

**ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD**

**Notes of Briefing on Consultancy Studies  
on the Heritage Value of Ho Tung Gardens  
held on Monday, 10 October 2011 at 3:00 p.m.  
in Conference Room, Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre  
Kowloon Park, Haiphong Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon**

Present: Mr Bernard Charnwut Chan, GBS, JP (Chairman)  
Professor Chung Po-yin  
Professor Ho Pui-yin  
Mr Philip Kan Siu-lun  
Mr Tim Ko Tim-keung  
Mr Tony Lam Chung-wai  
Mr Andrew Lam Siu-lo, JP  
Dr Lau Chi-pang  
Ms Lilian Law Suk-kwan, JP  
Dr Lee Ho-yin  
Mr Laurence Li Lu-jen  
Dr Ng Cho-nam, BBS, JP  
Ms Janet Pau Heng-ting  
Professor Simon Shen Xu-hui  
Professor Billy So Kee-long  
Mr Conrad Wong Tin-cheung, JP  
Mr Yeung Yiu-chung, BBS, JP

Ms Becky Lam (Secretary)  
Senior Executive Officer (Antiquities and Monuments)  
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Absent with Apologies: Dr Anissa Chan Wong Lai-kuen, MH, JP  
Mrs Mariana Cheng Cho Chi-on, BBS, JP

Ms Susanna Chiu Lai-kuen  
Mr Henry Ho Kin-chung  
Professor Tracey Lu Lie-dan  
Dr Joseph Ting Sun-pao

In Attendance:

Development Bureau

Ms Grace Lui  
Deputy Secretary (Works) 1

Miss Vivian Ko  
Commissioner for Heritage

Miss Queenie Lee  
Assistant Secretary (Heritage Conservation) 4

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mr Chung Ling-hoi, JP  
Deputy Director (Culture)

Dr Louis Ng  
Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums)

Mr Tom Ming  
Executive Secretary (Antiquities and Monuments)

Mrs Ada Yau  
Curator (Archaeology)

Mr Kevin Sun  
Curator (Education and Publicity)

Ms Fione Lo  
Curator (Historical Buildings) 1

Planning Department

Mr T K Lee  
Assistant Director/Metro

Architectural Services Department

Mr Fong Siu-wai

Assistant Director (Property Services)

Mr S L Lam

Senior Maintenance Surveyor/Heritage

**Opening Remarks**

The Chairman thanked Members and representatives from government departments for attending the briefing session. He also welcomed the new Deputy Secretary (Works)<sup>1</sup>, Ms Grace Lui who attended the meeting for the first time.

**Consultancy Studies on the Heritage Value of Ho Tung Gardens at 75 Peak Road  
(Board Paper AAB/23/2011-12)**

2. Mr Tom Ming reported that with Members' support to the proposal of declaring Ho Tung Gardens as a proposed monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (the Ordinance) at the special meeting on 25 January 2011, the declaration was made on 28 January 2011 by notice in the Gazette. The declaration provided Ho Tung Gardens with statutory protection for 12 months and allowed more time for the Antiquities Authority to consider whether Ho Tung Gardens should be declared as a monument on a permanent basis under the Ordinance. To facilitate the Antiquities Authority to make a decision, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) has commissioned the following two consultancies :

- (i) a consultancy jointly undertaken by Dr Victor Zheng and Professor Wong Siu-lun to study the history of Ho Tung Gardens;
- (ii) a consultancy jointly undertaken by Dr Lynne DiStefano, Dr Lee Ho-yin and Mr Curry Tse to study the architectural value of Ho Tung Gardens.

3. On behalf of Dr Victor Zheng and Professor Wong Siu-lun, who were unable to attend the briefing session, Ms Fione Lo of AMO briefed Members on the historical and social values of Ho Tung Gardens as summarised below :

- (i) a marker of racial policy in early colonial days;
- (ii) a note of bubonic plague;
- (iii) a signage of taking-root in Hong Kong;
- (iv) a trajectory of social mobility;
- (v) a blend of cultures and values;
- (vi) setting a new role for women;
- (vii) a mark of a woman's free will; and
- (viii) signifying a woman's contribution to the society.

4. Prof Ho Pui-yin doubted whether the “equal wife” status of Lady Clara Ho Tung marked a rising status of women and was an indicator of a woman's free will in Chinese history. Mr Andrew Lam also asked whether Lady Clara Ho Tung's request for “equal wife” status was innovative at the time as such arrangement might have been practised elsewhere in China.

(Post-meeting note: Members' views were conveyed to Dr Victor Zheng. Dr Zheng subsequently explained in writing that the system of “one husband, one wife, multiple concubines” (一夫一妻多妾制) was traditionally practiced in China. According to his research, it was common for a woman to be married as a succeeding wife after the death of the first wife or as a concubine, but not common as an “equal wife”. His research revealed that Lady Clara Ho Tung knew clearly that being married as a concubine implied loss of identity, independence and social status, and thus stood firm on this issue. Dr Zheng considered Lady Clara Ho Tung as a role model in pursuit of a woman's independence and free will in the Chinese community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

5. Prof Ho Pui-yin raised doubt over Ho Tung Gardens being a marker of racial policy since the European District Reservation Ordinance and the Peak District Reservation Ordinance were enacted in 1888 and 1904 respectively which were well before the construction of Ho Tung Gardens in 1927. In response to Prof Simon Shen's question about when the Peak District Reservation Ordinance was repealed, Ms Fione Lo replied that the said Ordinance was repealed in 1946.

