Interviewing the community in Yangon historic districts
Understanding the nostalgic shop and community
Hands-on experience in laying Chinese roof tiles
Building arches at Badaling, the Great Wall
Participating in the UNESCO conference in Penang
Vision for the Field

At a glance, conservation and development appear to hold conflicting agendas that are mutually exclusive, but is that true? In as early as 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) suggested an integrated approach towards conservation and development, according to which the conservation of built heritage should be considered a catalyst for high-quality development instead of an obstacle for development.

As Dr. Lee Ho Yin, Associate Professor and Head of the Division of Architectural Conservation Programmes (ACP) at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) explains, “As property development reaches saturation in the urban areas, an option for sustainable development is through massive urban renewal. However, this comes with the consequences of escalating property prices and rental rates, which will ultimately destroy the local community’s established social and economic infrastructure. A better option is through smaller-scale, non-demolition-based rehabilitation and revitalisation of the building stock, which raises property value without severely impacting the cultural heritage resources of the community, from its tangible heritage buildings to its intangible social and business networks. In this manner, conservation can serve as a driver for sustainable development as well as a regulator for the pace of change in the urban built-environment.”

In 2012, ACP introduced the four-year Bachelor of Arts in Conservation Degree [BA(Conservation)] to meet a growing need for graduates with professional knowledge in built-heritage conservation. In 2015, ACP realigned with the Department of Real Estate and Construction in order to demonstrate the programme’s pedagogic position more clearly within the framework of urban development, and through its professional accreditation by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

Mission of the Programme

ACP’s BA(Conservation) programme should not be confused with the study of archaeology, culture, or history, as the curriculum focuses on the conservation of architectural heritage in the built environment to achieve the goals of urban sustainable development.

The curriculum takes students from a year-1 introductory foundation course to more advanced year-2 courses, including those in cutting-edge documentation techniques (for example, 3D laser scanning), global and local urban conservation policies, and built heritage interpretation theories and practice. In year-3 and the final year-4, students explore the innovative possibilities and economic feasibilities of revitalising heritage building through field studies to sites in Hong Kong and elsewhere, such as Yangon in Myanmar, Shaxi in Yunnan, and Kaiping in Guangdong.

Field studies, workshops, and practical training are an integral part of the BA(Conservation) curriculum, allowing students to learn from real-life conservation projects in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and overseas countries. The programme’s emphasis on experiential learning provides students with opportunities for practical training in conservation-related projects. Depending on individual abilities, interests, and career plans, students may be placed with suitable government agencies, local or overseas private consultancies, and building contractors, as well as local or international NGOs – the former such as Viva Blue House and Tai Kwun, and the latter such as UNESCO.

Careers for Graduates

The BA(Conservation) programme is accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), allowing graduates to qualify as chartered surveyors upon meeting the requirements of the RICS Assessment of Professional Competence. The BA(Conservation) qualification provides graduates with multiple career options, from involving in conservation projects as an accredited conservation professional of the Hong Kong Institute of Architectural Conservationists (HKICON), to working in development projects as a surveyor and/or project manager, and serving in academic institutions in teaching and research.

For graduates who aspire to further enhance their professional competencies, the BA(Conservation) is a recognized basis for postgraduate studies in many Master’s programmes at HKU and other universities, including architectural design, urban planning, urban design, and landscape architecture. In addition, the HKU Department of Real Estate and Construction has announced a 4+1 Degree option, allowing First Class Honours and Second Class Honours Division One graduates of the BA(Conservation) programme to have the privilege of unconditional admission to the Master of Science in Real Estate or Master of Science in Construction Project Management programmes within two years of graduation.

In short, the integrated conservation-and-development pedagogy of the BA(Conservation) is a pioneering professional educational approach to especially meet the increasing interdisciplinary demands for built-heritage professionals pursuing careers with Hong Kong, Mainland China, and with a global outreach in mind.