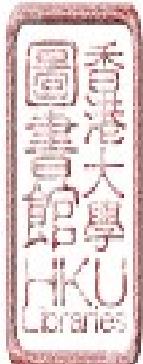


Location Map 9 : Map of Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店)



Photo 41 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

Photo 42 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店) still attached to the heritage building even their business ceased in 2008
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



5.1.10 Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)

Tien Heung Lau Restaurant is located at 18C, Austin Avenue, Kowloon. It serves Huangzhou cuisine.



Location Map 10 : Map of Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)

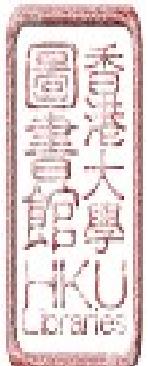


Photo 43 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 44: Cantilever Neon Signage of Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

The Cantilever Neon Signage is hanging over Austin Avenue with Orange characters on Blue background within a Green boundary line (Photo 43). It also provides a attractive bright orange characters in a Green rectangular box in night time (Photo 44).



5.1.11 Shun Hing (信興茶樓)

Shun Hing Restaurant is located at A-B No.95 Kweiln Street, Sham Shui Po, Kowloon. The restaurant erects a vertical CN signage along Kweiln Street (Photo 45) while another horizontal CN signage is along Ki Lung Street. (Photo 46)



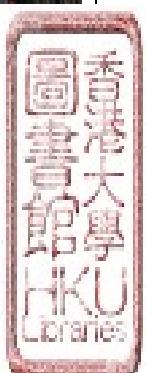
Location Map 11 : Map of Shun Hing (信興茶樓)



Photo 45 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Shun Hing (信興茶樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 46 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Shun Hing (信興茶樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



5.1.12 Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)

Tak Yu Restaurant is located at 378, Shanghai Street, Yaumatei, Kowloon. It was a 3-storey building. After redevelopment, it became a composite building named Tak Yu Mansion for residential and commercial purposes. One vertical CN signage is facing Pitt Street (Photo 47) and the other horizontal CN signage is hanging over Shanghai Street. (Photo 48)



Location Map 12 : Map of Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)



Photo 47: Cantilever Neon Signage of Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 48 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

5.1.13 Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)

Sin Dang Sea Food Restaurant is located on G/F., 419-421 Shanghai Street, Kowloon.

Photos 49 & 50 show the scene of the Characters for “Sin Dang” (神燈), “Sea food Restaurant” (海鮮菜館) in the day and night time respectively.



Location Map 13 : Map of Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)



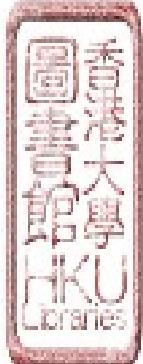
Photo 49 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 50 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



After a throughout on-site survey, some interesting information was found and recorded by the photos as shown in chapter 5.1.1 to 5.1.13 regarding the Cantilever Neon Signage of the Chinese Restaurants. From the photos, it can be found that all the Cantilever Neon Signage are displaying Chinese word characters logos of the company names in the form of bent Neon light tubes below the Chinese logos surrounded by further neon light perimeter encircling the rectangle steel frame on both sides of the signage. This double-sided rectangle steel frame which is being protruded outward by 2 to 3 feet long, is firmly anchored to the external wall by steel cantilever frame. (Location Maps 1 to 13 refers) Some of the Chinese Restaurants which are situated at a street corner have two facades. They then installed two Cantilever Neon Signage perpendicularly for the sake of business in order to catch all the visual contact and impact the pedestrian strolling on the streets.

Some of the Chinese Restaurant's signage have their logos in graphical form by displaying some dish logos or other form of delicacy pattern or secondary message in smaller logos telling the quality or origin of the food being provided. All in all, the business owners tried to maximize the information to be conveyed to the pedestrians and also to signify this particular location for good food restaurant. Another intriguing point by visual observation was that the signage provider tried to advertise his business by printing his company name and telephone number on both sides of edges of the Cantilever Neon Signage. (See Photos 51 and 52) Most of the texts are handwriting in white paint.





