

Historic Building Appraisal
Po Leung Kuk Main Building
No. 66 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, H.K.

Founded in 1878, Po Leung Kuk (PLK) is one of the most famous *Historical Interest* social welfare organisations in Hong Kong. The development of its headquarters building not only testifies to the history of PLK but also the changing needs of the community.

Rapid development of shipping and *entrepôt* trade in Hong Kong from the 1860s onwards accelerated the abduction and trafficking of women and children. On 8 November 1878¹, a group of elites and merchants of the local Chinese community, namely Lo Lai Ping (盧禮屏), Fung Ming Shan (馮明珊), Shi Shang Kai (施笙階) and Tse Tat Shing (謝達盛), presented a petition to the Governor, Sir John Pope Hennessy, to set up PLK to assist the Government in carrying out the laws for the protection of women and children. “Po Leung”, which means “to protect the young and the innocent” literally in Chinese, represents PLK’s core mission and vision.²

PLK was initially housed on the upper floor of two buildings of Tung Wah Hospital on Po Yan Street, Sheung Wan. It was not until 1896 that PLK moved across to the other side of Po Yan Street to its own building which was built on the former site of Kwong Fook I Tsz (廣福義祠). Given the lack of space to accommodate the increasing number of women and children in the building, new premises for PLK had to be identified. Subsequently, a parcel of land - I.L.3158 (now known as I.L. 9011) on Leighton Road in Causeway Bay, which was found suitable for PLK’s new headquarters, was granted by the Government to PLK in February 1931.

The new building was designed by Iu Tak Chung (姚得中) (1896-1933). Iu was an authorized architect graduated from the University of Hong Kong, the partner of Clark & Iu Architects and Civil Engineers, as well as the director of PLK from 1930-1931. PLK’s new headquarters (the Main Building

¹ 8 November 1878 was adopted as PLK’s founding date, on which the petition was submitted.

² The *Po Leung Kuk Ordinance* was promulgated on the *Hong Kong Government Gazette* on 5 August 1882 to confirm PLK’s mission, legal status and authority. PLK handled over 2,850 cases in just 5 years (from 1887 to 1891) with 85% of the victims restored to their families.

nowadays) which opened on 4 March 1932³, is more than just a place for operations and shelter use. The provision of garden and enclosing walls as well as rooms for domestic training and education reflect PLK's attention to the living condition and the wellbeing of the female and children residents. In general, the building can be divided into three parts: the Welfare Department (which occupies the left wing and right wing and the whole first floor of the building), Ho Sze Shi Memorial Hall (何東太夫人紀念堂) (located at the centre of the ground floor and facing the entrance of the building, where the most important meetings are usually held) and a waiting room for admission interviews (later converted into a meeting room for board meeting and now the Po Leung Kuk Museum, located on the ground floor of the building).

The construction of Main Building was made possible through fund-raising. Two men were especially prominent among the donors⁴, namely Sir Robert Ho Tung and Mr. J. E. Joseph⁵. Both donors contributed \$30,000 each and supported more than half of the construction fund. To commemorate their donations, the hall on the ground floor of the Main Building was named after Sir Robert's mother – the Ho Sze Shi Memorial Hall (also known as Kwan Ti Hall 關帝廳), while the hall on the first floor of the Main Building was named after Mr. J. E. Joseph's mother – the Mrs. Joseph Memorial Hall (祖孀太夫人紀念堂). To express gratitude to the major benefactors, PLK also displayed commemorative porcelain photos⁶ of donors in Kwan Ti Hall for posterity. These porcelains photos are a symbol of recognitions garnered by the reputable merchants of Hong Kong back in the 1930s.

Since its completion in 1932, the Main Building has been extended gradually to cater the needs of the times. In 1941, the Right Wing Annex was

³ The building was formally opened by Lady Peel on behalf on Sir William Peel who was indisposed and absent from the event.

