# Architectural Appraisal of Ho Tung Gardens

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# 1.0 Introduction

Ho Tung Gardens is a complex consisting of a mansion and its associated gardens and outbuildings, and its southern prospects. To focus on any one component undermines the significance of the place as a whole. Nonetheless, to understand the place and its significance, it is important to understand its individual components, which together create a whole greater than its constituent parts – a whole that can best be described as a *continuing cultural landscape*.

The mansion is set within distinctive gardens, and the gardens themselves are an integral part of the place. They are more than an element; they are a major component of the place and inseparable from the mansion and its carefully "staged" scenic viewpoints. Focusing on the mansion alone, rather than the mansion within its garden setting, negates the original design intent: the creation of a mansion within a garden setting, a mansion that is carefully positioned to exploit dramatic views to the south.

The views from the mansion and its terraces are a key factor in the siting and landscaping of the house and its grounds. Although such viewpoints are not currently accessible to the general public, they offer some of the best framed views of the southern part of Hong Kong Island. The containment of the views by nearby and mid-distance hills enhances the viewing – and intensifies the sublimity of the experience, creating a distinctive spirit of place that is perhaps unique.

An important aspect of the mansion and the gardens that has to be considered is the degree of change that has taken place. Since the property is a living cultural landscape, changes, particularly to the interior of the mansion, have understandably occurred, and these changes may not necessarily undermine its heritage significance. In fact, some changes may even add to the significance of the place.

A good example of a heritage place where changes have added to its significance is the Hong Kong Government House, a Japanese-designed residential building surrounded by a lush garden, which has undergone varying degrees of change to its interior through successive Colonial Governors and SAR Chief Executives. Little of its interior is original, but the changes have added to its accumulated layers of history. The same applies to the garden as a number of *feng shui* elements have been added in recent times. These changes to the mansion *and* garden have only added to the rich history of the place – and reinforced its designation as a continuing cultural landscape.

The conservation of Ho Tung Gardens is not about freezing the place at a given point in time. Clearly, changes that do not adversely impact the important character-defining elements are acceptable. This is the approach advocated by English Heritage and one accepted as international best practice. It is about sustaining the place as a living cultural landscape.

# 2.0 Architectural Significance of the Mansion of Ho Tung Gardens

By Lee Ho Yin

## 2.1 Guiding Principle and Methodology

In this section, the focus is on establishing the heritage significance of the mansion. The guiding principle for this study takes references from Article 67 of *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage 2008: 36), which states that

> Different people and communities may attach different weight to the same heritage values of a place at the same time. Experience shows that judgements about heritage values, especially those related to the recent past, tend to grow in strength and complexity over time, as people's perceptions of a place evolve. It is therefore necessary to consider whether a place might be so valued in the future that it should be protected now.

"To consider whether a place might be so valued in the future that it should be protected now" is exactly the underlying rationale for an appraisal of the mansion, which will help in determining whether or not the building is worthy of being protected as a monument, which can be defined as *an architectural heritage significant to the historical development and cultural identity of Hong Kong*.

This study uses Susan M. Pearce's methodology analyzing cultural heritage through various scales of social organizations – individual, family, local community, ethnic group, nation/sovereign state, and world. To achieve greater objectivity and representation of the appraisal, this study examines the architecture of the mansion from the three levels most appropriate to the nature of the appraisal: nation (represented by China); ethnic group (represented by Chinese communities within and without Hong Kong); and local community (represented by the Hong Kong community, in particular, the Hong Kong Chinese community).

In this study, the original English names of the Chinese people are used, with the modern Pinyin-Romanized version given in parentheses.

## 2.2 Chronological Development of the Mansion

1883 John Yardley Vernon, a founding member of the Association of Stockbrokers in Hong Kong (the forerunner of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange) and partner of the stockbroker firm Chater & Vernon, leased Rural Building Lot (R.B.L.) No. 28 and erected a residential house named "The Falls" after a small waterfall on a mountain stream that ran through the site.

1887 John Yardley Vernon leased more land at the southwestern end of R.B.L. No. 28 to add a garden to the house.

1923 Through lawyer Charles David Wilkinson, Robert Ho Tung purchased the property on R.B.L No. 28 and leased two contiguous lots: R.B.L. No. 124 and Garden Lot No. 26.

1925 Through the architectural and engineering practice Palmer and Turner (today's P & T Group), Robert Ho Tung applied to the Public Works Department for the construction of a mansion on the combined lots. The property was meant as the residence of one of Robert Ho Tung's wives, Clara Cheung (Lady Ho Tung; also Romanized as Clara Cheng), and her children.

1926 Construction of Robert Ho Tung's mansion began.

1927 Construction of Robert Ho Tung's mansion completed. The property maintained the name "The Falls."

1938 Clara Cheung died, and a commemorative Chinese gateway was constructed. On the lintel of the gateway are the words "Ho Tung Gardens" (in English), by which the property was henceforth named.[1]

[1] Curiously, the 26th edition (1956: 336) of *Index of Streets, Mansion Numbers and Lots* lists the property as "Ho Tung's Garden," while the 27th edition (1961: 315) lists it as "Ho Tung Gardens."

## 2.3 Clarification on the Aesthetic Character of the Mansion: Origins and Definition of "Chinese Renaissance Architecture"

The distinctive aesthetic character of the mansion represents a key character-defining element by which the mansion carries its most important heritage significance. Before we proceed to prove or disprove this, it is necessary to clarify the architectural aesthetics of the mansion.

