



Historic Preservation in Hong Kong
— A Three-Tier Approach to Inventorying
Our Past and Meeting the Challenges Ahead

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CONTENTS

I. FOREWORD -

THE CHANGING MOOD OF SOCIETY TOWARDS HISTORIC PRESERVATION3

II. A BRIEF STUDY OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION.....5

WHEN STARTED TO PRESERVE – THE ORIGIN OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION5

WHAT TO PRESERVE – THE SCOPE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION7

WHY TO PRESERVE – RATIONALES BEHIND HISTORIC PRESERVATION.....9

**III. COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS MADE BY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS OF SOCIETY
.....12**

A) UNFAILING SUPPORT RENDERED BY THE GOVERNMENT 12

i) *Leisure and Cultural Services Department*..... 12

ii) *Antiquities and Monuments Office*..... 21

B) CONCERTED EFFORTS MADE BY VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS.....34

I. *Conservancy Association*..... 34

2) *Central and Western District Council*..... 41

C) ACTIVE PARTICIPATION SHOWN BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC.....47

i) *The Floating Museum - Lamma Fisherfolks' Village*..... 47

ii) *Collective Reminiscence of Old Cityscape in Different Districts* 61

IV. CHALLENGES AHEAD IN LIGHT OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION67

THE CASE STUDY OF STAR FERRY PIER AND QUEEN’S PIER 70

V. SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO THE EXISTING PROBLEMS.....76

VI. CONCLUSION79

VII. REFERENCES80

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....81

APPENDIX 182

APPENDIX 283

Preservation in Hong Kong – A Three-Tier Approach to Inventorying Our Past and meeting the Challenges Ahead

I. Foreword - The Changing Mood of Society towards

Historic Preservation

With a history that dates back to 600 years ago, HK entralls the world with not only its position as Asia's leading financial centre and the world's third most competitive city in 2006 - but thanks to its unique Chinese origin and colonial rule by Britain for 99 years, Hong Kong is blessed with such an exuberance of historic legacies that from built monuments to old fishing culture, historic resources can be found in nearly every district in the territory.

In the meantime, one witnesses an increasing awareness of and concern about the preservation and conservation of all these historic relics, both tangible and intangible ones, among different stakeholders of society. As commented by Mr Chiu Siu-tsan, Executive Secretary of Antiquities and Monuments Office in 2002,

"Since the handover, there has been a greater interest and desire on the part of both the Government and the public to preserve and convert Hong Kong's archeological heritage into 'living relics' so that they become an integral part of the community and not just untouchable display items."

This gradual change of attitude comes as no surprise since as time goes by, an increasing number of HK citizens are demanding spiritual sustenance from Hong Kong's historic resources, be it archeological relics, historical buildings, traditional and cultural practices and all manners of antiquities. Realizing that these historic assets are inheritance of their ancestors and testimony to the collective human experiences of their past

life, they become emotionally attached to them and gradually identify them as part of their “collective memory”, as chanted by many historic and cultural preservation enthusiasts.

In consequence, different stakeholders of society, including the government, public bodies and private sectors including the general public are seen sparing no pains, in different areas, to preserve and conserve these relics, and work towards a promising scenario for historic preservation in HK.

The aim of this paper is to examine this three-tier approach by reviewing the efforts made and involvement of the three parties, namely the government, different public bodies and the general public, in inventorying our historic legacy in HK. The challenges we are facing will then be analyzed and corresponding solutions will be suggested.

It is hoped that through this case study, both the authors and readers can get a more comprehensive picture of what the current situation is like in light of historic preservation in HK, and that more people will come to realize that history is the root of our present life and it is inseparable from us.

II. A Brief Study of Historic Preservation

When Started to Preserve – The Origin of Historic Preservation

1) The Athens Charter (1931) and the Venice Charter (1964)

The concept of historic preservation can date back to the *First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments*, always referred to as *the Athens Conference*, in 1931. At the conference, seven main resolutions on the restoration of historic buildings were adopted (Appendix 1) and in the *General Conclusions of the Athens Conference*, it was put forward that

“When, as the result of decay or destruction, restoration appears to be indispensable, it recommends that the historic and artistic work of the past should be respected, without excluding the style of any given period.”
(Athens Charter)

The concluding statements reaffirm the historic and artistic values of the past and its relevance to the modern times, which justify their restoration and respectability.

Then In 1964, the same organization had their second meeting in Venice and created the International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, better known as *the Venice Charter*. The charter was then highly acceded as a leading guideline by preservation organizations all over the world.

2) The World Heritage Convention (1972)

Another conference highly regarded as the starting point of historic preservation was the *World Heritage Convention* adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

Aiming to “achieve, as far as possible, the proper identification, protection, conservation, and preservation of the world's irreplaceable heritage”, the Member States of UNESCO adopted in 1972 the

Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (better known as the World Heritage Convention), which complements heritage conservation programs at the national level and provides for the establishment of a World Heritage Committee and a World Heritage Fund.

The World Heritage Committee has, among other essential functions, to identify, on the basis of nominations submitted by States Parties to the Convention, cultural, natural and mixed properties of outstanding universal value which are to be protected under the Convention and to list those properties on the World Heritage List.



A pot that dates back to Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.)-----Identifying and preserving historic relics with aesthetic values is one of the missions of different world heritage conventions

What to Preserve – The Scope of Historic Preservation

i) Tangible History - Built Monuments

According to *Article 1* of the *International Charter For The Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, or the *Venice Charter in 1964*,

”The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event is found. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time.”

From the above, we can understand that the focus of historic preservation does not only lie on the protection of individual buildings, but that we should take a holistic approach and consider the relationship between the buildings and its surroundings and environment. We should preserve the overall cultural and historic landscape which bears testimony to the process of human evolution and civilization.

Applying this definition to the local context, we can see that the types of historic monuments are varied in Hong Kong, ranging from elegant traditional Chinese ancestral halls and Western residences to functional structures like lime kilns. Moreover, the architectural styles, selections of sites and building materials, as well as types of buildings to be constructed etc. are all governed by social beliefs, traditions, ideas and cultures. This highlights the close correlation between built heritage and its historic background and that they are inseparable from each other.

ii) Intangible History – Living Heritage

History is not confined to concrete physical buildings but the cultural aspects of our life that have been handed down for generations like customs, craftsmanship and traditions are part of our history, too. Indeed, the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* clearly defines that intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – or Living Heritage,

“.....is transmitted from generation to generation.”

“.....is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;”

The definition manifests explicitly that intangible cultural heritage, being traditional and living at the same time, is an indispensable part of history. As it is constantly recreated and mainly transmitted orally, social practices like “rituals and festive events”, “oral traditions and expressions”, representations like “performing arts”, as well as the “knowledge and skills concerning nature and universe” that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage are all parts of our history and deserve to be restored and preserved for good.



History is not bound to touchable monuments but traditional skills and craftsmanship inherited for generations are testimony to history too.