⁴ Other major philanthropists include Lady Ho Tung and Mrs. Lam Fook-chi, who each donated \$10,000. The kitchen and dining room on the ground floor were named Mrs. Mak Ng Shi Memorial Hall (麥吳氏太夫人紀念廳) and Lau Yu Fong Memorial Room (劉漁訪紀念廳), respectively, to commemorate their generous support.

⁵ Mr. Joseph Edgar Joseph (1882 – 1946) was born in Bombay (present-day Mumbai), India to a Jewish family and came to Hong Kong in 1884. He was an exchange broker and a philanthropist in Hong Kong. In 1954, the “J.E. Joseph Trust Fund”, was which named after him was established in Hong Kong. The Fund aims to provide financial assistance to farmers and it is still in operation.

⁶ The majority of the more than 120 porcelain photos on display are products of Jingdezhen, China.

built to provide additional accommodation spaces for the increasing number of residents affected by the Japanese invasion thanks again to a generous donation of \$50,000 from Mr. J. E. Joseph.⁷

After the Second World War, residents' personal development again was the main priority of PLK and the first regular school was therefore established in the Main Building in 1946 to provide formal education to children residing in PLK. A Left Wing Annex dedicated to domestic training was built in 1949. In consideration of the inconveniences that bad weather had brought to the staff and residents with an open air entrance of the Main Building, in 1953 PLK's directors decided for practical reasons to add a portico to the Main Building's entrance to shield off rain and winds, which also added grandeur to the building.

To further optimise PLK's services to the residents and the community, a series of construction projects outside the Main Building were carried out. These included a detached school building built in 1953 for the school opened inside the Main Building in 1946, a Domestic Science Annex built in 1954, a Vocational Training Building built in 1955, a four-storey building built in 1957 that housed a kindergarten on its ground floor and a home for mature ladies on the upper floors, and the West Wing built in 1969 for mentally handicapped children. Nevertheless, the Main Building has maintained its original use for over 90 years.

PLK's identity as a Chinese charity organisation is strongly reflected in their worshipping of Kwan Ti and displaying of commemorative couplets. Although PLK has no religious background, it embraces the loyalty, righteousness and faithfulness of Kwan Ti who was a real person from the Three Kingdoms period (220-265 AD) and an icon of integrity and loyalty in Chinese culture. It has been the traditional practice of PLK that when children leave for their adopted families or women are married off, rites are performed in front of the shrine of Kwan Ti for the sake of solemnity.

In addition to the tablets commemorating the inauguration of the Main Building in 1932, after directors completed their terms in office, it became a

⁷ The average number of persons admitted to PLK between the period from 1932 to 1937 was 517 and grew to 650 and 787 in the years of 1938 and 1939 respectively. As such, the extension work of the Main Building was inevitable. PLK remained in service during the period of Japanese Occupation (1941-1945).

tradition for PLK to invite renowned scholars and calligraphists to compose couplets and inscribe them on the granite columns inside the Main Building as commemoration. Calligraphies of famous former-Qing Hanlin (前清翰林) scholars like Wan Suk (溫肅), Chu U Chun (朱汝珍), Au Tai Yuen (區大原), Kwai Dim (桂玷) and Shum Kwong Yuet (岑光樾), the renowned local Chinese calligraphist Au Kin Kung (區建公) are seen in the main entrance lobby, corridors and Kwan Ti Hall on the ground floor. From 1950 onwards, when directors completed their terms in office, porcelain photos of them together with a tablet containing their major contributions would be displayed on the ground floor. Couplets, tablets and porcelain photos have become PLK's unique tradition and culture and can be seen as the embodiment of PLK's history.

Formally established as the Society for the Protection of Women and Children in 1882, PLK has gradually evolved from initially rescuing the kidnapped and protecting and offering a safe environment to destitute women and children into a welfare organisation providing a variety of social services and charity support in Hong Kong.