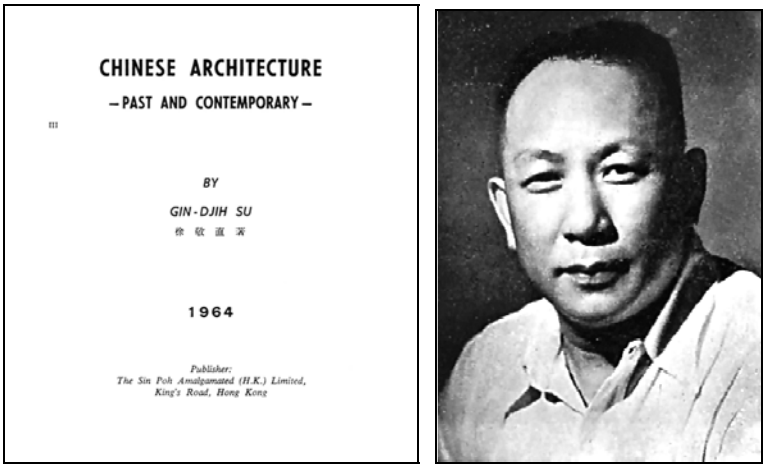
The architectural aesthetics is popularly referred to in the media, the Internet and government documents as the "Chinese Renaissance *style*" (author's italics).[2] This is by no means an incorrect term – it is an expedient terminology by which a popular understanding of the abstract meaning of the descriptor can be readily achieved, which is something important in conservation. However, as a piece of academic research, greater rigor is required to clarify the term, in order to leave no ambiguity regarding the aesthetic character of the architecture of the mansion.

Research into the origins of this form of architectural aesthetics reveals that it was not originally referred to as a "style," and the "style" affix is a local popular reference. It is quite possible that the term "Chinese Renaissance style" is a re-translation of the Chinese translation 中國文藝復興風格, and the term was subsequently adopted by authors in printed and on-line English publications. An example of a recent English publication that uses this term is the book chapter by Eduard Kögel (in the book *Architecture and Identity*, 2008), as evident in the title "Using the Past to Serve the Future – The Quest for an Architectural Chinese Renaissance Style Representing Republican China in the 1920's-1930's."

The term "Chinese Renaissance" is not a Chinese descriptor; it was coined in the English language by a group of American- and European-trained first-generation Chinese architects who advocated for a nationalistic movement in post-revolution Republican China (1911-1949). In Hong Kong, the original source of the term is most likely the 1964 book (in English) entitled *Chinese Architecture: Past and Contemporary*

[2] For example, in the Legislative Council Brief entitled "Declaration of Ho Tung Gardens at 75 Peak Road as a Proposed Monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance" (DEVB/CS/CR6/5/284), dated January 2011, the term "Chinese Renaissance style" is mentioned five times, such as on page 4, in which it is stated that "the main building of Ho Tung Gardens is built in Chinese Renaissance style."

(**Fig. 2.1**) by one of China's first-generation Western-trained Chinese architects, Su Gin-djih (徐敬直, 1906-1983) (**Fig. 2.2**). From the time of its publication in 1964 until the opening up of Mainland China in the 1980s, this was (as far as it is known) the first comprehensive English publication written by a Chinese architect on the subject of Chinese architecture, which, significantly, included a detailed discussion of contemporary Chinese architecture of the 20th century, from the Republican China period to the early decades of the People's Republic of China. As such, it became a standard reference for university students in Chinese architecture, fine arts and history, at a time when books and papers were the only easily accessible references, and were relatively hard to come by.




**Figs. 2.1 and 2.2** (from left to right) The book *Chinese Architecture: Past and Contemporary* (1964) (source: shequ.kongfz.com) and the author Su Gin-djih (source: Wenweipo).

However, in the section of Su's book that discusses important architectural examples of Chinese Renaissance carried out in Republican China (Su 1964: 135-140), he did not use the term "Chinese Renaissance style" to describe the works. Instead, he referred to the architects involved as "forerunners of the Chinese Renaissance *movement*" (Su 1964: 135) (author's italics) and the buildings as "Chinese Renaissance architectural work" (Su 1964: 137). Elsewhere in the book, he further emphasized that Chinese Renaissance in architecture was a *movement* (Su 1964: 241, 244). The only one time in the entire book in which Su connected "Chinese Renaissance" with "style" was in the description of the "National Art Treasure Museum" in Taipei (he was actually referring to the National Palace Museum, as it is now known) (Su 1964: 151), and the use of the word "style" in conjunction with "Chinese Renaissance" was specifically for commenting on the stylistic nature of the building as a modern imitation of an imperial Chinese palace. It is quite likely that Su's single mention of "Chinese Renaissance style" in his book was

subsequently taken out of context by other authors and used as an expedient description for buildings of the Chinese Renaissance movement in architecture.

While Su, a graduate in architecture from the University of Michigan in 1930, was among the pioneer group of first-generation Western-trained architects who promoted the Chinese Renaissance movement in architecture, he was definitely not the first to write about the "Chinese Renaissance movement" in an English language publication. Another pioneer architect, Doon Dayu (董大酉, 1899-1975; originally Romanized as Doon Dayu), was probably the first, as he wrote in his article "Architectural Chronicle" in the English-language *T'ien Hsia Monthly* (天下月刊, established in Shanghai in 1935) (Doon 1936/2010: n.p):

> A group of young students went to America and Europe to study the fundamentals of architecture. They came back to China filled with ambition to create something new and worthwhile. They initiated a great *movement*, a *movement* to bring back a dead architecture to life: in other words, to do away with poor imitations of western architecture and to make Chinese architecture truly national. This *movement* is often referred to as the "*Renaissance of Chinese Architecture*" (author's italics).

In the same article, Doon further clarified that the movement did not include "attempt(s) to 'restore' Chinese architecture" – referring to architecture based on traditional design, materials and technique – and that it is an architectural movement to modernize Chinese architecture for modern China by adapting "Chinese features for modern purposes." Doon's definition of the architectural nature of the movement is not dissimilar in essence to Su's definition: "the use of reinforced concrete and other modern materials in the Chinese-style buildings" (Su 1964, 135). Combining Su and Doon's definitions, what constitutes *architectural works of the Chinese Renaissance movement* can be defined as follows: in terms of materials and techniques, it employs reinforced concrete and other modern materials in its construction; and in terms of aesthetics, it adapts Chinese-style decorative features on buildings that serve modern functional purposes.