Why to Preserve – Rationales behind Historic Preservation

1. From a social point of view - Nurturing Cultural Identity

History is an evidence of life in continuity. By reflecting people's behavior and culture in the past, history tells people how the past looks like. Proud of their social roots and glorious achievement, people will gradually develop a better sense of belonging to their origin and a sense of cultural pride can be cultivated, which in return, contributes to the well-being of society.

2. From an architectural point of view: - Fostering Landscape Diversity

Landmark buildings always symbolize the image and outline the character of a city. As historic monuments are built in different styles at different times, they always carry various architectural merits and aesthetic values, which are invaluable assets to a city. Moreover, the co-existence of buildings in different styles help to maintain landscape diversity, an important element in urban town planning which can ornament and enhance the overall living environment and enrich the public's quality of life.

3. From a historical point of view – Enhancing Spatial Identity

As historical buildings always record significant historical events and reflect the social ambience at a particular time, citizens visiting them can learn about the origin and evolution of a city and establish a sense of continuity with their past. For instance, they may imagine themselves being in a war or experiencing a historic event. Gradually they will develop a sense of identity to that place. In this sense, built monuments carry great historical and academic values and are of great public interest to the citizens.

4. From an economical point of view – Spinning Profits

Successful protection, utilization and promotion of restored historic heritage sites, once revitalized, can be converted into popular attractions beneficial to not only for citizens but also for tourists.



Learning about the past history of one's origin helps to enhance his cultural identity to his social root.



(From left to right): A modern residential building, an old resettlement block and a church-like primary school on the same street---buildings built in different styles help to maintain the landscape diversity of a place.

For instance, Clarke Quay in Singapore, where the 19th century godowns and shop houses were located, is restored to its original splendor and taken over by restaurants and pubs fronting pedestrianized streets. Macau's cobblestone-paved streets and European villas invite visitors to visualize a by-gone era.

We uphold the opinion that Hong Kong can just follow suit and be equally successful in creating such tourist draws, while preserving the integrity of our unique heritage.

5. From an environmental point of view – Facilitating Sustainability

In recent years, sustainable development has become a buzz word in many countries and in Conveyance Association's words,

“Heritage conservation is also a matter of sustainable development.”

Defined as

“developments that meet the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,”

the principle of sustainability was put forward by United Nations on Environment and Development in 1992 and advocates that the vital legacy of cultural, educational, recreational, aesthetic, economic, social, and environmental benefits should be maintained and enriched for present and future generations. It is because the whole of our historic environment is our cross-generational equity. When a historical building is demolished, the loss is irrevocable. **We do not have the right to deplete our natural or cultural resources, especially if they are non-renewable, to the detriment of our future generations.**

III. Collaborative Efforts Made By Different Stakeholders of Society

a) Unfailing support rendered by the Government

Over the past decades, continuous support has been given by the Hong Kong government to preserve the historic monuments. For instance, the [Antiquities and Monument Ordinance \(Cap 53\)](#) was enacted in 1976 and empowered the Antiquities and Monuments Office to save valuable historical buildings from demolition.

The effort was further stepped up when the Chief Executive spoke in his 1998 Policy Address on the need to promote our heritage to foster a sense of belonging and identity. A review of the heritage policy was also ordered in 1999.

i) Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Leisure and Cultural Services Department is a governmental department which aims to provide quality leisure and cultural services for enriching the life of our community. Apart from running a wide range of well-equipped leisure and cultural facilities, the department also makes vigorous efforts to promote development of the arts and sports and preserve cultural heritage, with the purpose of making Hong Kong a truly world-class city and events capital.

Under the department, there are altogether 17 museums in HK (Appendix 2). Among them, the **Hong Kong Museum of History** bears the most relevance to the preservation of HK's history.

HK Museum of History

The Hong Kong Museum of History was first established in July 1975. In 1983, the Museum was first moved to the temporary accommodation in Kowloon Park, then re-moved to its present premises at Chatham Road in Tsim Sha Tsui in 1998.

The permanent home of the Hong Kong Museum of History, with a gross floor area of 17,500 m², is a comprehensive state-of-the-art museum showcasing the historic resources of Hong Kong.. It forms with the neighbouring Science Museum together a museum complex of a harmonious appearance and colour scheme.

Permanent Exhibition

The Hong Kong Story permanent exhibition is a showcase of the work done by the Museum staff in collecting, preserving and researching the history and development of Hong Kong. Comprising 8 galleries located on two floors, the over 4,000 exhibits with the use of 750 graphic panels, a number of dioramas and multi-media programmes, outline the natural environment, folk culture and historical development of Hong Kong.

Special Exhibition

Apart from the 8 storeys for the HK Story, there is a Special Exhibition Gallery in which exhibitions on special themes with close relevance to the history of HK and China will be organized from time to time. For instance, an exhibition named "Ancient Chinese Civilization - Treasures of the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties from Henan Province: is now on for public participation.



The Hong Kong Museum of History houses an exuberance of historic resources of Hong Kong and outlines HK's social development.

[“The Hong Kong Story” Exhibition](#)

[Lower Galleries \(Gallery 1-4,G/F\)](#)

[Gallery 1](#) The Natural Environment

This Gallery comprises two areas, namely “Landform and Climate” and “Flora and Fauna”. At the entrance are a globe and a tunnel of time paved with pseudo stone walls, in which rocks and fossils are used to demonstrate the topography of the Hong Kong in the last 400 millions years. Visitors will also be amused by a forest of towering trees as high as 18 meters with species of birds, reptiles of animals. This microcosm [introduces HK’s flora and fauna of 6000 years ago.](#)

[Gallery 2](#) Prehistoric Hong Kong

The most prominent exhibits in this gallery include prehistoric artifacts of stone, pottery and bronze in the middle Neolithic period, about 6000 years ago. Items like pottery and urns empower us to reconstruct the early inhabitants’ life. For instance, the fact that some of the hard pottery objects were fired and made at temperature as high as 1200 degree Celsius testifies that [the technology of pottery making was already advanced at that time. The ornamental patterns on the pottery wares also reflect the popular designs at that time and carry important aesthetic and academics values.](#)



A Coarse pottery pot that dates back to Neolithic Period



Landforms and fossils evacuated in HK that date back to 6000 years ago.



A foreign visitor learning about the flora and the fauna one can find in HK from an interactive interpretative device.

Galley 3 The Dynasties: From the Han to the Qing

This galley outlines the development of Hong Kong's history from the Han to the Qing dynasty through relics preserved in the region. For instance, the pottery model of a farm house provides a glimpse into the life of peasantry, along with the fact that rice has been the staple food of South China since the Han dynasty. **The relics of an old tomb dating back to the Han dynasty reflect the architectural design and social belief at that time.**

Gallery 4 Folk Culture in Hong Kong

This is the most interesting gallery as it **introduces the most colorful folk practices of the four ethnic groups in thong Kong,** namely, the Boat Dwellers, the Punti, the Hoklo and the Hakka. The spectacular display of folk rituals and traditional practice like salt making, the opera stage, worship of paper gods all footprints the glamour of their past life. For instance, legend has it that just be encountering another women, the chance for his bride to bear children would be lessened.



