

**Heritage Appraisal of Fung Ping Shan Building,  
The University of Hong Kong**

Fung Ping Shan Building, originally named Fung Ping Shan Library, was constructed in 1931 as a library for Chinese books of The University of Hong Kong (the “University”). The building was named after its donor, the late Mr Fung Ping Shan (1860-1931), who was an eminent Chinese entrepreneur keen on promoting Chinese education in Hong Kong. The library was opened on 14 December 1932 by Sir William Peel, the Governor of Hong Kong from 1930 to 1935. *Historical Interest*

To accommodate the needs of research by the School of Chinese of the University, Mr Fung Ping Shan wrote a letter to Sir William Hornell, the fourth Vice-Chancellor of the University, to express his wish to donate \$100,000 for constructing a Chinese library for the University in 1929. Two conditions were made for the donation: (1) the proposed Chinese library should be opened to the public so the building situated within the University campus but near public road would be desirable; and (2) the building should be permanently and exclusively used to house the Chinese library. After discussions with the University, Mr Fung Ping Shan agreed to increase the donation and be responsible for the cost of stationary, lightings, fans, furniture and bookshelves, etc. of the library. In mid-1931, the construction work of the library commenced but Mr Fung Ping Shan passed away in the same year before he could make his attendance in the opening ceremony held on 14 December 1932. The library was officially opened to the public in January 1934. Before the Second World War, the library held a collection of around 50 000 books.

Education in the University ceased immediately after the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. Fung Ping Shan Library was taken over by the British army as office and dormitory of the First-aid Station of Air Defence at Mid-Levels Section E in the same year. It was also used as a central repository for private and institutional collections from Hong Kong and the mainland China.

Over 240 000 valuable books from private individuals, schools and government organisations were stored in the library at that time. The then librarian of Fung Ping Shan Library, Mr Chan Kwan Po<sup>1</sup>, remained to take care of the library during the war and the period of the Japanese Occupation. He and his colleagues collected those birth certificate documents from Central Post Office and kept them in the library. The documents were proved extremely important in confirming the identity of Hong Kong citizens in the postwar years. In 1944, Fung Ping Shan Library became the Library of the Government of the Occupied Territory, and some of its collections was transferred to the City Library set up by the Japanese in The Helena May building.

In 1953, the Museum of Chinese Art and Archaeology was established to serve teaching and research purposes, and exhibitions were held in a room of the Fung Ping Shan Library. In view of the increasing numbers of users and collections and the spatial constraint, the collections of Fung Ping Shan Library was transferred to the newly constructed Main Library of the University in 1962. The original library building was converted into Fung Ping Shan Museum with the consent of the Fung's family and was officially opened on 31 January 1964 by Sir Kenneth Fung Ping Fan, the son of Mr Fung Ping Shan. It was renamed University Museum and Art Gallery in 1994 and a new wing of which, T.T. Tsui Building, was opened in 1996. Fung Ping Shan Building is still in museum use nowadays.

Fung Ping Shan Building was designed by Leigh and Orange. *Architectural Merit* It is a three-storey building with red-brick facade, carved granite ornaments and a prominent glass dome on the roof. The building is symmetrically constructed on a fan-shaped floor plan (also known as a “butterfly” plan) with a rounded central section. The facade is decorated with stone pilasters completed with moulded capitals and triangular or arched pediments over the windows, etc.

The red-brick facades laid in “Flemish Bond” set a colour

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Chan Kwan Po was a graduated from the Faculty of Arts of the University. He served as the Librarian of Fung Ping Shan Library from 1934 to 1956. He was awarded an OBE in 1947 in view of his contribution in preservation of the valuable documents during the wartime era.

contrast with the smooth grey masonry decorative features, like giant pilasters, window architraves, pediments, a moulded cornice and parapet. The ground floor elevation of smooth granite blocks provides a solid-looking podium to support the floor above.

The atrium features a high-level circular gallery supported on octagonal columns, which is lit by a prominent dome-shaped skylight on roof. The main staircase in the entrance hall is an impressive concrete construction surfaced with fine coloured terrazzo treads to match the main floors. Most of the old finely carved hardwood doors, windows with original brass fittings are still found in place throughout the building.

The exterior of the building is largely intact in spite of provisions of a new pedestrian bridge at the top floor level to link with the adjoining T.T. Tsui Building and a new elevator. These alterations are distinguishable but match with the original building appearance in terms of materials and colours. Other alterations including partitioning and installation of false ceilings were made for the museum's operation need. However, these alterations and additions are considered reversible and the building could be restored to its original appearance if required. ***Authenticity***

The building is a rare example of a "purpose-designed" library with a unique fan-shaped plan and rich variety of detailing and finely executed craftsmanship in Hong Kong. It is also the oldest museum in continuous operation in Hong Kong. ***Rarity***

The building is situated on a prominent location along Bonham Road which is adjacent to the East Gate of the University. The distinctive outlook of the building in such a prominent location enables it to be a well-known landmark of the University as well as the surrounding area. With its public nature as a library in the early years and later as a museum, the social value of the building does not only lie in its academic role played in the early development of Chinese education in the field of Chinese studies and culture, but also a place for leisure and education for visitors from all walks of life. ***Social Value & Local Interest***

Fung Ping Shan Building, together with the other historic buildings of the University, such as the Main Building, University Hall, Hung Hing Ying Building, Tang Chi Ngong Building, May Hall and Eliot Hall (the exteriors of these buildings are declared monuments), form a strong academic and cultural ambience. Other historic buildings in the surrounding areas, such as King's College (declared monument), Bungalow of West Point Filters (Grade 1), Senior Staff Quarters of Elliot Pumping Station and Filters (Grade 2), also depict the historical and socio-cultural development of the territory.

***Group Value***