Photo 51 : Signage Provider for CNS of Shun Hing (信興茶樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

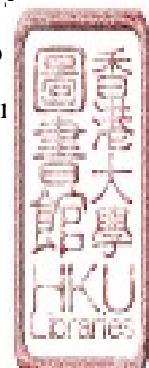


Photo 52 : Signage Provider for CNS of Shun Hing (信興茶樓)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

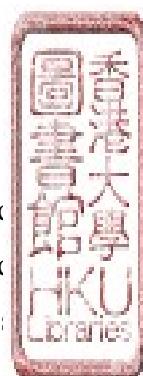
5.2 Signage Providers

Signage Provider is a hand-made and family-inherited industry in Hong Kong. The popularity and degree of well-known is comparatively low as compared to other manufacturing industries so they are still being ignored and excluded in the classification of Hong Kong Economical Annual Report as discussed in Chapter 2. According to the on-site survey, the information of the Signage Providers is shown on the sides (thickness of framework) of each of the cantilever neon signage. Most of the information of these "Signage Providers" for the 'Cantilever Neon Signage of Chinese Restaurants' are tabulated in the following table:-



Ref.	Name of Chinese Restaurants	Signage Provider	No. of CNSign	Telephone
1.	Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓)	Kevin (previous 家興)	2	27530963
2.	Luk Yu Teahouse (陸羽茶室)	-	1	-
3.	Yung Kee Restaurant (鏞記酒家)	雷達	1	23847696
4.	Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)	中國光管	1	23886706
5.	Wing Wah Restaurant (榮華酒樓)	南華	2	()4235181()
6.	Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)	雷達	2	23847696
7.	Fung Shing Restaurant (鳳城酒家)	寶華	1	23919092
8.	Siu Kee Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant (小祇園素食)	滿記光管	1	2363528() 2363688()
9.	Yau Chai Kee (有仔記飯店)	Nil	1	-
10.	Tien Heung Lau Restaurant (天香樓)	雷達	1	23847696
11.	Shun Hing (信興茶樓)	南華	2	24235181
12.	Tak Yu Restaurant (得如酒樓)	國際光管	2	23856916 27800(1)59
13.	Sin Dang Restaurant (神燈菜館)	南華	1	24235(7)81

Some of the texts are illegible as those signage providers' names and telephone numbers are mostly handwritten, or some of the slots peeled off or even part of the metal sheet are missing. In some cases the view is



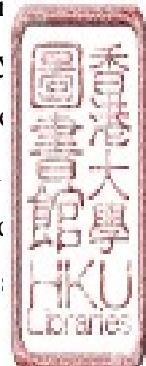
being blocked by the frame of the cantilever neon signage. Interestingly, it was found that one attractive sticker (Red texts on White background) of the new “Signage Provider” was found on the signage of Lin Heung Teahouse (蓮香樓), which might be leading the trend of change in the Signs Industry. However, this leads to another discussion in the tradition of Cantilever Neon Signage Industry.

Signage Industry in Hong Kong

The importance of Signage industry in Hong Kong was originally identified from the Logo of a TV programme called “73 professions” by ATV in 2006. (Photo 53) The signage in the broadcast revealed many trades and industries being clustered in different communities of this city and they can represent the actual lifestyle of this place at this particular moment.

In Tong Dynasty, historians summarized and categorized 36 types of Industries in entire business world. In the past decades, Hong Kong people used to increase the industry types to 72 trades. From insight adopted from the TV programme “73 professions”, it is apparent that the number of trades is far more than 72 as we used to recognize from our past wisdom in 70s. It is our responsibility to trace back all the trades hiding and shrinking under this economic turmoil and unveil other emerging industries in our society, or otherwise, most history of Hong Kong development will be lost in this generation.

In 60s, it was the golden age for manufacturing and trading sectors in Hong Kong. Shop owners tended to collaborate with other neighbors by erecting a stunning and attractive Cantilever Neon Signage along the streets so as to facelift the streetscape by luring more pedestrians to visit the street and their stores. This unofficial collaboration of business and co-existence of Signage can be traced back from some historic photo-



(see photo 54) which show the Cantilever Neon Signage of Neco Neon together with the Cantilever Neon Signage of Signage Provider nowadays. (photos 55 & 56).



Photo 53 : Photo of the Logo of TV programme “香港風華之七十三行”

(Source: Photo download from the ATV website)



Photo 54 : Cantilever Neon Signage for Signage Provider (Neco Neon) in 1960s

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong Tramways* (2005) p.91)



Photo 55 : Neon Signage of Signage Provider in Mongkok

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 56 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Signage Provider

(Source: Photo download from www.intneonlightco.biz.com.hk)

The following table summarizes some information of “Signage Provider” from the internet:-