Household bowls and dished made as early as in Ming and Qing dynasties(1368-1644 A.D.)



Statues of paper gods, Cantonese opera singing and a traditional toy stall showcasing the folk culture of the Hong Kong people.





Foreign visitors showing interest in the costumes and household setting of Hakkas and Hoklos---the earliest settlers of HK.



Upper Galleries (Gallery 5-8,2/F)

Gallery 5 The Opium Wars and the Cession of HK

Do you know why HK was once a colony of Britain? It is because China was defeated by Britain in two Opium Wars. This gallery outlines the wars, their causes, the way they were unfolded and the consequences. A statue of the anti-opium hero in Canton Province and historical photos are also on display.

Galley 6 Birth and Early Growth of a City

This gallery resembles an old street lined with a variety of shops like grocery stores, tea shop, pawn shop bank, etc filling the scene with an ambience of the days of HK before 1941. Visitors can visualize the transformation of HK from a fishing village to a cosmopolitan city and be amused by the nostalgic atmosphere created in the gallery.

Gallery 7 Japanese Occupation

Resembling an air-raid shelter, this gallery showcases how Sir Mark Young, the then HK Governor, surrendered to Japan after 18 days of fighting and pushed HK to its dark age of three years and eight months in the Second World War. Through the display of historical relics, one can learn about the harsh condition of life in HK under the Japanese occupation.

Gallery 8 Modern Metropolis and the Return to China

This gallery traces the story of Hong Kong's post-war development by depicting the general living condition of people and how they were affected by natural disasters. Social development like housing, education is illustrated with the use of multi-media program as well.

ii) Antiquities and Monuments Office

Established in 1976, the AMO is the Government's heritage expert on all aspects of the conservation of Hong Kong's archaeological and built heritage. Working under the Antiquities and Monuments Advisory Board, the Office aims to ensure that the best examples of Hong Kong heritage are protected for posterity. The work of AMO includes:-

- 1) Protecting and handing on to our future generations the cultural heritage which is diverse, sustainable, accessible and makes a direct contribution to our quality of life.
- 2) Presenting and explaining their conservation work to the wider public to enhance their understanding and enjoyment and the value they place on the shared heritage.

Thanks to its 50 staff, 26 of them of professional curatorial grade, AMO has been successful in searching for, identifying and recording a wide range of historical buildings and structures, as well as archeological sites. Recorded buildings and sites are also classified in accordance with their importance. So far, over 900 historical buildings and structures and archeological sites have been recorded and graded.

Declared Monuments

Historical buildings, sites, and ancient structures may receive legal protection in Hong Kong under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. In this case, the Antiquities Authority (i. e. the Secretary for Home Affairs) may, after consulting the Antiquities Advisory Board and with the approval of the Chief Executive and the publication of the notice in government gazette, legally declare a place to be protected. In practice, the Chief Executive will consult the Executive Council in controversial cases.

Graded Monuments

Apart from declared monuments, buildings of great historic values can be classified as graded monuments based on a three-tier system:-

Definition of grading of Monuments

Grade I

Buildings of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible.

Grade II

Buildings of special merit; efforts should be made to selectively preserve

Grade III Buildings of some merit, but not yet qualified for consideration as possible monuments. These are to be recorded and used as a pool for future selection.

Ping Shan Heritage Trail and Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery

A remarkable contribution of Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) is the founding of **Ping Shan Heritage Trail** built in 1993, and the new **Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery**, which was just newly opened on 15th April 2007.

Ping Shan Cultural Trail

The Ping Shan Heritage Trail is the first cultural Trail in HK and many of the antiquities have been inscribed as declared monuments. Inaugurated on 12 December 1993, this 1-km long trail links together a number of historic buildings and antiquities belonging to the Tang clan in easy walking distance.

The origin of the Tang Clan can be traced back to the Sung Dynasty (960 - 1279 A.D.). The Tang Clan is the earliest known settlers of HK and also the largest and most powerful of the “Five Great Clans” in the New Territories.

As the people of Tang Clan were so rich and powerful, numerous elegant structures built in those days remain today, bearing testimony to historical and social development over the past centuries. At the same time, [they provide visitors with an opportunity to recapture aspects of life in the New Territories in the old days in a convenient half-day excursion.](#)

[Historic Monuments along the Trail](#)

1. [The Star Gathering Pagoda](#)

Built in around 1486, Tsui Sing Lau Pagoda is a hexagonal building constructed of green bricks and granite in Chinese style. It is the major attraction along the Ping Shan Cultural Trail as it is the only ancient pagoda one can find in HK now.

Functionally speaking, the pagoda was said to be erected for the purpose of protecting the village from external evil influences. Some people also say that the clan people took their children to the pagoda as they believed this act could flatter the gods, who would in return bless their children and help them pass the Imperial Examination with flying colors.

2. [The Tang Ancestral Hall](#)

Tang Ancestral Hall is one of the three major attractions of the Trail. Built in 1273, the exquisitely decorated three-hall building contains many historical inscriptions and the roof features colorfully decorated ceramic figurines. All these features bear testimony to the wealth and power of the Tang clan.

Outside the hall one can find several vertical scholar stones commemorating clan members who passed the imperial examinations and the two drum platforms on either side of the entrance are where musicians perform during festivities.



Star Gathering Pagoda is the only pagoda one can find in HK now.



The rows of ancestors' tablets in the ancestors' hall witness the passage of time and evolution of the clan.

Wandering around inside, visitors can also admire the ancient wooden ancestral tablets and the roof beam carvings. They work together to [outline the character of the Tang clan, while showcasing the architectural merits in the ancient times.](#)

3. [Yeung Hau Temple](#)

Yeung Hau Temple is dedicated to Yeung Hau Wong, the bodyguard to the last Sung emperor who fled to Hong Kong in times of wars. Yeung is highly respected for his [loyalty to the Emperor, an attribute much stressed in Confucian principles in traditional Chinese culture.](#)

Apart from Yeung, one can see the figurines of many other local deities like the Earth God, Kitchen God, etc housing near the same temple. This reflects [the high compatibility of Chinese religions](#) as different gods can live together in harmony.

4. [Kun Ting Study Hall](#)

Kun Ting Study Hall was built for students preparing for the Imperial Civil Service Examination. The elegant and extravagant decoration of the study hall reflects how the clan people saw passing the Imperial Examination as a life-long objective of their children. Moreover, [passing the Imperial Examination is not at all a personal business as passing the exam will bring glory to not only the family but the whole clan and even the ancestors.](#)

Despite serving different functions, the architectural styles of these buildings reflect the beliefs and spiritual aspects of the time.