It is therefore pointless to argue whether the mansion of Ho Tung Gardens belongs to the "Chinese Renaissance style," as there has never been such a style to begin with. What we have is a movement – a common ideology – to modernize Chinese architecture in terms of building materials, construction techniques and a clearly identifiable Chinese aesthetic appearance. As such, the mansion of Ho Tung Gardens clearly is an expression of such a movement as defined by Su and Doon.

**Although technically accurate, it is too cumbersome to describe the mansion as "an architectural work of the Chinese Renaissance movement." Instead, "Chinese Renaissance architecture," a term which increasingly appears in academic publications (for example, in Rowe and Kuan 2002: 74), will be adopted in this study to refer to the aesthetic character of the mansion's architecture.**

As an epilogue to this discussion, it is interesting to note that while publications by academics from Mainland China on the topic of contemporary Chinese architecture, in both Chinese and English, were steadily becoming available since the 1980s, there was little mention of the term "Chinese Renaissance architecture." Instead, from the 1980s through the 1990s, a confusing array of substitute terminologies, such as "Eclectic Style," "National Style," "Palace Style" and "Chinese Art Deco," were used by academics in Mainland China to either *include* or specifically refer to what clearly belongs to the genre of Chinese Renaissance architecture.

Given that Chinese Renaissance architecture was an integral part of the Kuomintang's ideology on national identity during the Republican China period, it is unsurprising that the term was suppressed or avoided by Mainland Chinese academics during the uncertain early decades of China's open-door liberalization. The political overtones of the architecture was revealingly expressed in the earlier mentioned book by Su Gin-djih, who was commissioned by the Kuomintang Government for a number of important architectural projects in the 1930s. In his book, he wrote (Su 1964: 145-146 and 152),

> After Taiwan was made the provisional capital [in 1949], many Chinese architects came to the island with the government, and still imbued with the zeal of the Chinese Renaissance, carried on their work …. The architects in Taiwan, armed with free thought, are on the march. Surviving the spirit of the Chinese Renaissance, they are marching steadily, step by step, on their road to success – using new techniques, new materials and now [*sic*] ideas.

The politically motivated avoidance of the term "Chinese Renaissance architecture" in Mainland China was confirmed by Prof. Tang Guohua (湯國華教授), a professor of architecture from Guangzhou University, who led the recent restoration of King Yin Lei, a recognized piece of Chinese Renaissance architecture. In a discussion with the author, he said that he rarely came across the term "Chinese Renaissance architecture" while in Mainland China, and was surprised by the popularity of the term in Hong Kong. Part of the reason, he said, was because Liang Ssu-Cheng (梁思成, Liang Sicheng in

Pinyin Romanization), arguably the most prominent member of the Chinese Renaissance movement in architecture, was severely criticized and subsequently purged in the 1950s for his architectural ideology. This tragic chapter of Liang's life is fully detailed in Su's book (1964: 152-191), in which Su noted that, in 1958, Liang, his colleagues and students, were sent to work in the people's commune for five months (Su 1964: 191). It was not until the 2000s that Liang's contribution to architecture began to be acknowledged in Mainland China. In June 2010, a bronze statue of Liang was unveiled at Tsinghua University, where he had been a professor, in official recognition of his contribution.

The increased academic discussion in the subject of Chinese Renaissance architecture and the seemingly "rehabilitation" of the term in the 2000s could be due to improved relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Taiwan-based Kuomintang Government during the same period. An evidential highlight of the improved relationship was the historic official visit to Mainland China by senior members of the Kuomintang, led by party elder Lien Chan (連戰), in 2005. More research is needed to investigate this connection, but it is outside the scope and purpose of this study

## 2.4 Socio-political Significance of the Architecture at the National Level

To understand this significance, one has to look beyond the superficial aesthetic quality of the features, and examine the underlying socio-political meaning behind the aesthetics, and the relevance to Hong Kong.

As established in Section 2.3, the architectural aesthetics in question is referred to as "Chinese Renaissance architecture." It represents the vision of China’s first-generation Western-trained modern architects to create an architectural identity for the New China. Fueled by the optimism and idealism of a post-revolution Republican China, these architects launched the Chinese Renaissance movement in the 1920s. This movement was an attempt to modernize and revitalize Chinese architecture and develop an architectural language that combined the desire for Chinese aesthetic tradition and Western construction technology in architecture. While foreign architects in China, such as the American architect Henry K. Murphy (1877-1954), may have contributed to the origins and development of the movement from the 1910s, the subject is not the scope of this study. Rather, the scope is focused on the development of Chinese Renaissance architecture from its *Chinese* originators, and its impact on *Chinese* communities.

The story of this architectural development goes back to the 1920s when the first students from the newly established Republic of China journeyed to the United States to study architecture at elite universities, such as Columbia, Harvard, MIT, Pennsylvania and Yale (and to a lesser extent, the equally elite European school of architecture, Architectural Association in London). This academic journey to the West was motivated by a passionate nationalistic idealism to modernize a Chinese society that was deemed to have been mired in its imperial past, and the means to do so was through Western rationalism and scientific methods embedded in the study of architecture in Western universities (Atkin 2011: 45). However, these vanguard students would soon discover the contradiction of being modern and Chinese at the same time:

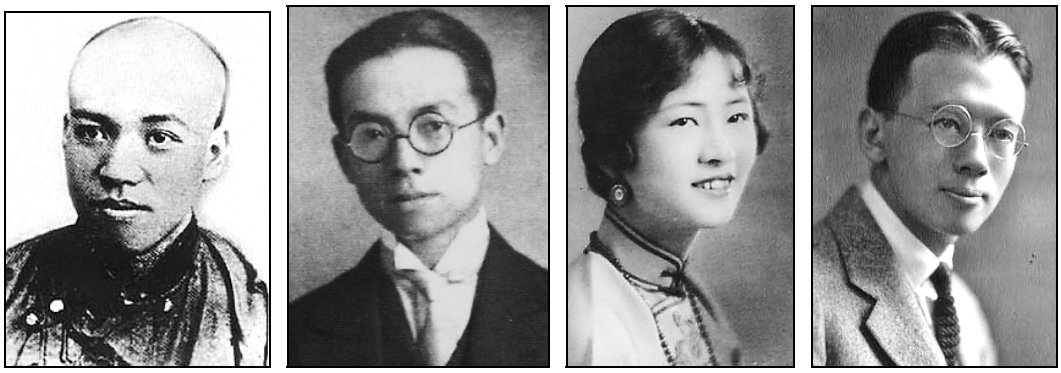
> Although their coursework and studios involved the rigorous study of Western accomplishments in architecture, most of them struggled with the idea of how to be modern (usually equated with Western ideas) and still be Chinese (Atkin 2011: 45).

