

## Past Event

### Experiencing the intangibles of Preservation

*Conservation in Practice Talk by Kenneth Yeh on 18 February 2005*

Trained as an Architect and Urban Designer in the USA, Ken Yeh is young but experienced and passionate about heritage and self-portraits with sculptures. He appreciates vernacular architecture, indigenous building style evolved through local/regional conditions and cultural traditions. He works on refinement, producing modernist architecture without ornamentation and embellishments. "Modernist architecture is about clean lines and honest use of materials, very open and airy spaces – an architecture of efficiency." Unbeknown to some heritage lovers, modern buildings do have heritage values.

So, what is the value system for Architecture?

During his presentation, Ken lamented that it was tough convincing some clients to opt for heritage conservation, In practice, he would use success stories to impress his clients and sought to balance original intent with adaptation, bringing resources, research and economy into manageable components. In real life, high ideals of architecture, aesthetics and memories are low priorities. Buildings are valued as property rather than a bed of memories – homes where children grow up, workshops, offices and factories where most people spend much of their hours earning their keep. "Use-Value" is up against its "Market-Value".

On human resources, local building-craftsmen carry their local culture factors and Ken is quick to accept their skills and practices. On Urban Planning, it is clear that Ken considers the ambience of old buildings as intrinsic to a city's built heritage. De-centralization – emptying out the city centre as development happens at the fringe – all but destroys the city and its heritage buildings. Only a walkable city and good public transport could bring people back to the city.

Ken called for inclusion of the young in our heritage preservation. "Young people are the future – they can start the mind-shift to get balanced values of their buildings. Their action will determine the future of our heritage." Of this, he cited Dublin's Group 91, a group of ten eighteen-year-olds, who went about voluntarily refurbishing old warehouses to revitalize their city.

Ken was accompanied by his wife, Carol - also an architect. During the Q&A, Carol encouraged PHS thus: "If you haven't got much, you've got to keep what you have! Support heritage preservation!" and "Do not be disheartened. The world is not against us. You are the pioneers!"

*Ed: A very lively discussion followed Ken's presentation. All present got involved and the night stretched well into my supper (late dinner) time! Carol and Ken are now based in Sydney, Australia. We wish them both the very best in their professional work. We should like to hear them again the next time they come home to Ipoh.*



Carol & Kenneth Yeh

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*"If you haven't got much, you've got to keep what you have!"*