For instance, the Clan Hall is always the outward manifestation of the pride, strength and economic power of a clan. The pair of pottery fish commonly found on the roof, known as the dragon fish, represents literary eminence and passing examinations with distinction.



A pair of gods of the Door employed to protect the families from evil spirits—a more than common history and cultural practice by every household.



[ii\) Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery \(cum visitors' centre\)](#)

In 2007, the AMO and the Ping Shan Tang Clan collaborated again for the opening of the Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery, a museum that has a colonial outward appearance but remain traditionally Chinese at heart. Converted from the Old Ping Shan Police Station built in 1899, the Centre is a two-storey structure featuring an arched verandah and three galleries, which introduces local folk culture and heritage to the visitors:-

[\(1\) The Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery](#)

It displays various relics belonging to the members of the Tang Clan which reflects different facets of their traditional life. Antique pieces like old photos, traditional wedding gowns, farming utensils, record books of land ownership are on display.

[\(2\) The Gallery of Ping Shan Heritage Trail](#)

It introduces monuments and buildings along the Ping Shan Heritage Trail.

[\(3\) The Community Heritage Gallery](#)

It presents periodically special thematic exhibitions on the history and culture of the New Territories organized by schools and community organizations like the delicacies of Yuen Long.

In a word, the Museum draws us a comprehensive picture depicting facets of the traditional life of the earliest settlers in Hong Kong. By preserving the relics of those generations who have lived before us, the Museum helps us look for our enduring traces which constitute a lasting testament to our origin on this planet.



A colorfully ornamented Chinese bed- the carving is so delicate!



Guess what it is-A baby chair used in the traditional Chinese society. Inside the showcase above it is a pair of baby's shoes and a baby's cap.

A traditional wedding gown for the bride featuring the auspicious red color in Chinese tradition.



An old Chinese sedan which carried the bride to the bridegroom's house for the wedding ceremony at times of poor transportation.



The most impressive piece of exhibit in the museum – a colourful blanket that dates back to 1872 delicately embroidered to celebrate the 60th birthday of a lady of the Tang Clan. The painted inscription records her life and her virtue while at the centre of the blanket is an image of Goddess of Longevity offering peach and wine to bless the lady.



A piece of real antique - a book of land lease records written in Chinese calligraphy (above) and a certificate of land ownership (below). Both items reflect that land is regarded as an important asset in traditional Chinese society.





(Left) The grain spreader is used for spreading out the grains for drying after harvest.

(Right) A water mill for leading water into the farmland.



Different types of utensils like tea-wares invite us to imagine what life was like in the past.



These utensils are for worshipping and toasting to the Heavenly God- Its expensive silver material reflects how people respected the Heavenly Gods with fear.

b) Concerted efforts made by Voluntary Organizations

I. Conservancy Association

The Conservancy Association, founded in 1968, is a non-government environmental organization with the longest history in Hong Kong. As a champion of sustainable development, the organization is dedicated to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Adaptive Re-use from Kom Tong Hall to Sun Yat-sen Museum

The case study of Kom Tong Hall is a prominent example showing how the Conservancy Association, a voluntary organization's stepping in has helped the government negotiate with private owners and achieve a win win situation for all parties in terms of historic preservation.

a) Kom Tong Hall

Kom Tong Hall is the residence of the younger brother of Sir Robert Ho Tung, an Eurasian tycoon in 1914. Featuring granite pillars and wrought-iron balconies on the 2nd and 3rd floors, the Hall has been faithfully restored to its original majestic appearance. Another facet of its historical value lies in the fact that it truly reflects the class-consciousness of the traditional society – two staircases, one for the use of Ho's family and the other solely for servants. No wonder the residence was declared a grade two historical building by the Antiquities Advisory Board in 1990.

In 1959 the house was first sold and then in 1971 it was re-sold to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The church, however, decided to demolish the building and redevelop the site into a religious cum education center in July 2002. Because of public objection to the demolition, the church agreed to enter into negotiation with the Government in late 2002. However, there was no breakthrough in the talks after a year.

The problem was not solved until the stepping in of Conservancy Association, when the organization wrote a letter to the headquarters of



The majestic-looking residence erecting against the backdrop of high-rise residential blocks sets a strong contrast between classicism and modernity.



A statue of Dr Dun Yat-sen, the great revolutionary leader who established the first republic in China at his youth.

the church in Salt Lake City, USA and facilitated the consensus between the Government and the owner of Kom Tong Hall. Eventually, the Government acquired Kom Tong Hall at a cost of \$53 million. The once glamorous residential hall is successfully re-adapted into a museum in memory of Dr Sung Yat-sen, the evolutionary pioneer who is renowned for transforming China from a monarchy to a republic.

From this incident, we see how the intervention of public bodies bridged up the gap between the government and private owners and brought about a win-win situation for all three parties, the government, the private owner and the heritage itself. More importantly, it serves as another successful example **demonstrating how old built heritgae can be rejuvenated and re-adapted for new community uses.**



Guess what this big bath tub is for- It used to be the place where the worshippers of the Church of Christ in the Latter Days were baptized. The bath tub bears testimony to the Museum's past history as a religious church.



How about this room? Can you guess what it is for? It was the treasury of the tycoon Ho family where they kept their gold bricks and other valuables.

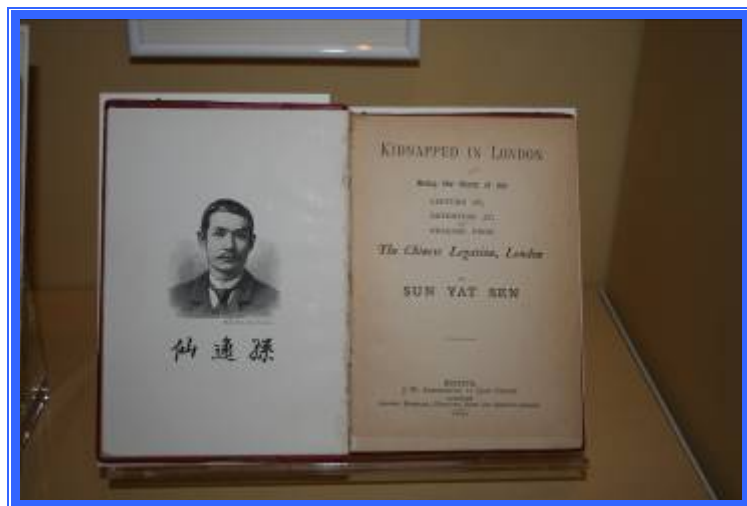
b) Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum

Dr Sun was dubbed “Father of our Nation” as he was the one who took the lead to overthrow the last monarchy and establish the first republic in China. His close relationship with Hong Kong was established when he shaped his revolutionary ideologies while receiving his early education in Hong Kong. Indeed, Hong Kong had served as his base for 18 years prior to the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1912.