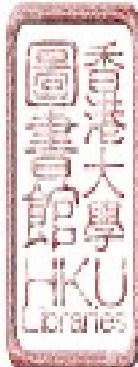


Source: yp.com.hk		Year-Establishment	Tel:	Fax:	Company Address		
Neon Signs / Fluorescent Lighting							
Po Wah Neon Light Co	寶華霓虹光管公司	Below15	Tel:2398 0069	2398 0835	Tong Mei House, Tai Kok Tsui	大角咀 唐尾大樓	http://www.powneon.com
China Neon Light Ltd The	中源光管有限公司		Tel:2385 4229		Shu Fung Bldg, Yau Ma Tei	油蔴地	
Chinese Neon Light Co	華人光管公司		Tel:2780 3632		30A Tung Choi St, Mong Kok	旺角 通菜街30A	
Far East Neon Light Co Ltd		FL	Tel:2898 9707		26 Lee Chung St, Chai Wan		
New Kwung Wah Neon Light	新冠霓虹管公司	Below15	Tel:2574 7051		Tai On Bldg, Sha Tin	沙田 奕安樓	
Ngai Shing Neon Light Ltd	堅成霓虹光管有限公司	Below15	Tel:2374 1300		Wing Kut Ind Bldg, Cheung Sha Wan	長沙灣 堅吉工業大廈	
Tai Cheong Neon Light Co	大昌霓虹光管公司		Tel:2789 4455		Lee On Bldg, Mong Kok	旺角 利安大樓	
Tai Fong Neon Light Co	大方光管公司		Tel:2572 1678		Wan Chai Rd, Wan Chai	環仔 環仔道	
United Neon Light Co	雷達霓虹光管有限公司	FL-Not provided	Tel:2770 2083		Fook On Bldg, Sham Shui Po	深水埗 福安樓	
Wiselight Neon Light Co	衛光霓虹管工程公司	Below15	Tel:2426 3377		Tinford Gdn, Cheung Chau	長洲	
International Neon - Light Co.	國際光管公司		2780 0759	2385 6916		香港九龍油蔴地廣東道五十四號	http://www.intoneonlightco.hk/
China Neonlight Advertising Co	中國光管廣告公司	66年製造光管招牌之經驗	電話：2388 6706			油蔴地 上海街366號5字樓B座	http://www.yp.com.hk/chinaneonlight
南華霓虹燈電器廠有限公司		1953	電話：2423 5181	傳真：2480 4483		葵涌 任合興工業大廈	http://www.yp.com.hk/namwahneon
大利光管有限公司			電話：2646 5161	傳真：2637 4448		沙田 沙田工藝中心	
中華光管公司			電話：2571 7126			油蔴地 廣東道548	
喜明霸實業有限公司	Below15		電話：2731 6500	傳真：2786 2479		尖沙咀 新文華中心	
東九量器光管公司	Not provided		電話：2893 6668			環仔 鑽華樓	
麗都光管公司	Below15		電話：2386 3574			油蔴地 德富強大廈	
路佳實易發展公司			電話：2474 2996			元朗 宏業工貿中心	
得和膠片廣告有限公司	Below15		電話：2267 6833	傳真：2267 6303		新蒲崗 崇齡大廈	
富力工程(香港)有限公司	Below15		電話：2759 9128	傳真：2780 1487		九龍 廣安工廠大廈	
普及(亞太)有限公司	Below15		電話：2572 1186			鑽仔 華興商業大廈	
新華廣國際有限公司	Below15		電話：2745 7928			尖沙咀 重慶大廈	

Diagramme 1 : Industry of Neon Light Signage

(Search and Extract from internet information at website www.yp.com.hk by Author)

After a brief interview with some Signage Providers, a more clear understanding of the industry is found. They responded that this industry is highly depending on handicraft and experience of the artisan (Master) to bend the neon light tubes in different shapes by means of controlling the temperature and applying suitable force on the tubes. One of the interviewees, the successor of Nam Wah Neon Ltd - Mr. William Tam, who adopted the skills from his father and has inherited the company till now, said that "Cantilever Neon Signage takes longer production time than other light box or LED signage, but it is durable and more attractive as the brightness is higher. However, this industry is under stark competition because of the strict restriction of statutory legislations. In addition, the new Buildings Department (BD) regulations on Signage severely prohibit their practice as more requirements are needed to be fulfilled and followed, for example, the cantilever signage must be hoisted up above 3.50m high above the ground and should be kept under 4.20m projection from an external wall of a building."



"As one more existing signage gets dismantled, this one will disappear and will not be replaced anymore." This is one of the keynotes sighed by another signage provider. Suffice to say, it is of top urgency to record and reserve these Cantilever Neon Signage before they disappear in our community quietly.