Built in 1932 and 1941, respectively, by Iu Tak Chung and Iu Tak Lam (姚德霖)⁸, the Main Building and its Right Wing Annex are ornamented with various decorative elements showing the influence of Art Deco on the exterior and interior which create a sense of Neo-Classicism as well as a juxtaposition of Chinese and Western elements. *Architectural Merit*

The front façade has a central tower capped by a dome at the center of the flat roof. The surface, which features uniformly cut and divided horizontal groove lines, helps decorate the façade of the building. Mouldings in form of fascias can be found at the two sides and the bottom of the dome and in the upper left and right sections of doorway entrance.

At the two adjoining sides of the doorway entrance are two rows of windows arranged with clean geometrical and symmetrical lines. Resonating with the classical design of the entablature along the roofline, the architrave with matching design emphasizes consistency and regularity of the overall architectural style. The moulding of the architrave is made of Shanghai plaster. They were originally wooden windows before the replacement in 1971, yet now

⁸ IU Tak-lam was also a graduate of the University of Hong Kong. From 1935-1936, he also partnered with John Caer Clark and continued his practice subsequent to the end of their partnership.

they are complimented with metal grills.

The semi-circular fanlight at the main entrance is embellished with a set of geometric shaped glazing segmented to imitate rays of sunbeams radiating out from the central disk to form a sunburst. Transom lights can be found above most doors in the building providing cross-ventilation and lighting across the interior. Usually found in sets of four, six or eight divisions of parallel rectangles glazing, transom light is a common feature adopted before electric lighting and air-conditioning were brought to practical usage.

The largest room in the Main Building, Kwan Ti Hall is built without columns and pillars and there are only four beams supporting the structure to provide a spacious room for massive events and high-population gatherings, complementing the high headroom of the hall.

The ceiling and stone couplets are decorated with traditional Chinese culture elements, such as the bat-shaped relief which represents “blessing” according to Chinese tradition. The interior of the ground floor is also seen finished with colourful terrazzo patterns, ranging from the floors to walls. The use of various colours including yellow, green and red for the terrazzo finishes can be found, which are examples of the building’s Art Deco design.

The Main Building is a good example of 1930s Neo-Classical architecture with Art Deco influence. It does not appear to have undergone many alterations and retains its authentic appearance as the expansion of other blocks have been utilised for its diverted usage. It is the most historical building within the headquarters. Its use and cultural association have also been retained and continued to serve the local community over the past century.

***Authenticity
& Rarity***

PLK is a major organisation in Hong Kong providing a wide range of social services, from child care to education, medical services and care for the elderly. Thanks to the diverse services and fund raising activities over the years, PLK has created a strong connection with the people of Hong Kong.

***Social Value
& Local
Interest***

In 1998, PLK set up a museum within the building for recording and passing on the history and achievements of the organisation. Lectures, workshops and guided tours in relation to the building’s history and traditions were organised over the years on site and online during the time of pandemic,

most notably would be the “Po Leung Heritage”, an online virtual tour for members of the public to understand the architectural and cultural heritage of the Main Building. To celebrate the building’s 90th anniversary, an “Open Day” was held in 2022 by PLK which attracted up to 1,700 visitors. The building represents the spirit of PLK’s dedication to serving the community throughout the years since its establishment and is a well-known landmark in Causeway Bay.

The Main Building does not only share group value with the nearby ***Group Value*** Tung Wah Eastern Hospital (Grade 2), which is also founded by a Chinese charitable organisation, but also with the surrounding buildings of different natures. These include St. Paul’s Convent Church (Grade 1), St. Paul’s Primary Catholic School (Grade 2), St. Margaret’s Church (Grade 1), Confucius Hall (Grade 1), Race Course Fire Memorial (Declared Monument), Shing Kwong Church, The Church of Christ in China (Grade 2), and S.K.H. St. Mary’s Church (Grade 1). Most of the above-mentioned buildings are historical imprints of various religious and charitable organisations settling in Causeway Bay.

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