The famous Chinese reformist and educator Liang Chi-chao (梁啟超, 1874-1929 ; Romanized in Pinyin as Liang Qichao) (**Fig. 2.3**) believed that the contradiction could be reconciled

> … through a deep understanding of ancient Chinese history and Confucian philosophy and their reintegration into modern life, much in the way of the Italian Renaissance was built on the restoration of ancient Greek and Roman culture, art, and humanism (Atkin 2011: 51).

Liang Chi-chao's prophetic belief would come true after the first-generation American-trained Chinese architects returned to China and initiated a movement to develop a Chinese national style that blended Western architectural technology with traditional Chinese architectural forms. Liang happened to be the father of one of these first-generation U.S.-trained Chinese architects – Liang Ssu-Cheng (梁思成, 1901-1972, Romanized in Pinyin as Liang Sicheng) **(Fig. 2.4)**, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and arguably the most renowned member of China's first-generation architects and architectural educators. The movement, called the "Renaissance of Chinese Architecture" by its proponents (Doon 1936/2010, n.p.), was initiated in the 1920s and vigorously developed throughout the 1930s before it was slowed down by the onset of wars and political turmoil.

Besides Liang Ssu-cheng, one of the key proponents of this movement included his wife and fellow graduate of the University of Pennsylvania – Phyllis Lin Whei-yin (林徽因, 1904-1955; Romanized in Pinyin as Lin Huiyin) **(Fig. 2.5)**. The couple became the first-generation of professors in architecture in China. As leading academics, they contributed to the movement through their rediscovery of Classical Chinese architectural rules from a book on traditional architectural standards, Yingzhao Fashi (營造法式), and their integration of such rules with modern (Western) architectural construction. Liang and Lin were among the most prominent first-generation Chinese architects and their influence on architectural trends in Chinese communities within and without China was far-reaching.



**Figs. 2.3, 24, 2.5 and 2.6** (from left to right) Liang Chi-chao (source: Baidu), Liang Ssu-Cheng (source: yvonnefrank.wordpress.com), Lin whei-yin (source: Wikipedia) and Robert Fan (source: The Standard).

An equally prominent proponent of the movement was also a fellow University of Pennsylvania graduate, Robert Fan (范文照, 1893-1979; whose Pinyin-Romanized name is Fan Wenzhao) **(Fig. 2.6)**. As one of Republican China's leading architects, Fan completed a number of buildings in the 1930s and these stand today as seminal examples of Chinese Renaissance architecture. These buildings include:

- Officers' Club in Nanjing (勵志社, completed in 1931, now part of Zhongshan Hotel) **(Fig. 2.7)**

- Chinese YMCA in Shanghai (上海中華基督教青年會, completed in 1931, now the Shanghai YMCA Hotel) **(Fig. 2.8)**

- Ministry of Railways in Nanjing (南京鐵道部, completed in 1933, now part of the campus of the People's Liberation Army Nanjing Institute of Politics) **(Fig. 2.9)**

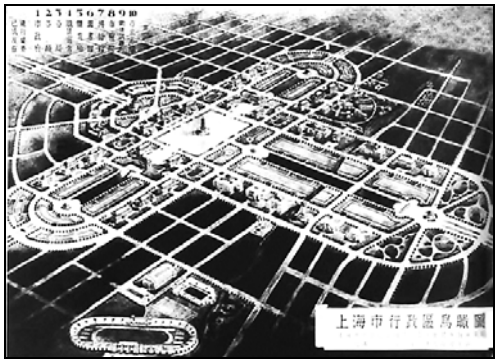
**Fig. 2.7** Officers' Club in Nanjing, from a vintage postcard (source: stamp.shuoqian.net).


**Fig. 2.8** The Chinese YMCA in Shanghai (source: Lee Ho Yin).

**Fig. 2.9** Ministry of Railways in Nanjing, from a vintage postcard (source: stamp.shuoqian.net).

Another important proponent of Chinese Renaissance architecture was Doon Dayu (董大酉, 1899-1975; Romanized in Pinyin as Dong Dayou) (**Fig. 2.10**), a graduate of University of Minnesota and Columbia University. A prolific practitioner and writer, Dong described Chinese Renaissance architecture as "a combination of modern and Chinese designs" (quoted in Kögel 2008: 463).

Doon was particularly significant as the Chief Architect of the Beaux-Arts influenced Greater Shanghai Plan (大上海計劃) (**Fig. 2.11**), which was to be the new city centre of Shanghai. From 1929 to 1937, Doon and other prominent Chinese architects completed a number of public buildings, before the Japanese invasion of China spelt the end of the plan. The buildings of the Greater Shanghai Plan represent the height of expression of Chinese Renaissance architecture. As a showcase of the most modern form of architecture that is identifiably Chinese in character, these buildings exercised considerable influence on overseas Chinese communities, which adopted the architectural aesthetics for some of their important buildings (this aspect will be elaborated in Section 2.5).




**Figs. 2.10 and 2.11** (from left to right) Doon Dayu (source: www.yplib.org.cn) and .a bird's eye view drawing of the Greater Shanghai Plan's city centre (source: expo2010.eastday.com).

