

**Brief Account of the Historical Development  
of the Grading System of the Antiquities Advisory Board**

The current Grading System of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) can be traced back to the discussions in AAB in 1980, 1995 and 1996.

**1980 Discussion**

2. The AAB decided on 28 October 1980, after considering AAB Board Paper AAB/8/80 on “Proposed Grading of Historic Buildings in Order of Importance” which had made reference to the then system of listing of historic buildings in the United Kingdom, to introduce a grading system for historic buildings. As set out in that paper, “It is proposed that all recorded buildings be graded, in the first instance by ES(AM), and the list submitted to the Board for approval. The grading is unofficial, for the guidance of the Board, and is in no way in furtherance of the requirements under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance”.

**1995 Discussion**

3. The AAB considered on 22 August 1995 and 28 November 1995 AAB Committee Paper AAB(HB)/12/95 on “Review of the Present Grading System”. The paper considered that the then grading system, which was adopted mainly from the British system, was useful in providing grading guidelines and to work out the relative importance of a building for internal reference. However, the paper also considered that the assessment and grading system could be further improved and enhanced to better assess the buildings. In particular, the paper noted that “there is no clear connection between gradings and declaration. Whether the declaration of a graded building should be pursued or not does not necessarily depend on the rating of the building. Grade III buildings were declared in the past although its definition reads ‘... not yet qualified for consideration as possible monument ...’.”

4. During the then discussion of the AAB, it was considered that approaches adopted by the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada had their own merits and drawbacks respectively, and hence direct adoption of any one of such models without comprehensive and comparative study would be a premature conclusion. Moreover, for grading historic buildings in the Hong Kong environment, careful consideration must be given to the cultural and ethnical values of both the oriental and occidental civilisations. Minor revisions were made to the definition of the three gradings.

**1996 Discussion**

5. The AAB considered on December 1996 AAB Board paper AAB/38/96 on “Grading of Historical Buildings”. The paper compared the situation in Hong Kong (Note: at that juncture: out of 375 graded buildings, 23.4% were accorded Grade I, 33.9% Grade II and 42.7% Grade III) with that of the United Kingdom (out of the some 443 000 listed buildings, 1.4% Grade I, 4.1% Grade II\* which is equivalent to

Grade II in Hong Kong and 94.5% Grade II which is equivalent to Grade III in Hong Kong), and suggested that “(w)hen comparing with the situation in the United Kingdom, we may have over the years tended to ‘over-grade’.”

6. The paper also explained that “our grading system carries no legal effect and is simply an internal device to guide our own decision making and to help set priorities when pursuing preservation of built heritage.” In trying to provide an explanation of the circumstances, the paper reads “There is no direct correlation between the grading of a historical building and its formal declaration or formal deeming as a monument. (Deeming may be seen as the interim step between formal declaration and grading.) However, as a general rule, Grade I buildings’ declaration/deeming will be more actively pursued while that of selected Grade II buildings will be processed with less vigour. Normally when a Grade II building is under threat or its owners take the initiative to approach the AMO, then the case for its declaration/deeming will be more actively considered. Further, if a Grade II or even a Grade III building fits into a larger scheme, e.g. in a heritage trail project, or for gaining trust and support from private owners so that preservation of other more important buildings may proceed, then consideration for its declaration/deeming may also be advanced.”