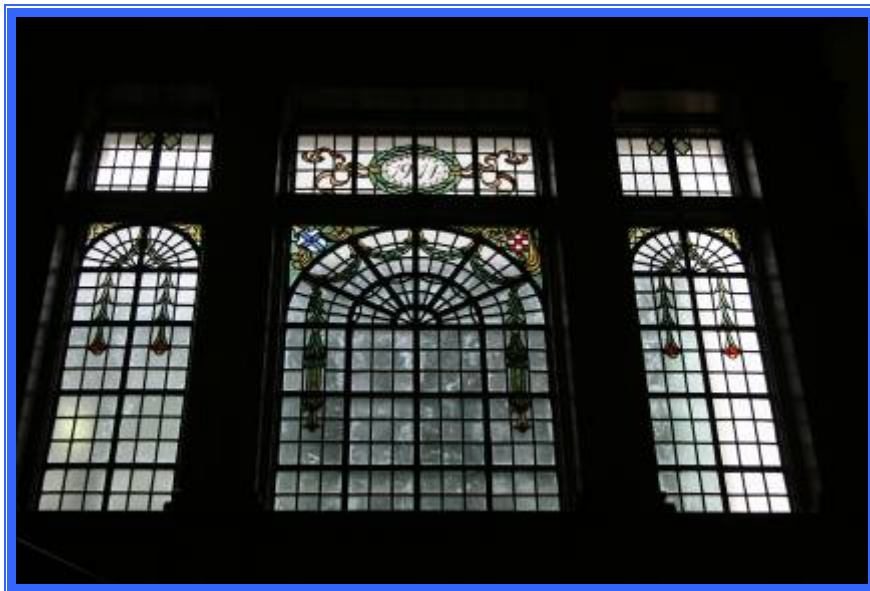
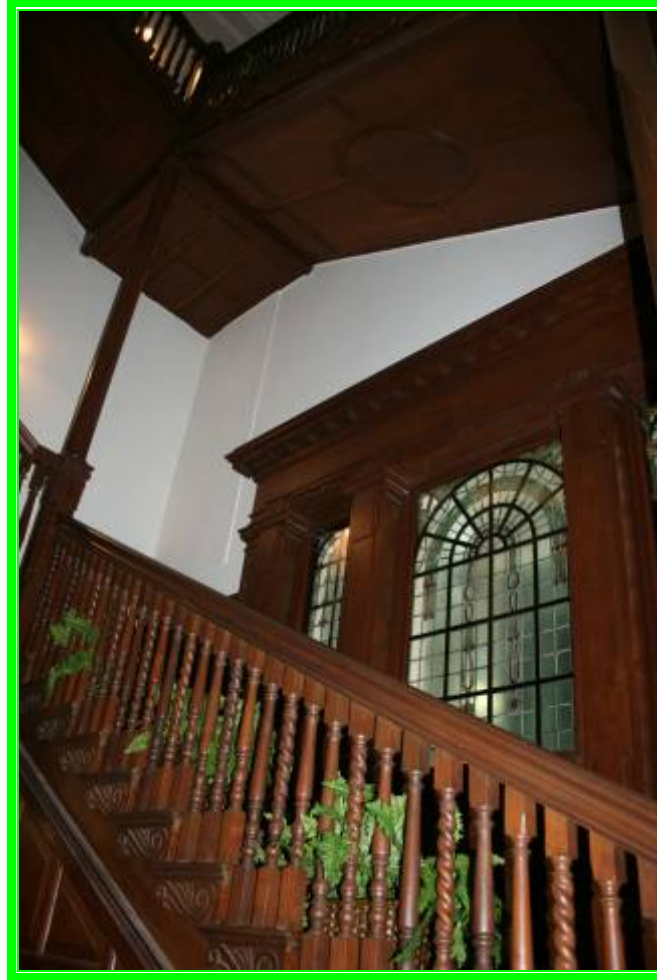
Inside this elegantly-decorated Museum in memory of him, one may find a fascinating showcase of Dr Sun's accomplishments including exhibition galleries covering his life history and his close relationship with Hong Kong. The 150 exhibits include his clothes and personal manuscripts, which bring alive the revolutionary spirit of Dr Sun. Visitors can gain more insights of Dr Sun, who was once proclaimed Provisional President of the Republic of China in 1912 by visiting the reading room, video room and an interactive room.

Apart from the story of Dr Sun, one may appreciate the architectural beauty of the old historical Kom Tong Hall and relive the old way of life of a tycoon almost 100 years ago.

Photos of Dr Sun Yat-sen and his family members displayed along the corridor of the Galley.



One of the exhibits in the museum is a book written by Dr Sun about his being kidnapped in London.



The color-stained windows, the long staircases and the background of Kom Tong Hall all add a new dimension to its historic meaning –being the residence of a tycoon, a Moron Church and now a museum of an evolutionary leader.

2) Central and Western District Council

The Re-opening of Victoria Prison as an Art Museum

District Council is an elected administrative structure in HK that acts as a middle man between the government and the citizens. Paying constant attention to local issues relating to people's livelihood and welfare, Board members, on a regularly basis, hold discussions with relevant government departments and offer advice on community projects that help to create a better living environment for the local community:

With a view to enhancing the public awareness of the rich historic resources in the district, the Central and Western District Board, together with several professional bodies, jointly organized a function named “Journey to the History of Victoria Prison” in January and April 2007.

History of Victoria Prison

Completed on 9 August 1841, Victoria Prison was Hong Kong's first prison. Indeed, it had been the centre of the local prison system and a testimony to the evolution of Hong Kong's correctional services until it ceased operation in December 2005.

Its historic value also lies in the fact that it is said to be the first western building constructed of durable material, mostly of granite and brick, in Hong Kong. The prison, together with the adjacent former Central Police Station and the former Central Magistracy, forms an impressive group of historical architecture. No wonder it was declared as a monument on 8 September 1995.

Thanks to the effort made by the Council, the historic prison was opened to the public again and visitors had a chance to reminisce the centre of justice and law enforcement of the colony in the early days. Moreover, in one of its activities called “Prison Art Museum”, the Artist Commune has successfully incorporated elements of art into the heritage compound.



Another prominent example of the successful adaptive re-use --- from an unused prison to an art museum.





A remarkable fusion of Art and History!





A scary prison turned into showcases of creativity





An art piece of strong contrast – Freedom and imprisonment.



Graffiti-like calligraphy in full expression of freedom and creativity.



Foreign visitors are interested in learning about the local history and art forms as well.



(Left) An experiential display – a once-in a life time experience to be kept in jail for one minute.