Photo 57 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 58 : Signage Provider for CNS of Chuen Cheong Kui Restaurant (泉章居飯店)

(Source: Photo taken by Author)



VI. Chapter 6

THE DESIGN, MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES OF ‘CANTILEVER NEON SIGNAGE’

The Design of “Cantilever Neon Signage”

‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ is made of metal framework covered with metal sheet, on which the colourful Neon tube affixed onto the surface of the metal sheet. The whole Cantilevered Neon Signage is supported by cantilevered metal frame with the aid of the metal wire tying on the external wall of the building. Traditionally, most of the logo letters or patterns of these signage were in white colour matched with a red base. Later, it was further developed by installing some font-bended neon lights beneath these logo letters and patterns under client’s driven needs. Since then, the brand names of these businesses can dazzle at night time to attract the customers and to represent that their businesses are still operating.

The Materials of ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’

In view of the materials used for those well-known ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’, the client would generally prefer to choose high-strength materials for the sake of safety and durability. Nowadays, the materials being used for Signage have been shifted to light-weight and flexible direction, i.e. acrylic-made lightbox (Photo 59) or silk screen printing on the vinyl sheet (Photo 60) are prevalently chosen for current needs.





Photo 59 : Acrylic Sheet Lightbox
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 60 : Silk Screen Printed Vinyl Signage
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

CASE STUDY:

Lung Moon Restaurant [龍門大酒店]

The History of Lung Moon Restaurant

The Lung Moon Restaurant has begun its business since 1948 and it has been situated on a single 6-storey building on Johnston Road at the corner of Stone Nullah Lane (石水渠街) in Wanchai on Hong Kong Island. The first three storeys are designated for sitting areas while the remaining floors are reserved as a dormitory for their staff.

The Evolution of the 'Cantilever Neon Signage' of Lung Moon Restaurant

Throughout the past few decades, Lung Moon Restaurant has come along with the development of Hong Kong as it has progressed through different peaks and troughs. Following with its rises and falls of business, its 'Cantilevered Neon Signage' has also been faced with several face-lifts which can be traced from some photos from history books.(Photo 61 & 62)

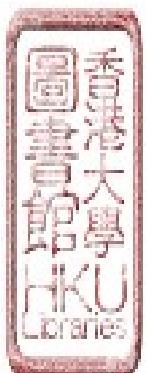




Photo 61 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓) in 1950s stated as “龍鳳大茶樓”

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong Eateries* (2003) p.42)

As time flies, the restaurant has changed its location but stands firmly at the same street beside the tram way though. However, the business name has been changed several times as it can be spotted out from the historical pictures. From the interviews with two gentlemen who both named Mr Tang, aged eighty and fifty-something respectively, the restaurant was initially named as “Lung Fung” Teahouse from 1948/49 to 1954. As shown in photo no. 54, the base of the signage board was in blue colour blended with some white strips. It was closely hoisted above the ground with about 1 feet projected from the building to the street. As mentioned by Tangs, the teahouse operated from 6:00am to 7:00pm which it served breakfast and cakes in the morning. Remarkably, it was different from other traditional restaurants as it merely served “dim sum” in the form of tea-tasting place instead of a conventional dining place. In addition, “Lung Fung” was also one of the well-known moon cake shops of Hong Kong in 1950s.

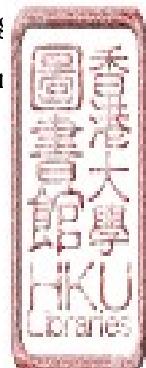




Photo 62 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓) in 1960s stated as “龍門大茶樓”

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong Eateries* (2003) p.42)

After 1954, the restaurant changed hands and the name of this restaurant was altered to “Lung Moon” teahouse. From appearance, it has a slight change as only the name was changed which can be seen in Photo 62. The base of the signage was coloured in red and the letter of “Fung” (鳳) was altered into “Moon/Mun”(門). In addition, the four relatively small lettering on the Cantilever Neon Signage showing “Moon Cake” (中秋月餅), which “...had become an important item in business of the restaurants because of its sizable profit.” *Early Hong Kong Eateries* (2003) p.167, was also changed to “Chinese Wedding Cake” (結婚禮餅). This reflected their business policy shift from selling “Moon Cake” to Chinese Wedding Cake and Banquet in 1960s.

