A FUTURE FOR THE PAST
The Authentic Continuity of Pre-war Shophouses
by
Lee Li Chern, Claudia
HD97-2019E
Submitted to School of Architecture
On 17th August 1999 in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT
The objective of this paper is to have a clearer understanding of Singapore's pre-war shophouses to better conserve them. Using Chinatown as my object of study, I hope to understand the meaning of shophouses and highlight the need for authenticity in our approach to conserve the shophouses. The methodology of the paper is to first identify the various styles of shophouses alongside with their authentic, characteristic elements. Upon identification of these elements and their importance in contributing to the intangible quality of the shophouse, precedents are studied and critically analysed on their consideration to these elements. At the end of these studies, the paper came to a conclusion that even though one can never understand what the intangible qualities of the ethnic quarters are, they are, to a certain extend, created or affected by the tangible qualities, of which, the shophouses plays a major role. Using the shophouses in Chinatown as the study subject, the paper only accentuates the need to re-look at the way Singapore has been conserving her cultural heritage. Adaptive reuse of the old shophouses driven by economics viability may be inevitable but if we do not first gaining some understanding of what a shophouse really means, all goodwill to conserve it will become guilty of falsification of our past.

Dissertation Supervisor: Mrs Chan Yew Lih
Title: Associate Professor