(Right) The interior of a cell.

c) Active Participation shown by the General Public

i) The Floating Museum - Lamma Fisherfolks' Village

Aside from the endeavour of the government and public bodies, private sectors and citizens have spared no effort in preserving our historical resources. One of the most prominent examples is a staged cultural village located at the third largest island, Lamma, in HK – Lamma Fisherfolks' Village which **fully acknowledges Hong Kong's early history as a small fishing village.**

Existing in the form of a floating platform which occupies an area of 1,300 m², the Village features authentic fishing junks & sampans, fishing boat models, an exhibition hall, floating household wares and fishing crafts and gears, etc. In consequence, both the tourists and local people can visualize the home of a fisherfolk family and reminisce facets of traditional life and history of the boat-dwellers, some of which being unique and unfamiliar to HK citizens in this living museum:-

After touring around the whole fishing village, we can learn that fishing was an old folklore industry long time ago in Hong Kong. The fishermen had to work from day to night while leading a simple and humble life style. However, at the same time, they had **accumulated a lot of undocumented indigenous knowledge which is invaluable collective wisdom and traces of past history.**

The entrance of the Floating Museum –Lamma Fisherfolk's Village



Different types of fishing nets for different types of fish



A bamboo-woven cage for shrimp catches.



Can you guess what the stone with a rope is for? It is for measuring the depth of the sea! After throwing the stone into the sea, fishermen can know its depth by measuring the length of the rope.





Foreign visitors are interested in fishermen's history and culture, too.



A big-thank to our Brother Ming, our interpreter.



The interpreter explaining the uses of different fishing tools.



The exhibition hall and photo gallery showing different facets of fishermen's life –like fishing boats in parade in celebration of Goddess of the Sea birthday (the two pictures on the right)



The traditional cooking utensils- The fishermen have to add fuel to the fire by blowing with their mouths. How amazing!



A traditional raincoat for fishermen!



The traditional Chinese junk has long been a symbol of HK.



Giant incense sticks and majestic-looking robes in celebration of Goddess of the Sea's birthday.



A colorful shrine extravagantly-decorated to please the gods.



Traditional Chinese costumes on display.

A Few Examples of Interesting Facets of History Preserved

1. The Sad Story Behind the Bottle Gourd

Stepping into the fish junk of the Village, one may be amazed by the bottle gourd hung on the wall, without knowing the sad story behind.

As the fishermen had to work from mouth to mouth for a living, they had little time to take care of their children. In many cases, the children of these fishermen were unattended and as a result, they fell into the sea and drowned, with their bodies sunk and washed away by the waves.

Inspired by the property of bottle gourds to float in water, the ingenious fishermen developed a custom of fixing a bottle gourd onto a child's body. By doing so, it was hoped that the bottle gourd would help the fishermen identify the body of the drowning child, whether dead or alive.

This custom reflects the humble and miserable life led by the fishermen in the past.

2. The Piggy Bank made of Bamboo

Stepping into a fishing junk, visitors can easily find a Piggy Bank made of bamboo in a fisherman's family, especially when the family has a new born baby.

The Piggy Bank, indeed, has profound cultural meaning behind. It is because in Chinese, the word "bamboo" carries the same word as the word "adequate". The cash box projects the fishermen's high expectations on their children and wish that their children could lead an affluent life in the future.



Who can imagine the life-saving function of the bottle gourd?



A piggy bank in Chinese fishermen's style-made of bamboo.

3. The General of the Boat Bow

Always working in the rough sea environment, fishermen grow traditionally superstitious and have strong faith in different gods.

For instance, they believe there is a god dwelling in the front part of the boat which will always navigate and bless the boat whenever it sets sail. The fishermen called this god the General of the Boat Bow and have it represented by a piece of red paper with its name stuck on the boat.

This ritual shows **fishermen's fear and respect of the power of mother nature and their yearning to be blessed and taken care of in the past.**

4. The Same Bed and the Shared Pillow

There is a common Chinese saying that we use to describe the harmonious relationship between the husband and the wife, i.e., "The Same Bed and the Shared Pillow". Indeed, this is not fictitious but a real practice among the fishermen!

In the bedroom of the fishing junk, we can always see a long pillow for two shared by the couple on the bed. It symbolizes the couple are so devoted to each other that they would not get apart from each even when they are sleeping at night!

This practice **reflects that fishermen couples are devoted lovers and they take marriage as a life long serious matter!**

5. The New-Weds' Washing Basin and Towel

In fishermen's culture, a just married couple has to wash their face with a new towel and a new basin both in red color the next day after their wedding. It is believed that their marriage will then be blessed and last forever.

This practice reflects since long time ago, red has been a signature color in Chinese tradition symbolizing happiness and hilarity.

Ready to look into the bedroom of a fisherman's couple.



The washing basin and the towel for the newly-wed couple must be red in color!



The fisherman couple has to share the same pillow- a unique culture of the fishermen's clan.



An authentic fishing junk with all the facilities on display inside.



The General God of the Boat is represented by a piece of paper stuck on the pole of the boat.

ii) Collective Reminiscence of Old Cityscape in Different Districts

With rapid urban development in society, many old districts in HK have been re-developed or scheduled to be re-developed. The demolition of old buildings and renewal of cityscape, gradually, gave rise to a nostalgic feeling towards facets of their past life and a yearning to preserve both tangible and intangible relics of their past among the residents. In consequence, different programs are launched at the community level with active participation by the citizens in support of them.

Wanchai – Wanchai Community Museum (The Blue House)

Wanchai is one of the earliest developed districts in HK and is interspersed with a mixture of high-rise commercial buildings and historic buildings. Among these buildings, the Blue House, built in 1920, is of great historic value and blessed with the collective memory of the old Hong Kong citizens. No wonder it has been classified by Antiquities and Monuments Office as a Grade II Monument in HK.

Being an old residential block which is even too old to have a flushing toilet, the block was proposed to be converted into a community museum inventorying the past life of the district. The proposal was favourably considered and it was so well received by the residents of the district that all the exhibits at the museum were donated by the residents. Enthusiastic local residents also volunteered to act as presenters explaining the history of Wanchai to the visitors.

Gradually, the museum has not only functioned as a showcase of past history but has also gradually become a meeting place for neighbors to have nice chats reminiscing the past, share old stories and take pride in. In light of this, we see the **community museum has not only successfully restored Wanchai's past history but has also nurtured a strong sense of identity among the local residents.**

Sham Shui Po

Being one of the most grass-root districts in Hong Kong, Sham Shui Po has had a long history since the manufacturing industry of garments and textiles started to flourish in Hong Kong in the 1970s'. Indeed, we can still find wholesaling and retailing shops of fabrics and fashion apparels in the district nowadays. It is no exaggeration to say that the district has played an important role in contributing to the prosperity of Hong Kong.

However, as time goes by, its long history, together with its aging and deteriorating living environment, has put the district on the list for relocation, demolition and re-development. The realization that the old will soon be replaced by the new triggered the awareness of the residents to restore fragments of their past life in the district. [A series of programmes and workshops were held to involve the local residents and herald and inventory the past glory of the district together.](#)

1. Workshop on Marginalised Wisdom

In the era of knowledge-based society, the merits of traditional craftsmanship, which is a kind of undocumented knowledge are always overlooked. Little respect has been paid to this common form of cultural practice and there is always little motivation to preserve and disseminate them.