The historical photos 61 & 62 are unable to show the true colour of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ for Lung Fung Teahouse and the four supplementary letters which blocked by the tram in photo 62 for Lung Mun Restaurant. However, the interviewers’ say can be proof by the photos of the Lung Fung Teahouse located on Nathan Road at the junction with Shantung Street, Kowloon in 1965. (Photos 63 & 64)



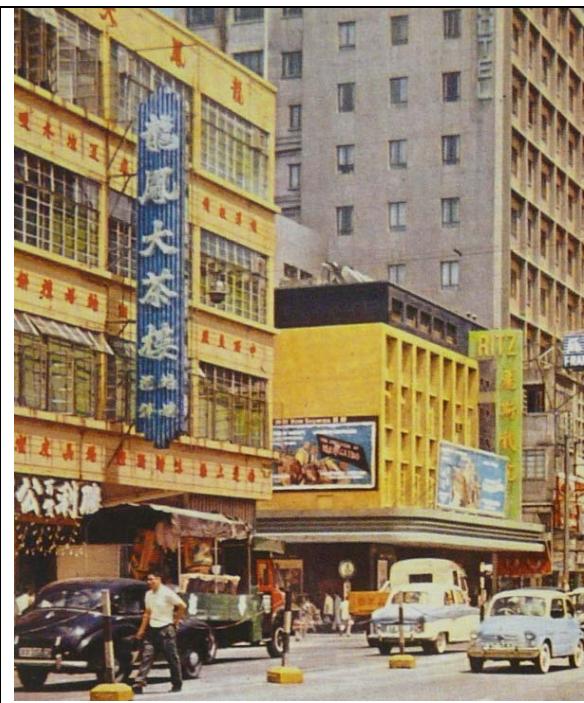


Photo 63 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Fung Teahouse (Kowloon) in 1965

(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula* (2007) p.94)

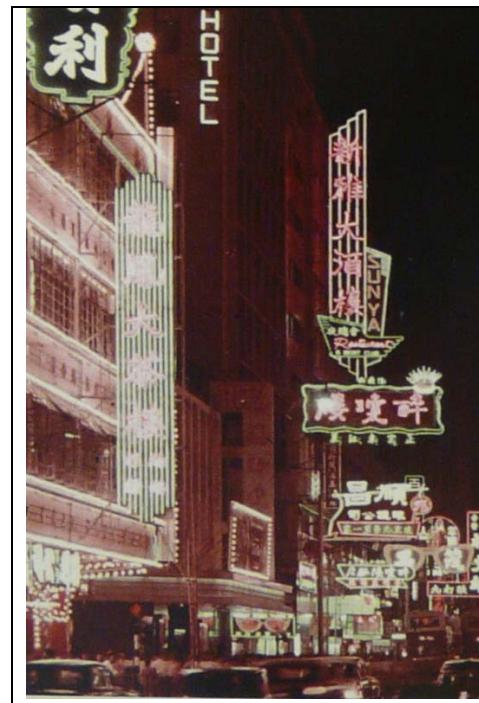


Photo 64 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Fung Teahouse (Kowloon) in 1965

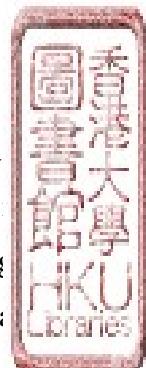
(Source: Photo taken by Author from book *Early Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula* (2007) p.94)



Photo 65 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓) in 2010s stated as “龍門大酒店”

(Source: Photo taken by Author)

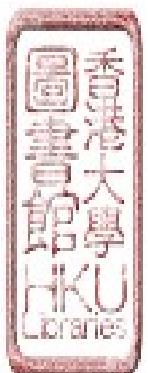
In early 70s, the business of the teahouse plummeted starkly. Traditional Chinese restaurants emerged cyclically and became popular again. Under that circumstance, Lun Moon Tea House could not but change according to the need and trend of the society by switching from a tea house to a



restaurant. The signage was also altered from “龍門大茶樓” (Lun Moon Tea House) to “龍門大酒店” (Lun Moon Restaurant) which is shown in Photos 65 and 66. In addition, the “Title in 5 Chinese Characters” of Lun Moon Restaurant was re-spacing as the small lettering “結婚禮餅” (Chinese Wedding Cake) were deleted from the signage.



Photo 66 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門大酒店) in 2010s stated as “龍門大酒店”
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Appraisal of ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’ of Lung Moon Restaurant

From a flashback to vernacular Chinese architecture (王其鈞, 2009), it can be found that conventional Chinese market square was surrounded by different businesses such as teahouses, restaurants, bathhouses and shops, etc. In view of business and competition, each shop will try to maximize its shop front exposure by hoisting signage outside their shops so as to solicit strolling customers.

