

Collectors' items

Two Hong Kong surveyors find fascination in their hobbies as collectors, each one with a particular relevance to their trade.

May Chan Rhodes



Sr Alan Cheung (R) and Sr Joe Wu (L) build up their collection of past images of Hong Kong and lego over the years.

Photo: SCMP and Sr Alan Cheung

“Not only is the street façade changing, but also its texture and feel ... The construction industry used to be more fragmented, so every building looked different.”

Collecting past images of Hong Kong is a way to not only preserve the memory of the city's transient landscape, but also to record fascinating changes in the fabric of life. One avid collector of such images is

Sr Alan Cheung Shun-kwong, Vice-Chairman of the Hong Kong Collectors Society, whose collection of postcards portraying Hong Kong's history and culture numbers in the thousands.

Cheung has authored several books on Hong Kong's changing urban landscape and his collection is very much in demand. He regularly loans his pictures out to both private companies and the government for use in various initiatives.

Cheung trained as a quantity surveyor in the 1980s and then worked among the many beautiful buildings that dotted the streets of Central, often witnessing their passing as Hong Kong's rapid development called for the old to be demolished to make way for the new. To document and record the many vanishing faces of the city, he started collecting images of Hong Kong. But it wasn't until after being approached to contribute his collection to a public exhibition on the eve of the 1997 handover that he was struck by the level of enthusiasm among the general public.

“For three months, people queued up to catch a glimpse of what Hong Kong used to be,” Cheung says. “Thousands of copies of the photo catalogue were sold as people feared the Hong Kong they knew might change drastically after the handover.” It was also a time when the topic of heritage preservation started to enter into the public discourse.

Many of the stunning European-style buildings captured in Cheung's pictures are long gone.

The impressive Central Fire Station, for example, was demolished to be replaced in 1991 by the Hang Seng Bank Headquarters. The regal Gloucester Building, which celebrities, movie stars and journalists used to frequent to take tea in its elegantly subdued café setting, was torn down to make way for today's Landmark building.

The three-storey tea houses, hotels, cinemas, and shops on Des Voeux Road Central and Pedder Street have all but vanished into distant memory as more and more high-rise buildings and skyscrapers have been erected and the city's skyline has climbed ever higher.

“Not only is the street façade changing, but also its texture and feel,” Cheung says. “In the past, stone and timber were used for most of the buildings because Hong Kong used to have a lot of natural quarries. The construction industry also used to be more diverse and fragmented, so every building looked different because they were built by various small companies rather than a few major players.”

The texture of buildings became increasingly uniform throughout the city as a result of cost savings and changes in the construction industry, Cheung adds. Masonry began to be replaced by curtain walls in the 1970s, and then to the pre-cast materials nowadays.

Some of the older architectural techniques also became history due to the dominance of high-rise buildings. Long corridors, for example, used to be a common feature of European-style buildings as they would isolate living quarters from the summer heat and from cold drafts in winter. It was as practical as it was beautiful as an architectural feature.

Cheung says that he procured his in-depth knowledge of the characteristics and history of Hong Kong's buildings through study and research. Whenever a new image came into

his possession, he would use a magnifying glass to study the street signs, billboards, and company names visible within. He would then pore through the annual reports published by the government that recorded company names, contacts and addresses to identify the buildings, and establish their longevity before they were torn down.

There is also a vibrant community of Hong Kong history enthusiasts and image collectors ready to discuss things about the past. As interest in the local history of Hong Kong grew steadily over time, the HKIS began organising walks around the city where surveyors would explain the history and technical aspects of various buildings. The Institute also publishes "Surveyors Serve Hong Kong" to demonstrate the achievements and contributions of surveyors based on a study of various landmarks in Central.

While leading a guided walk, Cheung explains what an existing building used to be, and compares the costs of the original building and the new building by way of demonstrating how construction costs have escalated over the past few decades, thus affecting the property price.

"When I told my audience that you needed less than HK\$50,000 to buy a property in the 1960s, I could see I had touched a nerve," Cheung says. "But then I went on to explain that the average salary of a white-collar worker at that time was probably around HK\$200 a month and they realised the property price was not so cheap after all.

"Property prices are one of the ways of glimpsing how the living standards of everyday people have changed with time. It is fascinating."

Sr Joe Wu, who is also a quantity surveyor, has a different collecting habit but one that he pursues with the same verve as Cheung.

He started collecting Lego a few years ago to help with his volunteer job teaching maths and science to disadvantaged school children.

"It is very refreshing to talk to young children after a stressful day at work," Wu says. "I love how their eyes shine with excitement when they are about to build something using the Lego blocks. They also program the motors to bring their objects to life with movement. They are able to understand the maths and science behind it, and apply it in a tangible way."

Wu also discovered that there is an active community of Lego collectors because of new software that allows users to design and build online. After building a Lego structure online, the software will then calculate what parts are needed for the structure, and collectors can start sourcing the parts amongst themselves.

Wu says this is surprisingly close to what the surveying industry is trying to achieve with the latest BIM (Building Information Modelling) technology, which is being used to generate bills of quantities based on the virtual building model. The technology informs surveyors what building parts are needed and in what quantity.

"I actually used the Lego allegory at an industry conference to explain what BIM can do, and it was very warmly received by the audience because they could all relate to using Lego blocks," Wu says. "I love how collecting can bring people together, help them to connect, and help them materialise abstract ideas."

The article is published courtesy of Classified Post.