Today, the buildings designed by Doon in the Civic Centre of the Greater Shanghai Plan are protected as the city's important historic buildings; among the more expressive examples of Chinese Renaissance architecture are:

- Mayor's Building (上海市府大樓, completed in 1933, now Shanghai Gymnastic College) (**Fig. 2.12**)

- Athletics Complex (上海市體育場, completed in 1935,today's Jiangwan Stadium) (**Fig. 2.13**)

- Municipal Museum (上海市博物館, completed in 1935, now part of Changhai Hospital) (**Fig. 2.14**)

- Municipal Library (上海市圖書館,completed in 1936, now part of Tongji High School) (**Fig. 2.15**)


**Figs. 2.12 and 2.13** (from left to right) Mayor's Building (source: diary.wenxuecity.com) and Athletics Complex (source: www.ypta.gov.cn) of the Greater Shanghai Plan.


**Figs. 2.14 and 2.15** (from left to right) Municipal Library (source: ypq.sh.gov.cn) and Municipal Museum (source: ypq.sh.gov.cn) of the Greater Shanghai Plan.

## 2.5 Impact of the Socio-political Significance of the Architecture on Chinese Communities outside China

The impact of Chinese Renaissance architecture on overseas Chinese society can be seen in terms of its popularity through time and geographical spread. The outstanding architectural works of Doon Dayu in the Civic Centre of the Greater Shanghai Plan undoubtedly provided the stimulus that pushed the movement to its height through the 1930s. During this golden decade, the movement competed with and outlasted such

globally popular architectural trends as Art Deco and Stripped Classicism. The latter two stylistic trends went into decline after World War II, while the longevity of Chinese Renaissance architecture persisted in its use for important buildings of Chinese communities in as late as the 1960s, such as, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (新加坡中華總商會, completed in 1963, now known as the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry Building) (**Fig. 2.16**).

The aesthetic character of Chinese Renaissance architecture has been applied in almost all building types. However, it is most often associated with institutional buildings, particularly those for education and religion. For educational buildings, some of the most distinguished examples in China are the original campus buildings of the Private University of Nanking (私立金陵大學, established 1910, now part of the Nanjing University campus and a Protected National Heritage Site 全國重點文物保護單位) (**Fig. 2.16**) and those of the National Wuhan University (國立武漢大學, established 1928, now Wuhan University and a Protected National Heritage Site) (**Fig. 2.18**).

**Fig. 2.16** Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (source: www.singas.co.uk).

**Fig. 2.17** Campus buildings of the Private University of Nanking (source: wiki.ilzp.com).

**Fig. 2.18** Campus buildings of the National Wuhan University (source: news.ziqiang.net).

Given that education is traditionally highly valued in Chinese society, it is not surprising that the aesthetic character of Chinese Renaissance architecture was adopted by a number of prominent educational institutes outside China. A prime example is the Administration Building of Nanyang University (南洋大學行政樓, completed in 1956, now a National Monument in Singapore) (**Fig. 2.19**), which was Singapore's first Chinese-language university and is now the Nanyang Technological University, one of Asia's leading universities. Another example is the Main Building of Chung Cheng High School (中正中學主樓, completed in 1968) (**Fig. 2.20**), which was Singapore's top Chinese-language secondary school and is now an elite bilingual secondary school in Singapore.

In Hong Kong, perhaps the most distinguished use of the style in an educational building is the Tung Lin Kok Yuen (東蓮覺苑, completed in 1935, now a Grade II Historic Building) (**Fig, 2.21**) in Happy Valley, which was founded by Clara Cheung – the first resident of Ho Tung Gardens – as Hong Kong's only seminary for nuns and the first Buddhist free school for girls.

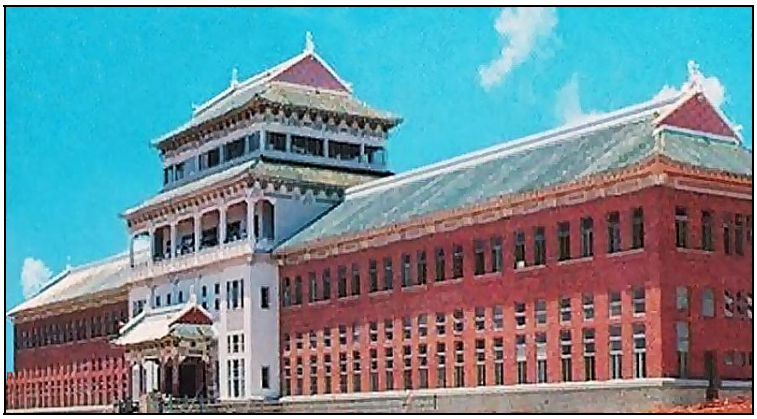


**Fig. 2.19** Administration Building of Nanyang University in Singapore (source: blog.omy.sg).

**Fig. 2.20** Main Building of Chung Cheng High School in Singapore (source: Wikipedia).

**Fig. 2.21** Tung Lin Kok Yuen in Happy Valley, Hong Kong (source: Flickr).

The aesthetic character of Chinese Renaissance architecture was adopted by Christian churches in China during the early 20th century to serve its Sinification agenda. A detailed discussion of this typological application can be found in Jeffrey W. Cody's article (1996) and will not be repeated in this report. In Hong Kong, the style is prevalent in Christian buildings, and examples include:

- Buildings of the Tao Fung Shan Christian Centre in Shatin (道風山基督教叢林, completed in 1930, now Grade II Historical Buildings) (**Fig. 2.22**)

- Holy Spirit Seminary in Wong Chuk Hang (聖神修院, completed in 1931, now a Grade I Historic Building) (**Fig. 2.23**)