Ergonomically, it is known that normal human visibility can only confine within an angle of 60 degree. Hence, it could be difficult for pedestrian to visualize the signage only affixed on the external wall without protruding outward to the street. In order to ensure the signage of the business to be conspicuous enough, the signage will be cantilevered outward from the existing building facade by a hanging frame. With the aid of the Neon lights, an eye-catching signage board embodying a message of “here is a store you need” will be displayed glamorously in front of the pedestrian. Geometrically, the shop front signage, which is originally parallel to the existing shop front, will reverse its location by spreading its charm and allurement perpendicularly to the road.

Trade name is an intangible asset of a business and a “Cantilever Neon Signage” represents such intangible asset in a tangible manner. In the past, only restaurant with a reputable trade name and a certain scale would have a Cantilever Neon Signage, as the signage could only be erected with the permission of the owner of the building and the business operator also needed to pay for such installation. Without certain status in the industry and financial support, erection of a “Cantilever Neon Signage might not be possible. (see Photo 67)

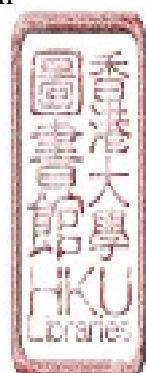




Photo 67 : The building of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)

The Design of 'Cantilever Neon Signage' of Lung Moon Restaurant

The "Cantilever Neon Signage" of Lung Moon Restaurant was constructed by the metal sheet and framework and painted with 3 layers Synthetic paint (red) and the double tube neon light was bent in accordance with the outline of the characters of the name of the restaurant.



Photo 68 : Metal Framework of the CNS of Lung Moon Restaurant
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 69 : Double tube Neon Characters of the CNS of Lung Restaurant
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



The size of the signage is about 35 feet and 8 feet in height and width respectively, and it is projected 6 feet from the building line. In 2007, the whole signage board was replaced with the same size and similar appearance. New metal framework and metal sheet were replaced and the whole cantilever structure was tied by wiring and supporting metal angle.



Photo 70 : The building of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Photo 71 : Cantilever Neon Signage of Lung Moon Restaurant (龍門酒樓)
(Source: Photo taken by Author)



Indeed, Mr Tang intended to replace such Cantilever Neon Signage with a modern and fashionable one. However, the cost of a new lightbox/signage with the similar size would be over HK\$600,000. In addition, Buildings Department would not allow the size of a new Cantilever Signage over 20 meters square, of which the size of that of Lung Moon Restaurant is already over 20 meters square. In view of above, Mr Tang can only keep the appearance of such signage as original as possible. (see Diagramme 2.) This leads the "Cantilever Neon Signage" of "Lun Moon" erects there for contribution to the streetscape of Hong Kong continuously in a fresh, but similar look with good condition.

Hence, if the owner or even the public do not cherish the value of Cantilever Neon Signage, though they can still stand in front of the public, they are also under the threat of existence.



Diagramme 2 :
CN Signage of Lung Moon Restauran



VII. Chapter 7

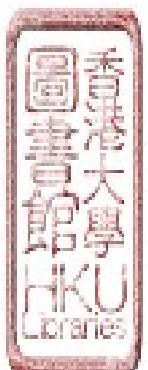
THE THREATS OF EXISTENCE

Economic Life and Physical Life

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ is made of metal frame with colourful neon lights and entirely fastened by metal wire affixed to building facade. Though the signage itself is being attacked by external environment and adverse weather, the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ can be kept in good form if proper maintenance and immediate repair to be provided by the ‘Signage Provider’. Usually the signage will be repainted every 3 to 5 years which depends on the condition. However, the neon lights are routine consumables which may be required to be replaced frequently.

However, the destiny of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ is normally controlled by its economic life rather than its physical life. (It is purported that neither one of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ are blown down by typhoon or strong wind since World War II. As a matter of fact, those ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ which were taken down were mainly due to the cease of business.) Nowadays, the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ no longer possesses any economic value for way finding and attracting customers according to the era of information explosion by a lot of advertisements, maps, leaflets, and guidebooks.

Lastly, the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ for Chinese restaurants do generate some commercial values. Since these Chinese restaurants generally do have a long history which give them popularity and reputation amongst the Hong Kong citizens. Therefore, these traditional Chinese Restaurants which attempt to maintain these precious privilege would prefer to keep the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ so as to inform the customers that they are still running the business.



The Threats of Existence of Cantilevered Neon Signage by Legalisation

As stated above, the economic and physical lives of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ could be lasted for a long period of time. However, it is noticed that many of them are wrongly erected without proper approval or consent from Buildings Department.

On one hand, the Building Authority is currently paying more attention and concerns on public safety as well as construction obligation by tightening the legislation and regulations. On the other hand, the Government fosters free trade and business autonomy which encourages business development and expansion. In fact, the policies are self-contradicting. It would be an extra effort for the Government to strike for a balance between free market and building control.

