

# Preserving the treasured cultural heritage

## ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT ANTIQUITIES AND MONUMENTS OFFICE

From a small fishing village to Asia's world city, the transformation of Hong Kong is a legend of international attention. Interspersed by wars, occupation and periods of uncertainty, the city of global importance is marked with relics of its history.

Only with careful preservation of Eastern cultures and Western offerings can an enchanting mixture of harmony be kept in this modern metropolis.

The government has developed a number of trails, linking monuments and significant historical buildings or sites within walking distance, to promote heritage conservation. These include the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail and the Central and Western Heritage Trail.

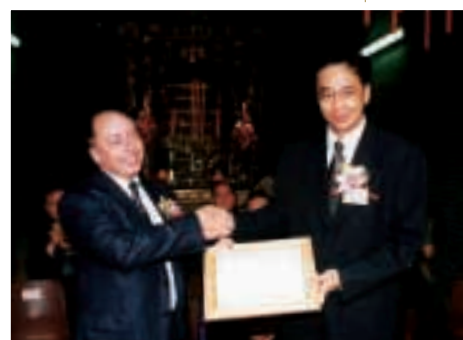
The government's determination to conserve Hong Kong's heritage was expounded by the Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee Hwa, in his 1998 Policy Address when he said: "To foster a sense of belonging and identity, we need to promote our heritage, which is a valuable cultural legacy. This involves the protection of historic buildings and archaeological sites, some of which are more than 6,000 years old."

"We will also look to strengthen Hong Kong's own unique culture which embodies a successful blend of the best of the East and West," He said.

With this vision, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has been trying to protect this culture. For example, the AMO has organised the conservation team for repairing and restoring the King Law Ka Shuk Ancestral Hall at Tai Po Tau Tsuen, in co-operation with the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) and the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

The restoration project, which began in 1998 and completed in 2001 to revert the ancestral hall into the architectural style of Qing dynasty (1644 -1911), was awarded the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation: Award of Merit.

*Presentation of Certificate for Award of Merit of UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage 2001 Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation by Dr Richard Engelhardt, UNESCO Regional Adviser for Culture in Asia and the Pacific to Mr Paul Leung, former Director of Leisure and Cultural Services.*



## Bringing the treasured monument to the public

The panel of judges for the award commented with appreciation:

*“The outstanding restoration and preservation of the King Law Ka Shuk ancestral hall sets an example in the application of best practice methodology of renovation and in demonstrating the value of restoration and conservation of an historic building for community use.”*

*“Carried out through a balanced conservation approach and strong community involvement, the restoration was an ambitious extrapolation to bring the ancestral hall to its original state, also integrating some of the modern elements from the 1930s.”*



The Certificate of Award of Merit of UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage 2001 Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation.

Assistant Curator of the AMO, Mr Ng Chi-wo, said: “We are very proud that such an authoritative organisation has recognised our government’s concern for cultural heritage.

Chief Architect (Central Management Branch) of the ArchSD Mrs Priscilla Tam agreed, saying: “We are honoured to have contributed to the meaningful project and have protected a cherished trace of Hong Kong’s history.”

She said: “The monument was built in early 1700s and has been restored many times. All that remains of the first structure such as the traditional grey brick walls, timber brackets, the ancestral altar, timber carving and the plastered decoration are carefully preserved.

Traditional craftsman restores the decorated plaster surface.

“Identifying and recollecting the original design and building materials to restore the building posed a great challenge both artistically and historically.”



Mr Ng said the most difficult task was to reconcile the requirements of the architects with those of clan members and there were times when “feng shui” was used to resolve some matters which were of particular concern to clan members.

## Impact of the project on the community

Owned by the Tang Clan, the ancestral hall at Tai Po Tau Tsuen, was originally built to commemorate the clan’s 10th generation ancestor Tang King Law.

The hall was constructed as a study hall for teaching and preparing clan members for the important imperial examinations. With the government’s program of building primary and secondary schools in the territory, the educational function of the building ended in 1948.

It was also a village meeting hall and a ceremonial hall to honour the clan’s ancestors.



The altar of King Law Ka Shuk ancestral hall after restoration.

Careful redecoration of the main altar, which was of utmost religious importance, especially justified the hard work of the AMO and the ArchSD by the admiration of fellow clansmen living in other villages.

“The hall has now reverted to its former use as a central celebration venue for traditional village functions,” Mr Ng said. “It is also an attraction for the emigrated Tang clan members for making visits to their home village.”



Left: King Law Ka Shuk ancestral hall before renovation.

Right: King Law Ka Shuk ancestral hall after restoration.

### **Dedicated to conserving cultural heritage**

Besides the winning project of King Law Ka Shuk, Hong Kong also won UNESCO Asia-Pacific heritage awards for the restoration projects of Hung Shing Temple at Kau Sai Chau, the Ohel Leah Synagogue and the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

Hong Kong’s heritage items are a testimony to her unique past. Conserved heritage also forms part of Hong Kong people’s collective memory and defines their cultural identity. There is a growing recognition of the importance of heritage conservation in urban development and an increasing commitment by the community to support the government to conserve our heritage.

Conservation of the former pumping station of the Water Supplies Department in Shanghai Street, and some of the buildings in the St Joseph’s Home for the Aged as well as the Lui Seng Chun Building at Sham Shui Po are landmark examples.

The triumph of conserved heritage was seen again in February, 2004, when the government reached a consensus with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints after a year of negotiations on the preservation of the historic Kom Tong Hall building.

The hall was built in 1914 as a residence of the affluent Ho Kom-tong, younger brother of Sir Robert Ho Tung. Built in the classical style architecture of the Edwardian period, the building is lavishly decorated with stained glass windows, teakwood staircase and panels. It was bought by the church in 1960 for religious purposes and will be converted, for permanent preservation, into a Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum in close vicinity with the Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail.



*Kom Tong Hall, built in 1914, will be converted into a museum to introduce Dr Sun Yat-sen, one of the most respected figures in Hong Kong history.*