To acknowledge this kind of traditional knowledge, a workshop named "In Search of Marginalised Wisdom" displaying an array of traditional skills was held in March 2007 by See-network with active participation of citizens.

The workshop first started with a guided tour around Sham Shui Po, with the presenters explaining the stories behind different old buildings to the visitors. The visitors would then have a chance to visit some old shops in the district and talk with the skilful old masters, listening to the old stories of their industries and getting a better understanding of these once flourishing industries.

Demonstration of traditional local skills like rattan furniture production, wooden cart making by friendly old masters allows us to re-discover and the local knowledge and indigenous creativity of the small communities that have when handed down from one generation to another.





A guide tour around Sham Shui Po highlighting some of the oldest buildings in the district.



Mei Ho is the oldest public housing estate in HK.



Marginalized traditional skills are collective wisdom that deserves respect and preservation.



The visit to an old master's shop allows us to learn about traditional craftsmanship which may be washed away by the tides of history



IV. Challenges Ahead in Light of Historic Preservation

Despite the increasing public awareness and active involvement of different parties in society, there are a number of problems ahead of us in light of historic preservation:-

1. Inadequacies of the institutional and legal framework

As commented by a spokesman of AMO,

"The grading system for assessing built heritage is an internal reference mechanism with no statutory authority. "

Under the existing policies, AMO can preserve a historical building by declaring it a monument. However, it is a pity that both the Antiquities and Monuments Office and its Advisory Board remain advisory in nature and have no real power to stop the demolition of built heritage.

Indeed, if the building happens to be privately-owned, the declaration requires the consent of the owners, who in most cases, would rather surrender the ownership to private developers for profitable re-development. It is no exaggeration to say that the authorities have to fight an uphill battle in many cases

2. Lack of funding

Asked what was the biggest obstacle confronting the AMO. a spokeman replied,

"Still a shortage of manpower. "

Although the total staff of AMO was increased from 38 in 1999 to the current 50, and their budget went up from \$17 million to \$27 million

in the same two-year period, this is still woefully inadequate. In the years to come, AMO is expected to monitor 250 archeological sites, appraise the architectural and historical value of more than 9,500 pre-war buildings and recommend protective measures as and when necessary. The lack of funding causes much hindrance to the progress of their work.

3. Struggle between urban development and historic preservation

Geographically speaking, over 70% of the land in HK is made up of mountains, with little flat land. The rugged landscape, together with the large population of over 7 million, results in a strong demand for land.

Consequently, many old buildings occupying sites for potential commercial development are regarded as barriers for profitable re-development projects despite their historical significance and architectural beauty. They end up being succumbed to private development and construction projects in many ways.



Different reclamation vessels at work while leaning against the backdrop of high-rise skyscrapers – a symbol of the struggle between urban development, historic preservation and environmental protection.

The case study of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier

1) The Historical Value of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier

Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier had seen significant moments of Hong Kong' colonial history.

Star Ferry Pier

The Star Ferry has been an important transport mode for people in Central Business District to cross the Victoria Harbour since 1958. Thousands of Hongkongers shared the experience of Star Ferry journey. Besides, the clock sounds of Star Pier Clock Tower has long been a part of life of Central and earned the reputation of 'heartbeat of Central'. The Star Pier is also a tourism attraction of Hong Kong and the National Geographic Traveler named it as one of the 50 places of a lifetime (National Geographic Traveler, Oct 1999).

Queen's Pier

Since the colonial age, the area around Queen's Pier was used to be the venue for official ceremony. Indeed, every Governor would attend his welcoming ceremony in the open space between Queen's Pier and City Hall. It was also the place where the Royal Family, namely Queen Elizabeth II and Prince of Wales landed and was welcomed on her first visit to Hong Kong in 1975.

It is no exaggerating to say that they "form significant parts of collective memory of Hongkongers", as Conservancy Association puts it.

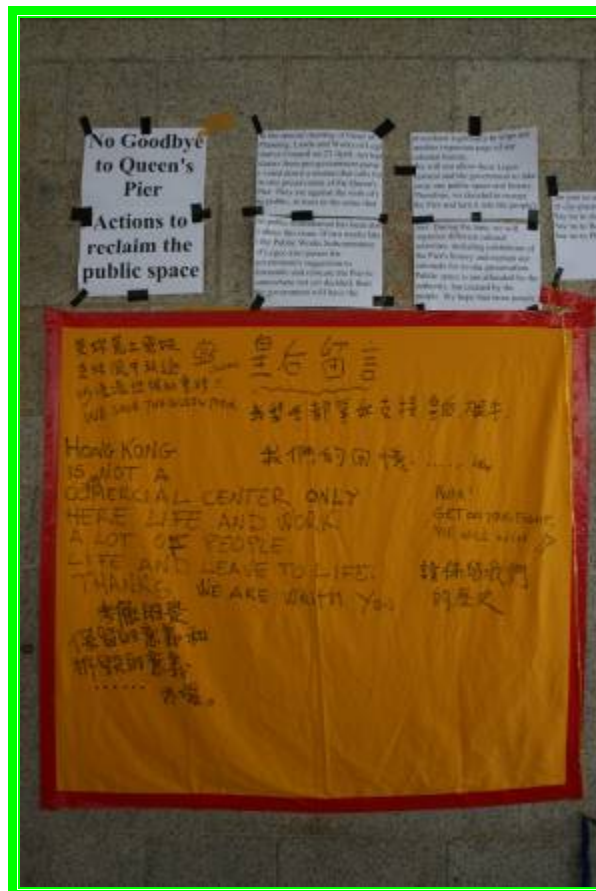


Queen's Pier – Physically not so attractive. But its being the landing place for the royal family and 6 governors when HK was under the British rule has made it part of Hong Kong people's collective memory.

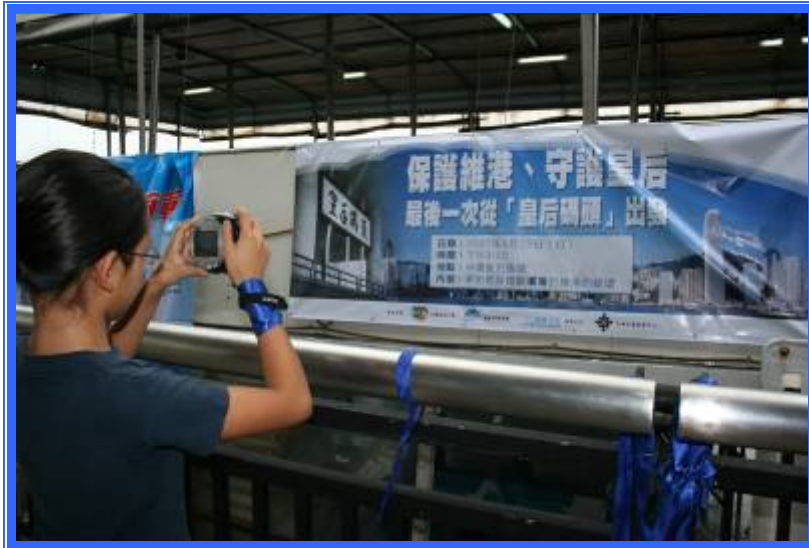
2) The Issue of Relocating and Demolishing the two Piers

Central has long been the central business district (CBD) of Hong Kong. However, with numerous skyscrapers erecting along the promenade of Victoria Harbor, its rapid development, together with the busy traffic, gave rise to the need for Central Reclamation works (Phase III) authorized by the Chief Executive in Legislative Council in 2001, which implied the re-location of the two piers.