Recently, Buildings Department has spent 18 millions aiming at demolishing 5,000 abandoned signage boards within a year. (Metronew, 2009)

Referring to a practice note regarding ‘Glass Panel External Walls, Large Signboards and TV Displays in Pedestrianization Areas’ electronically on its website, the Buildings Department is highly concerned about the increasing number of unauthorized structures, in particular to large advertising signboards as well as TV displays being installed on external walls of buildings in areas with heavy pedestrian flow and commercial activities, in which the installation exert a potential hazard to the public safety.

Buildings Department has been taking enforcement actions under Building Ordinance against unauthorized signboards which are exercisable according to the enforcement policy promulgated in April 2001. Any new unauthorized cantilevered signboard with the display area greater than 10 square meters and projected more than 600mm from



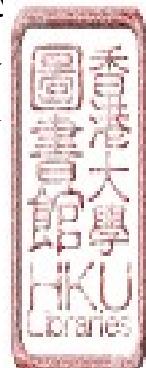
the external wall will be instructed to dismantle for removal. For the existing unauthorized cantilevered signboard like ‘Lung Moon Restaurant’, Buildings Department will not enforce the demolition order to these targeted signboards, providing that the defective parts of an existing signboard will be rectified and the overall stability of the signboard can be kept in a good condition. However, erection of any new signboard exceeds the tolerance as stated by Buildings Department, i.e. again like ‘Lung Moon Restaurant’, shall not be allowed and should be removed immediately.

The Threats of Existence of Cantilevered Neon Signage by Society

In light of technological advancement, the signage provider can manufacture a signboard by lightbox or silk screen printing on the vinyl sheet for logo. Hence, people seldom request the signage provider to erect a new ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’. In addition, there is a lack of the craftsmanship and skill of bending Neon light in line with the rapid development of the economy.

With the implementation of the Buildings Department’s enforcement actions, the number of the existing ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ will be decreasing, as “one demolished, one lost” even though they are one of the characteristics of Hong Kong’s streetscape.

In the aspect of the urban development, the construction of the cantilevered signboard is not allowed in most of the development of districts. For instance, there is no cantilevered signboard in Tseung Kwan O or Sha Tin. The provision of a signboard has become the duty of the Architect and usually it has been incorporated in the architectural planning during the design stage and also controlled under the relevant statutory building control.



VIII. Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

The first impression of Hong Kong cantilevered signage for public may be a chaos/mess. But I would like to describe the scene as the nature beauty in an urban city. Order is found in the chaos, just like the plants with different species. Although the leaves of different species of vegetations are in different shapes, you can still see the particular growth patterns in various species. Therefore, this research is just like researching a plant. You need to explore its particular nature and the factors affecting its growth.

In my research, I have looked for the value of the vernacular shop signage of old Chinese restaurants through a process of literature reviews, site visits and interviews.

Vernacular Shop Signs

In the past, people tended to erect a ‘Cantilever Neon Signage’ as large and bright as they could in a form of competition. It represented not only a sense of superiority in the neighbourhood, community and the industry, but also reflected the traditional value of the shop with its old brand name. A good reputation of a shop can gain the trust of its customers that can secure the sustainable development of the business. The status of a shop can be reflected in its ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’.

‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ shows the status and value the old traditional old brand name of the famous restaurants. Chinese restaurants are always the gathering place of Chinese community. Their ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ can tell you the tangible value (its location)



and the intangible values (good reputation of its shop name) of Chinese restaurants and has become the Landmarks. In addition, it does represent the trade name, trust, value and sustainability of this business. Nowadays, ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ becomes a record of the economy and community development.

The Importance of Cantilevered Neon Signage

‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ in Hong Kong creates a unique streetscape and cultural landscape in different districts. They consist of two dimensional graphic arts such as Chinese characters and logos and erect in a three dimensional space between buildings. They directly occupy a commercial district and also tell the story of the development of Hong Kong business and industries by using another kind of language.

From historical pictures and the streetscape today, the social development, local languages, visitors and local residents of a certain period were recorded.

It is believed that many local people would have a strong feeling about the social union because of their long-standing sentimental attachment with the streetscape that has become part of everyone’s memory. Some may even feel a further lost after perceive suddenly that all Cantilevered Neon Signage would disappear in one day. It becomes a unique piece of cultural heritage. In addition, Cantilevered Neon Signage has been a living part of daily life here. Apart from acting as a sign or indicator of a Chinese restaurant, there are obviously the inherent cultural aspects to be explored further.