6. Mr Tony Lam considered that Ho Tung Gardens, which was a residence with mixed Chinese and Western architectural elements, represented the unique characteristics of Sir Robert Ho Tung as an Eurasian.

7. Prof Chung Po-yin said that she learnt from some manuscripts from Sir Cecil Clementi that Sir Robert Ho Tung was conscious of his unique identity as an Eurasian, i.e. neither European nor Chinese. She doubted the “Chinese” identity of Sir Robert Ho Tung as mentioned in the consultancy report.

(Post-meeting note: Dr Victor Zheng subsequently responded in writing to the above question that Sir Robert Ho Tung had introduced himself as a Chinese and China as his own country in public speeches and newspaper interviews.)

8. In response to the questions raised by the Chairman and Mr Andrew Lam about the four properties once owned by Sir Robert Ho Tung in the Peak area, Ms Fione Lo explained that the four properties were “The Chalet”, “The Dunford”, “The Neuk” and “The Falls”. “The Falls” was demolished and rebuilt as a mansion with Chinese architectural elements in 1927 and renamed later as Ho Tung Gardens.

9. Regarding Mr Andrew Lam’s question on the difficulty of getting permission for constructing a building with Chinese architectural elements under the European District Reservation Ordinance and the Peak District Reservation Ordinance, Mr Tom Ming said that there were archives showing the concerns and objection once raised by some government officials over the application by Sir Robert Ho Tung.

10. Mr Tim Ko recommended a book compiled from the manuscripts of a British soldier during the Japanese invasion, which he considered as the first-hand account of the events happening at Ho Tung Gardens during the Second World War for Members’ reference.

(Post-meeting note: The book which Mr Tim Ko referred to was *Resist to the End: Hong Kong 1941-1945* by Charles Barman.)

11. Dr Lee Ho-yin and Dr Lynne DiStefano gave a powerpoint presentation on the architectural value of Ho Tung Gardens. Dr Lee Ho-yin said that the mansion was set within distinctive gardens, and the gardens themselves were an integral part of the place. They were more than an element; they were a major component of the place and inseparable from the mansion and its carefully “staged” scenic viewpoints.

12. Dr Lee Ho-yin further briefed Members on the architectural significance of

the mansion of Ho Tung Gardens. Dr Lynne DiStefano then briefed Members on the character defining elements and the heritage significance of the gardens.

13. Mr Tony Lam said that the mansion and the gardens as a whole reflected the unique life-style of the Ho Tung family at that time.

14. Prof Ho Pui-yin queried if the extensive alterations and modifications to the mansion throughout the years would undermine its heritage significance. Mr Curry Tse pointed out that the overall aesthetic character of the mansion had been maintained despite the following alterations and modifications :

- (i) a portion of the mansion was damaged during the Japanese invasion;
- (ii) a lift tower was added; and
- (iii) internal finishes and partitioning.

15. In reply to Ms Janet Pau's question, Dr Lee Ho-yin accorded Ho Tung Gardens with the highest heritage value when comparing Ho Tung Gardens with another three major pieces of Chinese Renaissance architecture in Hong Kong, namely Haw Par Mansion, King Yin Lei and Dragon Gardens.

16. Mr Laurence Li doubted if the Dragon Garden, which was built in 1950s, should be grouped together with the other three pieces of Chinese Renaissance architecture which were constructed in 1920s and 1930s. Dr Lee Ho-yin considered it appropriate because the characters of these four pieces of Chinese Renaissance architecture were similar.

17. In response to Mr Andrew Lam's enquiry, Dr Lynne DiStefano said that the mansion together with the garden setting formed an integral design. Ho Tung Gardens were of high authenticity as all alternations and modifications carried out over the years could be easily identified and such changes enriched the layering of history of the buildings. She commented that Ho Tung Gardens, being so important for Hong Kong, should undoubtedly be preserved.

18. In reply to Mr Laurence Li's enquiry, Dr Lee Ho-yin responded that the research by Dr Victor Zheng and Prof Wong Siu-lun revealed Sir Robert Ho Tung's strong will to choose the conspicuous Chinese aesthetic character for his mansion despite the legislative control at that time.

19. Prof Chung Po-yin considered that Ho Tung Gardens was of heritage significance not only because it was an illustration of the national architectural trend at that time but also a reflection of the lifestyle of Eurasians in the history of Hong Kong.

20. In response to Ms Lilian Law's question on the rarity of Chinese Renaissance architecture worldwide, Dr Lee Ho-yin said that some Chinese Renaissance architecture buildings could be found in overseas Chinese communities such as the Haw Par Mansion in Singapore.

21. The briefing was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Antiquities and Monuments Office  
Leisure and Cultural Services Department  
October 2011

---

Ref: LCS AM 22/3