

LIKE



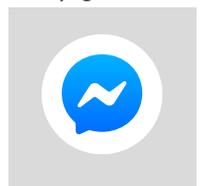
Written by –
Isobel McKenzie
on February 5th 2019

What started as a patch of scraggly land merely decades ago is now one of Hong Kong's best kept secrets. The Dragon Garden began as a private oasis, developed by a rich philanthropist who enjoyed the space holding swimming galas and hosting peaceful downtime with his family. Now it's a place for learning and exploring spirituality and faith, as the rural campus for Christian educational establishment [Lumina College](#).

PLAY VIDEO

Cultural Heritage History

You're hard pushed not to find traces of Dr. Lee Lu Cheung's legacy in [Hong Kong](#). With a hand in reforming and constructing many of the hospital, social housing and education systems in the city, his spirit of giving had a huge impact on how social care and clinics are run today. Retreating from public life, his garden was a place for quiet contemplation, and also a playground for cultural history. Pathways are lined with old ceramic ginger beer bottles, leftover from his bottling factory, and Grade II listed buildings can be found between the stream, koi ponds and rich flora and fauna. It's the biggest private park in Hong Kong, a place you easily get lost in and find yourself exploring new paths every time – if you're lucky enough to visit.

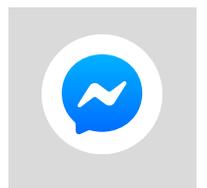


LIKE



A Place for Spirituality

You enter the Dragon Garden from the busy Castle Peak road, but inside is quiet thanks to the thick buttressed stone wall and tree cover that mutes the passing traffic. While not overtly religious, the garden embraces spirituality from across the Western and Eastern traditions; there's a gold mosaic featuring Mary and baby Jesus hanging on one of the sea-facing walls, Confucian art, and Buddhist monuments provide space for sacred traditions. In the spirit of serving the public, The Dragon Garden is now managed by [Lumina College](#), a Christian higher education institute that uses the garden as its rural campus.



LIKE



You Have To Go Upstream

“Lumina College is intending to be a meeting of mind; of East and West,” explains Dr. Leung Wing Tai, Founding President of Lumina College who now cares for the Dragon Garden. “It’s a cultural hybrid because the world is getting smaller through social media. Through the global village, we are getting smaller.”

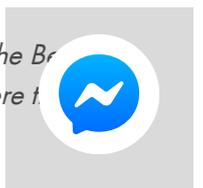
After working in youth education in Hong Kong for forty-five years with his non-profit organization Breakthrough, Leung is concerned that with the change in pace of technology we require a different shade of leadership qualities to the generations before. For “the future leaders, we need bridge-builders of multi-cultural [exchange]”. We sat down together in one of the Grade II listed buildings, to discuss Lumina College and the Dragon Garden’s role in leadership studies.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START THE LUMINA COLLEGE?

In a river if the upstream is bad then the downstream is problematic, so you have to go to the upstream — which is the world view and values of people. You have to go back to the origin. There are two things that shape the world views of a society. One is popular media; culture. Second is higher education where thoughts and values are shaped.

I was involved in popular media in Breakthrough; as a filmmaker I was trained at USC in film. George Lucas was my many years senior and Steven Spielberg – so I know what you are doing [he laughs and nods at the videographer].

That’s why the 20 years ago I already made documentaries about Japan and Eastern Europe and the Berlin wall and all of that. So mass media and popular culture was one [reason]. At this time and age where the whole industry of higher education was in crisis because you had the global economic tsunami.



LIKE

world view context, use creativity through leveraging culture, and having a commitment to shaping our world through kindness, faith and morals.



"I think Hong Kong needs cultural heritage and collective memory," explains Leung. I asked him what it is about the Dragon Garden that is special to him, and at its essence, having a cultural history allows community and the city to look toward the future. The garden captures the good efforts of its founder Dr. Lee Lu Cheung and is held as a good example to set when caring about community.