Furthermore, Hong Kong streetscape is renowned worldwide. Such magic streetscape zoning the region and the building located one by one in different vision depth create changeful art effects. The presence of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ does endeavour to beautify the



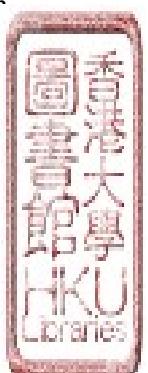
streetscape in a fruitful and colorful way, such intangible asset of Hong Kong does contribute a culture value to the irrevocable record of the community change in Hong Kong.

For the social development of Hong Kong at the outset, there are no concepts for area of industrial, commercial, and residential by Government control. In fact, it just turned out naturally.

However, some valuable ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ also disappeared naturally due to social changes. Under the impact of globalization and large-scaled urban development, some shops cannot avoid the change but cease their business while some are forced to be relocated. Large corporations or Multiple National Corporations (MNCs) flex their muscles by extending their businesses in different areas by expanding their market shares. The mass duplication of shops gives no uniqueness of their shops. Nowadays, stylish stores are most likely opened in commercial complex or shopping mall scattered around residential or commercial areas. As a result, the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ cannot be installed as it would only be replaced by the shopping mall directories. Streets are remaining in a city but there is no streetscape anymore. This unique culture will be disappearing in the coming decade.

The Challenges of Cantilevered Neon Signage

Hence, the existence of ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ is normally controlled by its economic life. As stated before, ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ happened naturally. The influx of population from the mainland together with their skills and capital, formed a solid basis for the development of the signage industry since the post war period in Hong Kong. Its application was directly appointed by the business operators and produced by the signage providers. There was no professional design at the beginning and just a media for the businesses transmitted the



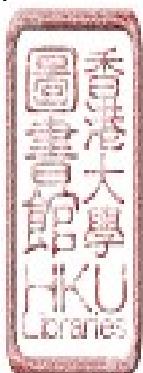
message to public. As there is a transmission of messages, it interchanges with human mind, living mode, and design concepts at the time. The considerations were added including human scale, vision, traffic flow, pedestrian flow, initial cost, maintenance cost, running cost, and functions of allocation, advertising, way finding and attraction for customers.

For the concerns of the cost, safety, liability, rental, and time of production, the economic value of the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ may be replaced by other types of signage such as LED, Billboard, and/or wall mounted type according to the choices of business operators and the complexity of application procedures of Government control departments. However, ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ will still be chosen if the public and the business operators really understand the social-economic value and the particular status it represents.

The Future of Cantilevered Neon Signage

It is a pity that the public and the Government are generally not aware of the importance and significance of ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ to our culture and Hong Kong history. As there is no more Cantilevered Neon Signage being left in our streets, we are afraid that all the information relating the signage will be lost as there are neither sufficient documentation or records about the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ other than the piece of historical photos. This dissertation is an attempt to record part of the information relating to the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ and try to collect and compile some superficial data of Chinese Restaurants and Signage Providers on the signage.

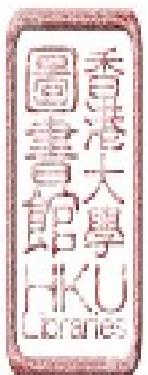
After understanding the cultural value of ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’, it is recommended that the Government control departments should take the Cultural Heritage Value into account for the application of erecting ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ over streets, especially for the Vernacular



Shop Signs. As this graphical message in an urban city contributes a lot to the Hong Kong development, the streetscape forms the characteristics of Hong Kong city. In conclusion, the messages of ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ with other signage brought to Hong Kong society are diversity, and economical freedom, just like the nature with power of life.

However, the situation would be further dampened due to the lack of public recognitions to the value of the signage. It coupled with the wrong approach by the Government as they consider the ‘Cantilevered Neon Signage’ as an Unauthorised Building Works (UBWs) rather than a Character Defining Element of our Hong Kong historic culture. It would be highly regrettable if the situation keeps on and we might only be able to recall these valuable memories from the historic photos and books. Furthermore, the current policy on prohibition of unauthorized signboards will directly kill the ‘heritage icon’.

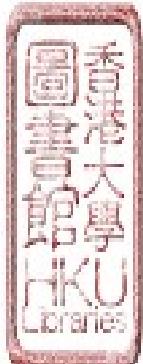
To sum up, the Cantilevered Neon Signage is definitely considered as a valuable heritage asset which plays the same role as tramway or Queen’s Pier in our collective memory. It should be noted that the government should work closely with private sectors to maintain and uphold the forgotten Cantilevered Neon Signage, just as those historical buildings which can enrich our city’s cultural life.



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