

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

Fung Ping Shan Building (馮平山樓), originally named *Historical*
Fung Ping Shan Library (馮平山圖書館), was constructed in 1931 *Interest*
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 (馮平山) (1860-1931), who was an eminent Chinese
entrepreneur enthusiastic in promoting Chinese education in Hong
Kong. It was opened on 14 December 1932 by Sir William Peel,
who was the Governor of Hong Kong from 1930 to 1935.

To cope with the research needs of the School of Chinese,
Mr. Fung Ping Shan wrote a letter to Sir William Hornell, the 4th
Vice-Chancellor of the University, expressing his wishes to donate
\$100,000 for constructing a Chinese library for the University in
1929. There were two conditions for the donation: the proposed
Chinese library should be opened to the public and for this purpose
it is desirable that it should be built within the University site but
near public road; and this building should be permanently and
exclusively used to house the Chinese library. After further
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. The
construction work of the library finally began in mid-1931.
Unfortunately, Mr. Fung Ping Shan passed away in 1931 and could
not witness the opening of the library held on 14 December 1932.
The Fung Ping Shan Library was officially opened to the public in
January 1934. Before the Second World War, the library already
had a collection of around 50 000 books.

Education in the University ceased immediately after the
outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. The First-aid
Station of Air Defence at Mid-Levels Section E (防空救護處半
山區 E 段) set up by the British occupied the building as its office
and dormitory in 1941. Fung Ping Shan Library also became the
central repository for private and institutional bodies, both locally

and from the Mainland China. Over 240 000 valuable books from private individuals, schools and government organisations were stored in Fung Ping Shan Library. Mr. Chan Kwan Po (陳君葆)¹, who was the librarian of Fung Ping Shan Library at that time, remained to take care of the library throughout the war and the Japanese Occupation. Chan and his staff also collected discarded birth certificate documents found at the Central Post Office and kept them in the library. These documents were extremely important in confirming the identity of Hong Kong citizens in the post war period. Fung Ping Shan Library became the Library of the Government of the Occupied Territory (香港佔領地總督部立圖書館) in 1944. Some of its collections were sent to The Helena May where the Japanese set up the City Library (香港市民圖書館) there.

In 1953, the Museum of Chinese Art and Archaeology (中國藝術及考古學陳列所) was established to serve teaching and research purposes, and exhibitions were held in a room of the Fung Ping Shan Library. In 1962, the collection of Fung Ping Shan Library was transferred to the newly constructed Main Library of the University, in view of the insufficient space of Fung Ping Shan Library and the increased number of users and collections. The original library building was converted into Fung Ping Shan Museum, after obtaining the consent from the Fung's family, and was officially opened on 31 January 1964 by Sir Kenneth Fung Ping Fan (馮秉芬), the son of Fung Ping Shan. The museum was renamed University Museum and Art Gallery in 1994, before its new wing T.T. Tsui Building was opened to the public in 1996, where traditional Chinese arts exhibitions are held nowadays.

Fung Ping Shan Building was designed by Leigh and Orange. It is a three-storey building with red-brick façade, carved granite ornaments and a prominent glass dome on the roof. The design of the elevation is based on the principles of symmetry. The overall design also reflects distinctive architectural features,

*Architectural
Merit*

¹ Mr. Chan Kwan Po was a graduate of the Faculty of Arts in the University. He served as the Librarian (圖書館主任) of Fung Ping Shan Library from 1934 to 1956. He was awarded an OBE in 1947 in view of his contribution in preserving the valuable documents during the wartime era.

including the fan-shaped floor plan (also known as a “butterfly” plan) and the rounded central section of the front; the stone pilasters with their moulded capitals and triangular or arched pediments over the windows, etc.

The façades are mainly of red brickwork, laid in “Flemish Bond”, with smooth grey granite decorative features, such as giant pilasters, windows architraves, pediments and a moulded cornice and parapet, which provide a colour contrast. The ground floor elevation is also of smooth granite blocks which provide 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 the central roof light above. The main staircase in the entrance hall is an impressive feature of concrete construction, with the treads surfaced with fine coloured terrazzo to match the main floors. Most of the old finely carved hardwood doors and windows with original brass fittings are still in place throughout the building.

The exterior of the building is largely intact in spite of a pedestrian bridge at the top floor level to link the building with the adjoining T.T. Tsui Building and the provision of a new elevator. These alterations, however, are distinguishable but match with the original building appearance in terms of materials and colour. Alterations including partitioning, installation of false ceilings and temporary covered-up of windows in the atrium have been done to cater 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 one of the exits of the University ***Social Value & Local Interest***

(East Gate). The distinctive outlook of the building in such a prominent location enables it to be a well-known local landmark of the University as well as the area. Also, being initially a library and then a museum for which are both open to the public, its social value obviously does not only lie in its academic role in early Chinese education development in the field of Chinese studies and culture, but also a place for leisure and enjoyment for visitors from all walks of life.

Fung Ping Shan Building, together with the other historic buildings situated in the University, such as the Main Building (本部大樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), University Hall (大學堂) (the exterior of which is declared monument), Hung Hing Ying Building (孔慶熒樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), Tang Chi Ngong Building (鄧志昂樓) (the exterior of which is declared monument), May Hall (梅堂) (Grade 1) and Eliot Hall (儀禮堂) (Grade 1), undoubtedly form a strong cultural environment providing an academic ambience. Other historic buildings in the surrounding areas, such as King's College (英皇書院) (declared monument), Bungalow of West Point Filters (西環濾水廠平房) (Grade 1), Senior Staff Quarters of Elliot Pumping Station and Filters (抽水站及濾水廠高級職員宿舍) (Grade 2), etc., also depict the historical and socio-cultural development of the territory.

Group Value

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