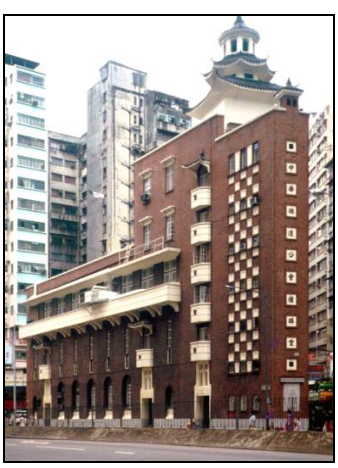
- Chinese Methodist Church in Wan Chai (中華循道公會香港堂, completed in 1932, demolished in 1994) (**Fig. 2.24**)

- Holy Trinity Church in Ma Tau Wai (香港聖公會聖三一堂, completed in 1937, now the Holy Trinity Cathedral and a Grade III Historic Building) (**Fig. 2.25**)

- St. Mary's Church in Causeway Bay (聖公會聖馬利亞堂, completed in 1937, now a Grade III Historic Building) (**Fig. 2.26**)

- St. Francis of Assisi Church in Shek Kip Mei (聖方濟各堂, completed in 1955) (**Fig. 2.27**)

**Figs. 2.22 and 2.23** (from left to right) Chapel of Tao Fung Shan Christian Centre in Shatin (source: Wikipedia); the main building of Holy Spirit Seminary in Wong Chuk Hang (source: Flickr).




**Figs. 2.24 and 2.25** (from left to right) The Chinese Methodist Church in Wan Chai (now demolished) (source: Cheng Po-hung); Holy Trinity Church in Ma Tau Wai (source: the-sun.on.cc).


**Figs. 2.26 and 2.27** (from left to right) St. Mary's Church in Tai Hang (source: Lee Ho Yin); St. Francis of Assisi Church in Sham Shui Po (source: Lee Ho Yin).

It can be seen that majority of Hong Kong examples of Chinese Renaissance architecture were completed in the 1930s. A critical year of note is 1928, when China was able to form a unified government under the Kuomintang after years of fragmented regional control by warlords. The resultant socio-political stability provided the impetus for the development of public works projects vital for national development, such as facilities for education, administration and amenities. These public works enabled emerging architects in China to advance the movement in Chinese Renaissance architecture in some of the largest and most prominent architectural projects.

By the 1930s, the movement had spread to cities in the European colonies of the Far East, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, where the style was embraced as an expression of Chinese identity under the reign of Western authorities. In post-1949 Taiwan, the style was upheld as an expression of political ideology in the last remaining Chinese territories held by the Kuomintang Government (see: Su 1964: 140-152 and Fu 2011: 136-140), but this aspect is outside the scope of this study.

## 2.6 Significance of the Mansion to the Hong Kong Community

Robert Ho Tung was of European patrilineal descent, and he could have identified himself with the European community. Instead, he adamantly identified himself throughout his life as a Chinese person and with the Chinese community in Hong Kong at a time of racial segregation and discrimination. He therefore subjected himself to open hostility from the European community when he applied to build a house on the then European-exclusive Peak District.[3]

To make matter worse for himself, instead of taking an easier approach by conforming to the exclusively "European house" built-environment in the district, he willfully chose to have the mansion designed in a conspicuously Chinese aesthetic character, which subjected him to further hostility. The "European house" exclusivity in the Peak District was established in the *European District Reservation Ordinance, 1888*, for which it was argued that (see: Hong Kong Legislative Council 1888: 25-26):

> The district indicated . . . is one which has always been occupied by European houses, almost without exception, so that there will be no disturbance of present conditions; and the only change proposed is the prohibition for the future of what has not actually taken place in the past, viz., the erection there of what are known as Chinese houses by large number of people after the manner usual with Chinese.

Although this ordinance was repealed and replaced by the *Peak District Reservation Ordinance, 1904*, the tradition of having exclusively "European houses" in the Peak district was firmly in place when Robert Ho Tung applied to build his mansion in the district. This suggests that Robert Ho Tung intentionally chose the aesthetic character of the Chinese Renaissance architecture for his mansion as a statement about class divisions and racial segregation in Hong Kong. As a learned person, it is likely that he

[3] This aspect is elaborated in the historical appraisal of Ho Tung Gardens by Zheng and Wong (2011).

was aware of the movement of Chinese Renaissance architecture and the socio-political meaning behind the movement. In any case, the aesthetic choice for the mansion was very much in the *Zeitgeist*, and consistent with the Chinese Renaissance movement under intense development in China during the 1920s, when the mansion was designed and built.

(For a detailed appraisal of the significance of the mansion, see: Section 6.1)

# 3.0 Additions and Alterations to the Mansion

By Curry C. K. Tse and Lee Ho Yin

## 3.1 Introduction

This section details the additions and alterations of the mansion. It should be emphasized that changes to the fabric and the place should be treated as part of its history and deserve appropriate attention and study.

The mansion is part of a continuing cultural landscape. It is located at a relatively higher level of the site at approximately +368 mPD. From the mansion the surrounding natural and man-made landscape elements in the gardens can be appreciated; from the gardens the grandeur of the mansion can be observed.

The study consolidates the information derived from literary study, record plans kept by the Buildings Department, and aerial photos from the Survey and Mapping Office of Lands Department.

## 3.2 Additions and Alterations

Since its completion in 1927, the mansion of the Ho Tung Gardens (**Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4**) has undergone a series of major additions and alterations. The sections below are a chronological documentation of the changes made to the mansion.

**Figs. 3.1. 3.2. 3.3 and 3.4** (from left to right, top to bottom) The north, east, south and west elevations of the mansion of Ho Tung Gardens (source: Antiquities and Monuments Office).

(a) 1927

The property known as the Falls was completed. The property would go by this name until 1938, when it was renamed Ho Tung Gardens. The mansion on the property was

designed by the architectural practice Palmer and Turner. Undoubtedly, Clara Cheung had much involvement in creating a character of East-meets-West for the mansion's interior and yet suitable for modern living by:

(1) furnishing different rooms in Western and Chinese styles, for example, "a large sitting room after the style of an English drawing room, a second room to be furnished with more formal Chinese furniture";
(2) furnishing the "chapel" (referring to the designation of this room on the architectural plans) as a "Buddhist temple" and a shrine for ancestral worship;
(3) installing such modern services as " light fittings from the General Electric Company of London."