The realization that the two piers would be demolished inflicted the issue of historic preservation of Star Pier and Queen's Pier among the public. The later demolition of Star Ferry Pier triggered a heated public debate. After months of public discussion, the Queen's Pier was assessed to be a Grade I historic building by Antiquities and Monuments Office on May 9 2007. However, a consensus still cannot be reached on what is the best way to preserve the half-century old colonial legacy.



Citizens who would not like to see Queen's Pier be demolished voiced their concerns.



Citizens busy taking photos on the last boat trip boarding at Queen's Pier.



Foreign visitors are eager to capture the fond memories of Queen's Pier too easy as they realize its historic significance.





Dr Kwok Ka-ki, a strong supporter of preserving Queen's Pier and Victoria harbor, explaining the importance of historic preservation and environmental protection.



We are in support of the preservation of Queen's Pier, too.

V. Suggested Solutions to the Existing Problems

In light of the challenges above, we propose the following solutions for alleviation of the problems:-

1) **Bette the institutional and legal framework**

With a view to enhancing the present policy and administrative framework, the government should step up its effort in

a) Making it necessary for prior notice to the AMO to be given for any development proposal or building alteration to all post-war buildings;

b) Devoting more resources to the Antiquities and Monuments Office and the Antiquities Advisory Board so as to speed up the task of grading and declaration of monuments;

Empowered with more authority and ample resources, AMO can speed up the identifying and assessment procedures of potential historic monuments and have more authority to fight for the survival of the historic monuments, before it is too late.

2) **A Holistic Approach to Historic Preservation**

There should be better coordination among various government departments and the departments concerned, like the Urban Renewal Authority and Town Planning Authority need to take a more holistic approach to urban redevelopment that emphasizes preservation of buildings of historical, cultural or architectural interests.

In other words, they should not be too short-sighted just to look at the monetary values of land generated from the sale of the property but more

consideration should be given to the community's overall interest in light of better landscape diversity and quality of community life promised by the restoration of the old buildings.

3) Learning from the Overseas Experience

Many overseas countries like Australia and France have longer history and more ample experience in historic preservation than HK. To learn from the predecessors, the Hong Kong government should make a commitment to benchmark Hong Kong's heritage conservation policy with that of international standards.

This can be done simply by committing to accede to well-recognized charters and principles like the Venice Charter (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites 1964), the Burra Charter, the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China, etc.

4) Heritage Trust based on Public-private Partnership

In light of the problem of lack of funding, we suggest the government should play a more proactive role in initiating privately-sponsored or public-private partnership trust.

For instance, in 1992, a trust was established in memory of Sir David Wilson, the late Governor of HK. The Trust aims to render financial support to heritage-related projects and invites public application for the grant on a yearly basis. Lobbying work should be directed towards tycoons and corporations for the establishment of similar funding support so as to well-source sustainable preservation work like buying up land and buildings of high heritage value and restoring them.

5) Promotion and Wider Application of Adaptive Re-use

Instead of being left empty and deserted, some deserted monuments can be re-developed for other uses. For instance, Murray House, the once

barracks of British military, has been successfully converted into a popular restaurant when re-located at Stanley, a picturesque tourist area.

There are also prominent overseas examples like the Art Village housing art galleries and painting collections in Welshpool, London, which was originally a brewery.

These two examples show how [adaptive re-use can rejuvenate old buildings or districts and empowering them with new community merits.](#)

6) Education

In the long run, continuous education to the public is a must if historic preservation is to be done in a sustainable way.

Apart from propagating the close relationship between the historic heritage and us, endeavor should also be directed towards [strengthening the appreciation level of the public on the built monuments and different architectural designs of HK.](#) The recognition of the architectural beauty of the historic buildings by citizens will reinforce their cultural identity and gradually, their resolution to maintain the relics in good shape.



VI. Conclusion

With the passage of time and rapid urban renewal, one can easily identify a change in people's attitude towards historic preservation and heritage restoration in HK over the past decades. Citizens are emotionally more attached to historic buildings and heritage that help them reminisce their past life. This new mindset and growing awareness have evidently mobilized the whole community to join hands and work towards a new "anchorage in history" involving every stakeholder of society.

In the process of inventorying our past, conflicts are bound to arise as interests of different parties are affected. Historic preservation is also hindered by inadequacies in respects of manpower, resources. However, As Dr Patrick Ho, our Secretary for Home Affairs elaborates on the importance of history,

"through our maturity as a community, (citizens) have come to a dawning realization.....(our society) has to draw upon its roots for nourishment of new ideas and fresh vision. And our roots lie in our history and our cultural identity."

A city can never leave its past history resources, both tangible and intangible ones, in oblivion if it wishes to progress forward. It is because the old relics and collective wisdom handed down from the old generation can always empower and enrich the new. In this respect, seemingly an uphill battle, **the prospect of historic preservation is promising as long as the different sectors in society share the same vision and that this whole city approach is at work.**

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VIII. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the following sponsors for granting this invaluable learning opportunity to us:-



Appendix 1

The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments

Adopted at

At the Congress in Athens the following seven main resolutions were made and called "Carta del Restauro":

1. International organizations for Restoration on operational and advisory levels are to be established.
2. International organizations for Restoration on operational and advisory levels are to be established.
3. Proposed Restoration projects are to be subjected to knowledgeable criticism to prevent mistakes which will cause loss of character and historical values to the structures.
4. Problems of preservation of historic sites are to be solved by legislation at national level for all countries.
5. Excavated sites which are not subject to immediate restoration should be reburied for protection.
6. Modern techniques and materials may be used in restoration work.
7. Historical sites are to be given strict custodial protection.

Appendix 2

List of Museums under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department in Hong Kong

1. Hong Kong Railway Museum
2. Hong Kong Heritage Museum
3. Hong Kong Film Archive
4. Sam Tung Uk Museum
5. Sheung Yiu Folk Museum
6. Hong Kong Museum of Art
7. Flagstaff House Museum of Teaware
8. Hong Kong Museum of History
9. Law Uk Folk Museum
10. Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence
11. Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb Museum
12. The Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum
13. Hong Kong Science Museum
14. Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre
15. The Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre
16. Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Heritage Trail Visitors Centre
17. Hong Kong Space Museum