"At that time around 1948 when he started to build this garden, Hong Kong was about what — half a million people?" asks Leung. "But then during 1948 to 1952 there are over one million refugees [that] came and the Hong Kong colonial government was shocked, and didn't know what to do. The church, Catholic and other Christians, helped a little bit in the charity and some social organisations rose up. However this guy together with some friends — he faced the challenges of over one million refugees. He built what we call private low rent housing."

Taking a look back in time, Hong Kong has always had a rich history of immigration. But at the end of the Chinese Civil War and as borders began tightening, by 1956 Hong Kong's population density became one of the highest in the world. Dr. Lee Lu Cheung began constructing low rent housing, and stepped in to make hospital care affordable to this swell of people. "No one wanted to be Tung Wah Hospital chairman because it was losing money, and he rose up to become the chairman and modernize it. No more tips, no more nurse and cleaners squeezing money from the patients. No more, okay? All clean," smiles Leung. The hospital group still works to provide 600 free beds every year to those in need, while the government highly subsidizes medical costs for the rest.



LIKE



Bridging East and West in the Dragon Garden



LIKE



LIKE

In a 60s-era pavilion, I sat at a round table with Dr. Leung and asked how the Dragon Garden fits with the Lumina College mission now that it functions as one of its campus spaces.

I think it's a good experiential learning ground. We have the Jordan campus — you have not been to the Jordan campus?" he queried. I had not. "Hong Kong is very big. It has many subways — if you get off at Shep Kip Mei or Sha Tin Wai you have nothing; low rent housing, two restaurants and a market, that's all. But in Jordan you have everything; the city is our campus. We are next to the southern terminal of the high speed train of the whole China high speed train network. Next to us is West Kowloon. West Kowloon cultural district is next to us; all the museums and concert halls available. Kowloon Park; an Olympic-sized swimming pool free of charge — no, you have to pay \$11," he laughed. "Almost free."

With the Jordan campus in the centre of the action, it's a delight for the students and teachers to have the Dragon Garden as a rural getaway. "Bringing students here, you have a different perspective on life — you are away from the city. Being away from the city you are more closer to nature than you have a [wider] perspective." They use the space for ceramics, photography, teaching video storytelling and hosting retreats. It's a place to reflect, unwind and clear the mind. "For us, Lumina College, your life is a mission. Your life is a song. Your life is worship. You don't just [say], 'I go on Sunday for worship. I sing a song,' no! Your LIFE is a song, is a poem, is worship. So we try to instill that."



LIKE

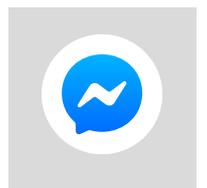


LIKE

To be able to become such a giving philanthropist, Dr. Lee Lu Cheung amassed his fortune in a number of ways. He ran a construction company, he introduced the flush toilet to Hong Kong, sold ginger beer, and he found a lucrative market in chicken feet. "You know nobody wants it in America, they just throw it away!" laughs Leung. "He bought it for free and it became a delicacy in dim sum. So this guy knows how to make money! Then he spent every cent to nurture Hong Kong." It's the entrepreneurial and charitable aspirations that Lumina College aim to pass on to their students.

Another teaching moment for Lumina College students about charitable giving is all in the Dragon Garden's swimming pool. One of the first things Dr. Lee Lu-Cheng built in the garden was a big swimming pool, with a pipe that draws up water from the beach across the road. It was intended for local schoolchildren to have lessons swimming galas long before the first public swimming pool was built in Victoria Park. In the 1970s, the garden was used as a film set, most notably the James Bond movie *The Man With the Golden Gun*. The rental fees for hiring the garden went back into charities.