Below is an extract from Gittins (1969: 61) that describes the original character of the interior of the mansion, and, at the same time, reveals Clara Cheung's involvement in the furnishing:

> It was to be a large house – it would have to be to fulfill mother's requirements. The plans showed three huge reception rooms on the ground floor, leading in from the main entrance on the south side. All three rooms looked out on to the same wonderful view, slightly angled because of a difference in position, of the bays and islands and boundless sea beyond, that we had at The Chalet and Dunford. There was a library and reading room at the back. We know that Mother had wanted a large sitting room after the style of an English drawing room, a second room to be furnished with more formal Chinese furniture, and a dining room to hold twenty tables (Chinese style) for dinner, giving a capacity for two hundred guests. The three main rooms had sliding doors which could be drawn aside to form one large entertainment area. There was to be a sun terrace on the west side and a covered porch forming a rear entrance on the north. Over this porch was a sick room, where minor operations could be performed; it had its own bathroom and kitchenette and could be used as an extra guest room. This was half way up the main staircase and formed a mezzanine floor, with a "chapel" above this, over which was a tower roof. The chapel when finished turned out to be a Buddhist temple of impressive dignity. It served also as a shrine for ancestral worship.
>
> The kitchen and pantry occupied the southwest corner of the ground floor, above which were two hot rooms for storage. … Upstairs there were seven large

> bedrooms, with five bathrooms. The house had a flat roof, with a sun room approached through the chapel. … Men servants' quarters were to be built over the garage which was separate.
>
> It turned out to be a lovely home, beautifully finished with marble fireplaces imported from Italy, teak paneled walls and parquetry floors. Plasterers were imported from Shanghai to work on the high ceilings and Mother herself selected the light fittings from the General Electric Company of London.

Below is an extract from Cheng (1976: 36-39), which highlights Clara Cheung's role in introducing many Chinese elements in an otherwise Western interior ("Chinese reception room"; "family shrine"; "Buddhist deities"; "ancestral tablets") after the mansion was completed in 1927:

> Mamma took a great interest in the project and made numerous suggestions that were used by the architects. When she accompanied Eva and me to London in 1927, she took the plans with her and arranged for the General Electric Company to supply many of the electrical fittings, including a number of beautiful chandeliers. The central hall of the house was decorated and furnished as a Chinese reception room, with blackwood furniture and an impressive carved blackwood screen.
>
> It was a beautiful house. The floors were parquetted in teak and the downstairs walls paneled in the same wood. An exquisite wrought iron banister framed the window staircase, and there were marble slabs in various places. It had nine bedrooms and half a dozen bathrooms. The inevitable box-rooms (there were two of them) were placed between the upper and lower floors at the back, above the large kitchen. The women servants' quarters were in the basement, which had windows facing down the hillside and overlooking the fishing village of Aberdeen. Other living quarters (above the garage) housed the men servants. Over the covered driveway entrance there was a large airy bedroom with windows on three sides, complete with bathroom and kitchenette. This suite of rooms Mamma, because of her intense interest in nursing, planned as a sick room or convalescent room.
>
> Above the sick room was Mamma's family shrine, with an altarpiece in the centre, designed so that her Buddhist deities were on one side and her ancestral tablets on the other. Just outside the shrine were two little rooms Mamma used for

meditation.

(b) 1938

When Clara Cheung passed away in 1938, two major changes were made on the property to commemorate her: the first was the renaming of the Falls to "曉覺園" in Chinese and "Ho Tung Gardens" in English; the second was the construction of a Chinese pai lou gateway.

(c) 1941, December

The prelude to a major change to the original fabric of the mansion took place at the start of the Japanese invasion, when aerial bombs seriously damaged the family shrine and Clara Cheung's bedroom.

Below is an extract from Cheng (1976: 39) that details the war damage:

> The Falls received several direct hits during the war, one bomb landing on the roof of Mamma's shrine, another on her bedroom (which made it look like an open verandah) and several elsewhere in the house and on the grounds.

(d) 1941-1945

During the Japanese occupation, many timber components, such as doors, windows and timber flooring were looted due to shortage of firewood for cooking. This means that the timber components in the mansion are post-war additions.

(e) 1949

Post-war rehabilitation of the damaged mansion began. The significance of this rehabilitation is stated in the notes of the submission plans to the Public Works Department: "the whole building to be *reinstated to its pre-war state*" (authors' italics). This is evidential that the reconstruction has maintained the Chinese Renaissance architectural character. These reconstructed parts of the mansion are clearly

documented in the architectural plans, which are presently available.

(f) 1953

The interior of the mansion underwent major changes as the layout was rearranged to accommodate six flats that would be individually rented out. These flats, of varying sizes, are located on:

- Ground floor: two flats created from the areas of the existing ground floor and the new extension.
- First floor: two flats created from the areas of the existing first floor and the new extension.
- Entrance tower: two flats converted from the bedrooms originally housed on different floors of the tower.

This major redesigning of the interior was carried out by the architectural practice Palmer and Tuner, and it incorporated ideas of Jean Gittins, daughter of Robert Ho Tung. Some of the more conspicuous changes include the following:

(1) New two-storey extension was built on the east elevation of the mansion. (The extension has a pitched roof that is identical in design to the pitched roof of the entrance tower.)
(2) New kitchens, bathrooms, toilets, cloak rooms, stores and other services rooms were added to the flats.
(3) New fire places (and corresponding chimneys) were built and old ones demolished to accommodate the flats.
(4) Main staircase was redesigned.
(5) Greenhouse on the roof was converted to a "Living & Dining Rm" (this is the designation in the architectural plans).
(6) New balcony was built on the south elevation.
(7) New fountain was built in place of a green house on the north elevation.
(8) New garage was built that could accommodate eight cars.