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測量以外

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收藏家的藏品

兩位香港測量師對收藏情有獨鐘，而他們的藏品均與工作息息相關。

May Chan Rhodes

收藏香港昔日的照片，不但能夠在記憶中保留轉瞬即逝的風景，同時亦可記錄生活當中令人著迷的點滴變化。現任香港收藏家協會副主席的張順光測量師，一直熱衷於收藏照片，其珍藏的明信片多達數千張，每一張皆是香港的歷史及文化的見證。

張氏在香港城市景觀變化方面多有著述，而他的藏品亦頗受歡迎。他會將他的照片定期借予私人公司及政府，供各類活動使用。

張氏於上個世紀八十年代受訓成為工料測量師，踏入職場之後，曾在中環一帶多棟華麗的建築物內工作。他多次親眼見證這些建築隨著香港的迅速發展而被拆除，並由新建築取而代之。為記錄香港昔日的容貌，他開始收藏關於香港的照片。不過，直至在 1997 年主權移交前夕，他將藏品獻出作公開展覽後，他才驚訝地發現公眾的熱情如此高漲。

張氏稱，「大家擔心，在主權移交之後，香港的容貌會發生翻天覆地的變化。人們為留存香港昔日的芳容而排隊參觀展覽，數千本相冊被搶購一空。這股熱潮持續了足足三個月之久。」亦正是在這個時候，文物保護這一話題開始進入公眾視線。

張氏的照片所展現的歐式風格建築令人嘆為觀止，但如今已不復存在。舉例而言，引人矚目的中環消防局於 1991 年被恆生銀行總部所取代。至於如今被置地廣場所取代的羅素士打大廈，當時以豪華規格著稱，大廈內更設有格調高雅的咖啡廳，吸引一眾名流、影星及記者前來嘆茶。



張順光測量師

隨著愈來愈多的高層建築及摩天大樓拔地而起以及城市的天際線不斷上升，德輔道中及畢打街的三層茶樓、酒店、影院及商舖亦無一倖免，只能永遠藏於人們的回憶中。

張氏說，「不單只是街道的景觀，其質地及觀感亦在不斷變化。在過去，香港擁有大量天然採石場，因此大部分建築是用石頭及木材建造而成。過去的建築行業較為多元化及分散，建築多由不同的小公司而非少數大公司建造，因此每棟建築的外觀各有特色。」

張氏亦提到，出於節省成本考慮及由於建築行業的變化，本港的建築質感亦趨同質化。及至上個世紀七十年代，玻璃幕牆開始取代砌石，之後又逐漸演變為今時今日的預製材料。

隨著高層建築日漸佔據主流，一些舊時的建築技術亦逐漸成為歷史。例如，長廊是歐式風格建築的共同特點之一，其主要作用是確保冬暖夏涼。這個建築特點既實用又美觀。

張氏表示，為求深入了解香港建築的特點及歷史，他會進行認真研究及調查。一旦有新照片到手，他均會透過放大鏡研究照片中的路標、廣告牌及可辨認的公司名稱。隨後，他更會仔細研讀政府發佈的年度報告，利用年報中記載的公司名稱、聯絡方式及地址，辨別該棟建築物及確定其樓齡。

香港亦有一個活躍的歷史愛好者及照片收藏家群體。他們對於本港的歷史如數家珍。隨著公眾對香港本土歷史的興趣日漸濃厚，香港測量師學會開始組織城市導賞團。測量師會就不同建築的歷史及技術問題進行講解。本會亦出版了「測量專業建香港 (Surveyors Serve Hong Kong)」，以多個中環的地標作研究，從而展示測量師的成就和貢獻。

在帶領市民參與導賞團期間，張氏會講解現有建築物的前身，並會展示過去數十年建築成本的上升趨勢，從而對原有建築與新建築進行成本比較，讓聽眾了解影響樓價的因素。

張氏說，「當我告知聽眾，在二十世紀六十年代，只需不到 50,000 港元就可以買樓時，我知道這個話題觸及到大家的敏感神經。但是，當我提到，當時的白領平均月薪大約只有 200 港元時，他們亦明白當時的樓價其實並不算低。」

「透過樓價的變化，可以窺見人們的生活質素如何隨著時間而演變。這是一個有趣的現象。」

同樣身為工料測量師，胡錦輝測量師與張氏的收藏愛好截然不同卻抱有同樣的熱情。他於數年前開始收藏樂高玩具，用於在弱勢學校傳授數學及科學知識。

胡氏稱，「經過一日緊張工作後與年幼兒童交談，會給人耳目一新的感覺。我非常樂於見到他們用樂高積木建造時，目光中流露出興奮之情。他們亦為物件裝上馬達，為其賦予生命力。他們能夠明白當中蘊藏的數學及科學原理，並以可見的方式靈活運用。」

胡氏發現，新推出的軟體允許用戶在網上設計及建造樂高模型，由此衍生一個活躍的樂高玩具收藏家群體。於網上建造樂高結構後，該軟體會計算該結構所需的部件，而收藏家可開始相互物色相關部件。

胡氏稱，這個軟體與測量行業使用的最新 BIM (建築資訊模型) 技術所得的成果驚人地相似。利用 BIM，可為虛擬建築模型製作工料清單。該技術讓測量師能夠知曉所需的建築部件及工料數量。

胡氏說，「我曾經在行業會議上利用樂高玩具解釋 BIM 的用處。由於大家會自然而然地聯想到樂高積木，我的方法頗受聽眾歡迎。我非常樂意見到透過收藏而將人們連繫在一起，互相交流和將抽象的概念具體化。」

本文由《Classified Post》撰文。



胡錦輝測量師

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