In Search of the Dragon by Kacey Wong



LIKE



Although the pool is no longer in use, the Dragon Garden is still a place for taking photos and film shoots for Lumina. Lumina College have designed a Master of the Arts in Communication and Digital Storytelling, pairing with Kentucky-based liberal arts college Asbury University as one of the many programs they offer. Dr. Leung himself, who enjoys making documentaries, created a piece about the garden founder *Hong Kong Gardener. Dr. Lee lu Cheung.*

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE LUMINA COLLEGE MASTER OF THE ARTS PROGRAMS?

If the seminary and the church talk about heaven and the other schools talk about earth skills, [...] we are like Jacob's Ladder. Have you heard of Jacob's Ladder? The angels are ascending and descending, so we try to look at the world through the lens of faith and seeing Christ in the world; in media; and so on. We try to connect the two and that is the uniqueness.

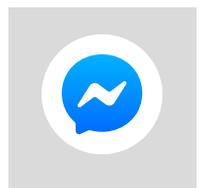
Secondly, we are different from other Christian colleges. Many Christian colleges in the world, they focus on Evangelism. They focus on chapel. They focus on fellowship and some they focus on character; ethics, moral. Those are all good! But to me, [with] Christian higher education, you have to have a world view approach. Go to the deep structure of the economics.

So the first point is we are different from the seminary, and then different from the secular schools because we are more heavenly. Thirdly, is that when you go into CityU or HKU you study a degree, a local degree. And [when] you go to England you study an English degree. But in Hong Kong through partnership with different universities then your program is both global and local; one third is taught by the faculty flying in.

Fourthly, it's hybrid. Today either we have online program or face to face (full time). Then for those hybrid programs on the market, maybe a Masters, maybe a PhD, most of them [only] have one week or one month intensive face to face and then the whole program is online. Then at the end before you graduate, you come again for one month only; and that will satisfy all those face to face hours. We don't believe in that. We believe in every course — every course — if you have ten courses, every course we have two days face to face.



