

**MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS OF THE
ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**CONSULTANCY STUDIES ON THE HERITAGE VALUE
OF HO TUNG GARDENS AT 75 PEAK ROAD**

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the findings of the consultancy studies commissioned by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) on the historical and architectural values of Ho Tung Gardens at 75 Peak Road.

BACKGROUND

2. At the special meeting of the Antiquities Advisory Board on 25 January 2011, Members unanimously endorsed the Grade 1 status of Ho Tung Gardens and supported the Antiquities Authority's proposal to declare Ho Tung Gardens as a proposed monument under section 2A(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53). The declaration was made on 28 January 2011 by notice in the Gazette and would be effective for 12 months. The declaration provides Ho Tung Gardens with legal protection for 12 months¹ and allow more time for the Antiquities Authority to consider in a comprehensive manner whether or not Ho Tung Gardens should be declared as a monument on a permanent basis under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance.

CONSULTANCY STUDIES COMMISSIONED

3. Declaration of a historic site as a proposed monument does not necessarily lead to its declaration as a monument. To facilitate the Antiquities Authority to make a decision on whether to declare Ho Tung Gardens as a

¹ During the period, Ho Tung Gardens will be subject to legal protection provided under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. The protection includes the prohibition of any building or other works on the proposed monument, or any actions to demolish, remove, obstruct, deface or interfere with the proposed monument unless a permit is granted by the Antiquities Authority.

monument under section 3(1) of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, AMO has commissioned the following two consultancies –

- (a) a consultancy jointly undertaken by Dr. Victor Zheng and Professor Siu-lun Wong to study the history of Ho Tung Gardens. Dr. Zheng was a Research Assistant Professor of the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences of The University of Hong Kong while Professor Wong is an Honorary Professor of the same institute. Both of them are recognised scholars on the history of the Ho Tung family and the authors of a number of publications on Sir Robert Ho Tung and his family members; and
- (b) a consultancy jointly undertaken by Dr. Lynne DiStefano, Dr. Ho-yin Lee and Mr. Curry Tse of the Architectural Conservation Programme (ACP) of The University of Hong Kong to study the architectural values of Ho Tung Gardens. Dr. DiStefano, who is an International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) World Heritage Technical Evaluator, has professional knowledge and expertise in historic landscape. Dr. Lee and Mr. Tse are recognised conservation architects who have practical experience in architectural conservation in Hong Kong.

FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTANCY STUDIES

4. According to the consultants, Ho Tung Gardens is of high historical and architectural value as summarised in paragraphs 5 to 7 below.

Historical value

5. While Ho Tung Gardens was not the main residence of Sir Robert Ho Tung, it was closely associated with him, his wife Lady Clara Ho Tung² and their children including General Robert Ho Shai-lai³, and other significant historical figures and events. Apart from being the venue of important family events (such as Christmas and New Year parties, and the funeral of Lady Clara

² Lady Clara Ho Tung (née Cheung) is the founder of the first Buddhist school for girls in Hong Kong (寶覺第一義學); and the founder of the Buddhist temple Tung Lin Kok Yuen (東蓮覺苑), which is a Grade 1 historic building.

³ General Ho Shai-lai is an important historical figure not only in the history of Hong Kong but also in the history of modern China.

Ho Tung), Ho Tung Gardens was also a site for receiving important guests such as Hau Pei-tsun (former Premier of the Republic of China) and George H. W. Bush (former President of the United States; he was the Chief of the United States Liaison Office in the People's Republic of China at the time of visiting Ho Tung Gardens). Ho Tung Gardens was also used as a base of military operation against the Japanese attack in 1941.

6. Ho Tung Gardens has important socio-cultural value and its historical significance is beyond doubt. During the early colonial days, Chinese tenements were not allowed to be built, and Chinese were restricted from living in the Peak. Sir Robert Ho Tung was the first non-European to receive permission from the then Hong Kong Government to reside in the Peak area. While Sir Robert Ho Tung had several Peak residences, Ho Tung Gardens was the only remaining Peak residence directly related to Sir Robert Ho Tung and was the only building with Chinese architectural elements built in the Peak area at that time. Ho Tung Gardens thus marked a break of the racial policy in the early colonial days.

Architectural value

7. Ho Tung Gardens exemplifies a mixture of Chinese and Western architectural elements. This type of buildings, named as “Chinese Renaissance architecture” by some architects, was popular in Hong Kong and China during the early 20th century. It represents not only an important page in the history of architecture in China and Hong Kong, but also the vision of China's first-generation-overseas-trained modern architects of a new China. These architects developed an architectural language that merged Chinese aesthetics with Western construction techniques. Therefore, the significant architectural merit of Ho Tung Gardens is in terms of it being an early example, and in fact appears to be the earliest surviving example, of Chinese Renaissance architecture in Hong Kong. It is also dated to an earlier time than many of the examples found in Mainland China. While alterations and modifications have been made to Ho Tung Gardens over the years, the overall aesthetic character of Chinese Renaissance architecture has been maintained.

8. Full reports of the consultancies have been uploaded to AMO's website and their executive summaries are at [Annexes A and B](#).

ADVICE SOUGHT

9. Members are invited to offer their views on the findings of the consultancy studies.

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