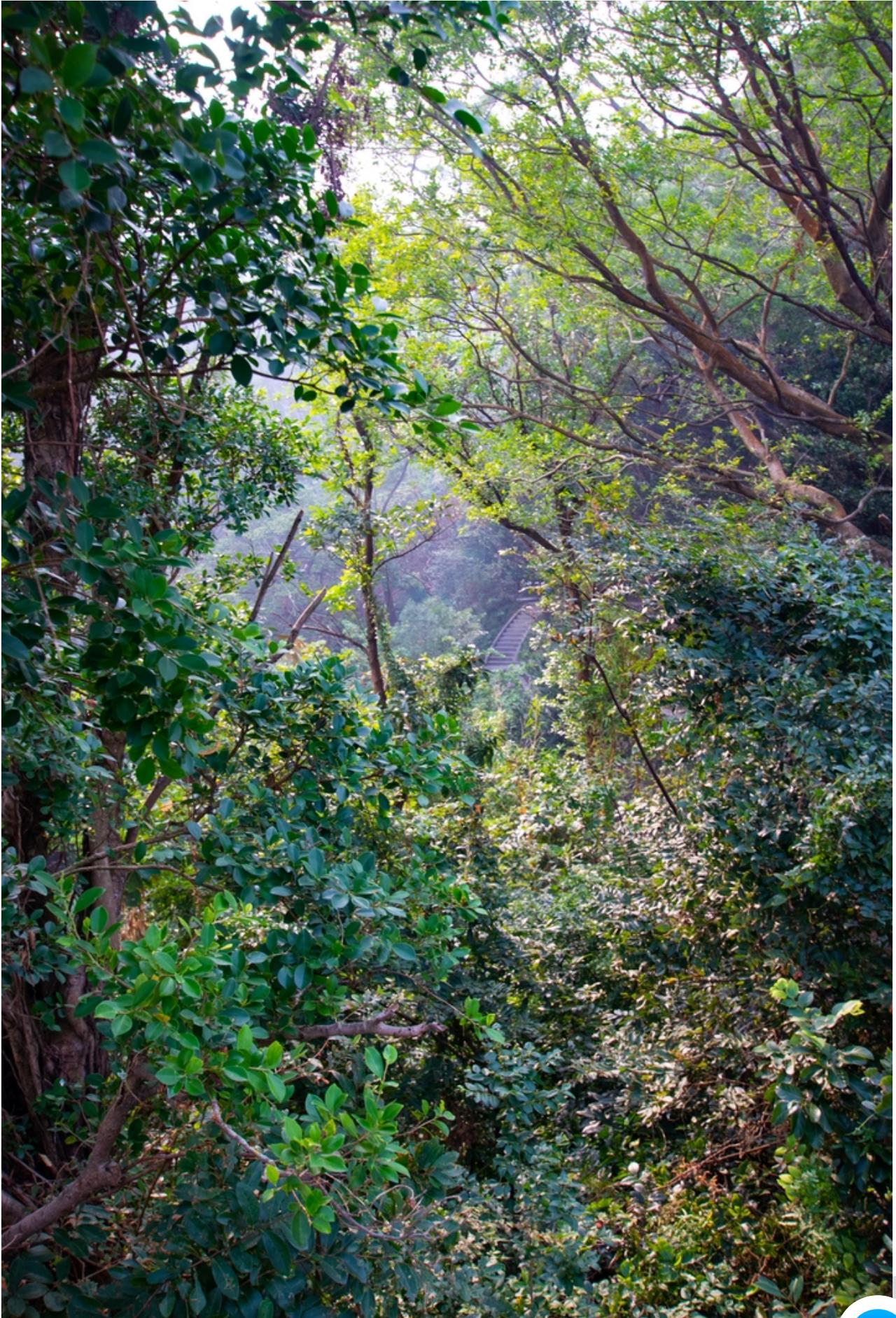
LIKE



LIKE



LIKE

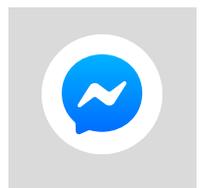


LIKE

After Dr. Lee lu Cheung's death in 1976, the garden was joint owned by his five sons. They sold it in 2006 to developers, but the youngest son bought it back to preserve its cultural heritage.

"He single handedly bought it back from Sun Hung Kai [property developers]. The brothers did not tell him which real estate [developers] they had sold it to. Then he searched and searched and searched. The chief at the time of Sun Kung Kai was Thomas Kwok, he was a Christian. The price had risen many times already but then that guy respected the younger son. He resold it back to the family for the same price he got it," Leung told me.

The youngest son originally wanted to donate the campus to Lumina College, but Dr. Leung didn't want to deal with the maintenance fees as it could not be sustained very easily. In the end, the son continues to cover the garden maintenance with Lumina College borrowing the space and taking care of it. Dr. Leung chuckled at the final arrangement, "now we are getting money and we are getting the campus."



LIKE

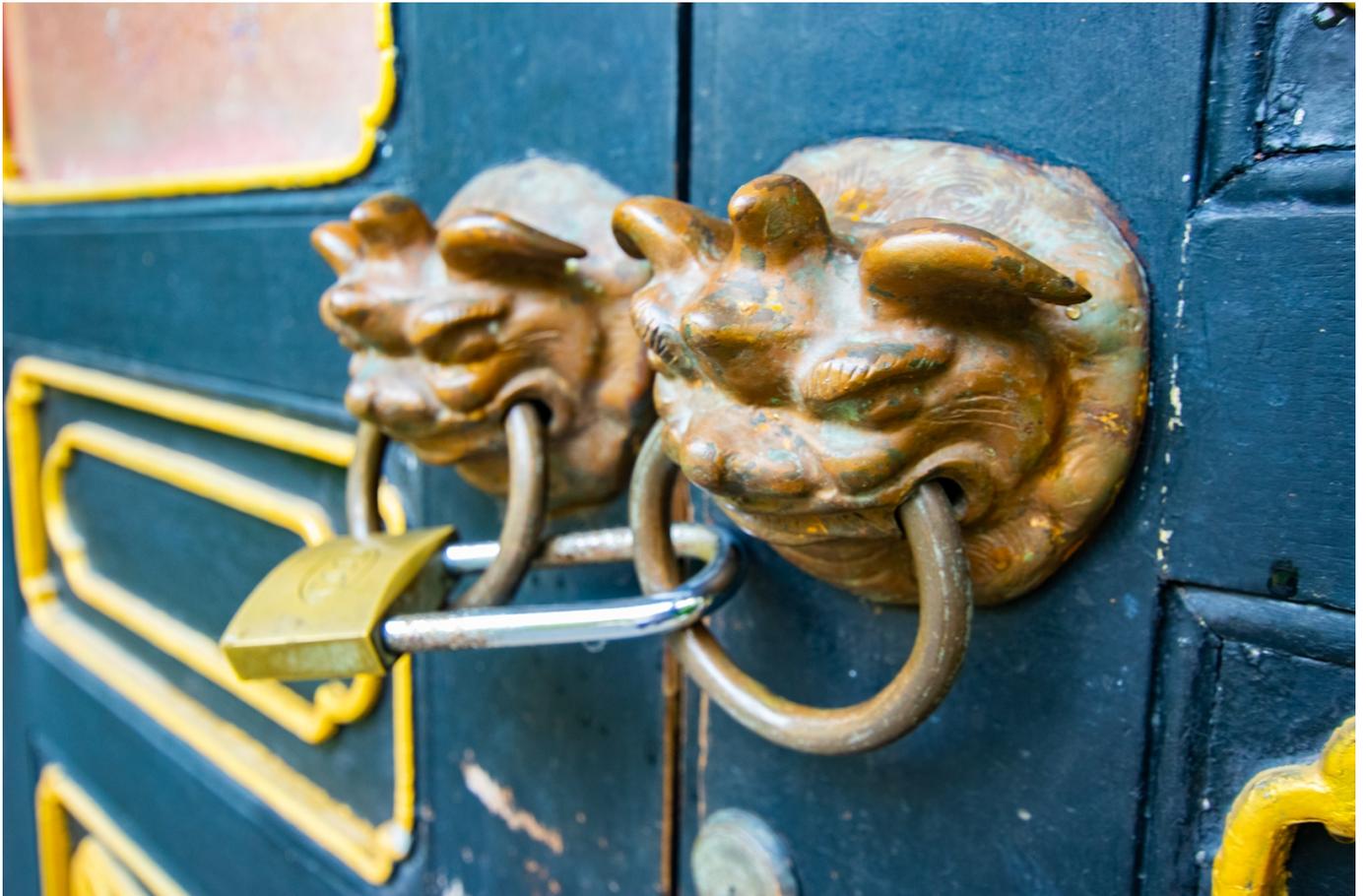


LIKE



LIKE

Back in the garden, I could see signs of spirituality and faith scattered in the various nooks and crannies of the sprawling estate. The gleaming gold tiles of the halos in the Maria Mosaic Mural are also met with Taoist and Confucian elements. A Buddhist-style shrine at the peak of the garden is the final resting place for Dr. Lee lu Cheung, a spot overlooking the sea view somewhere between the sky and the earth, an oasis of green in one of the most densely populated cities. The future of the Dragon Garden remains as a cultural heritage spot, it's great to know that students and visitors can enjoy the park as it was first intended.



If you're interested in finding out more about Lumina College, [you can find their website here](#).

To read more of our stories, [subscribe to our newsletter](#) or [find us on Instagram](#) for our daily design and art inspiration.

Tags: ARCHITECTURE, CHINA, DRAGON GARDEN, EDUCATIONAL, GARDEN, HILLSIDE, HONG KONG, IMPERIAL GARDEN LION, LEARN, LUMINA COLLEGE, OCEAN VIEW HOME, SCHOOL, VERTICAL GARDEN