(g) 1958

The "Living & Dining Rm" on the roof (originally a greenhouse) was enlarged to incorporate a study. Again, the design was executed by Palmer and Turner.

(h) 1980

The mansion was modernized with a lift tower. The tower has a Chinese-style roof design similar to that of the pavilion on the terrace. This time, the design was executed by the architectural practice Spence and Robinson (today's Spence Robinson Group).

## 3.3 Conclusion

The most salient point about the changes made to the mansion is that despite the serious war damage, the postwar reconstruction, and the extensive additions and alterations, there is, without question, no apparent change in the aesthetic character of the architecture, which is discernably Chinese Renaissance. As such, the most important character-defining elements are not its individual parts, but the building as a whole as an aesthetic expression of Chinese Renaissance architecture.

# 4.0 Ho Tung Gardens: Significance of the Gardens

By Lynne D. DiStefano

## 4.1 Introduction

The gardens are part of a unique and distinctive *continuing cultural landscape*, which includes, in addition to the gardens, a mansion that expresses the aesthetics of the Chinese Renaissance movement. Consequently, focusing on either the garden *or* the mansion negates the original design intent: the creation of a mansion within a garden setting that offers dramatic views.

In order to understand the importance of the gardens within a continuing cultural landscape, garden areas and their associated garden elements (Character-defining Elements) need to be identified. Accordingly, in this section (4.0), the gardens are described in general, the garden areas are explained in detail and the views (and viewpoints) addressed. In the following section (5.0), the individual garden elements are examined in greater detail.

## 4.2 Description

(a) Garden Areas (for more information about the Garden Areas, see Section 4.3)

The gardens are a unique combination of different garden areas:

- Approach, including a Pai Lou
- Mixed Buddhist Garden (including a "Pure Land Garden")
- Recreation Areas, including relaxation and viewing areas
- Terraces (primarily for growing vegetables)

(b) Geography of the Site (for more information about the stream, see Section 5.5, Element 18)

The gardens take advantage of the geography of the site, relating, for example, to a southward flowing stream that bisects the core of the gardens. The Approach and Mixed Buddhist Garden lie to the east of the stream, while the Recreation Areas are found on either side. The Terraces lie to the west of the stream, and relate directly to the mansion. (Please note that the stream lies outside the property technically as it lies between two parcels of land.)

(c) Spirit of Place; Garden Traditions

Couplets on the Pai Lou reflect the Spirit of the Place, especially the Pure Land Garden component: "*a pure land for coming and going of life" – "a sacred mountain for peace and stability in life*"; "*accumulate good deeds for surplus happiness" – "exercise the* (Buddhist) *ways for good fortune."* At the same time, the gardens are a coherent expression of both Chinese and Western approaches to garden design. In additional to garden elements associated with the Mixed Buddhist Garden, traditional Chinese garden elements are found throughout the gardens, including viewing pavilions and a zigzag bridge. Decidedly Western features include a swimming pool and what appears to be a nearby grassy area. The openness of the garden, as well, probably refers to the then Western preference for less contained garden spaces.

## 4.3 The Garden Areas

(a) Approach, including Pai Lou (for more information, see Section 5.5, Element 1)

The approach to the gardens is marked by magnificent granite Pai Lou, which was installed as a memorial to Clara Cheung shortly after her death. It pays explicit tribute to her role in creating a memorable setting for a distinctive mansion.

(b) Mixed Buddhist Garden, including a Pure Land Garden (for more information, see Section 5.5, Elements 2-9 and 13)

The Mixed Buddhist Garden occupies the garden area east of the original streambed and generally flows, like the stream, from north to south, blending seamlessly with the Recreation Areas and in harmony with the east-facing vegetable-growing Terraces immediately to the west of the streambed. Major elements include (the numbering of the elements is collated with the map in Section 5.2):

(**1**) Pai Lou;
(**2**) Bridge;
(**3**) Cave;
(**4**) Pagoda;
(**5**) Stairs to Pagoda;
(**6**) Well Parapet;
(**7**) Fountain;
(**8**) Guanyin;
(**9**) Moon Gate; and

(Elements **10** To **12** do not belong to the Mixed Buddhist Garden)

(**13**) Bamboo Forest (it is unclear whether or not this exists and, if so, whether or not it exists to the extent of the original).

(c) Recreation Areas, including relaxation and viewing areas (for more information, see Section 5.5, Elements 10, 14, 15, 17, 20 and 21)

The Recreation Areas, including relaxation and viewing areas, are found on either side of the streambed. Major elements relating to recreation include:

(**10**) Swimming Pool; and
(**15**) Lawn (it is unclear if this is original).

(Please note that the tennis courts are not included as an element as they lay outside the gardens proper.)

Major elements relating to relaxation include:

(**14**) Sitting Area (immediately west of the Swimming Pool).

Major elements specifically related to viewing areas include:

(**17**) Two-tiered Water Pavilion;
(**20**) South-facing Terraces (the upper terrace); and
(**21**) Viewing Pavilion.

(d) Terraces (for more information, see Section 5.5, Elements 19 and 20)

The vegetable-growing terraces occupy the East-facing Terraces and once occupied the lower South-facing Terraces as well. Major elements are the terraces in and of themselves:

(**19**) East-facing Terraces; and
(**20**) South-facing Terraces

## 4.4 The Views

The views from the mansion and its gardens, especially those from the upper terrace of the South-facing Terraces, are a key factor in the siting of the mansion and the landscaping of the grounds. Although such viewpoints are currently inaccessible to the general public, they offer some of the best framed views of the southern part of Hong Kong Island (**Figs. 4.1 and 4.2**). The containment of the views by nearby and mid-distance hills enhances the experience and contributes to the Spirit of the Place.

**Figs. 4.1 and 4.2** View from Ho Tung Gardens towards the south (source: Antiquities and Monuments Office).

(For a detailed appraisal of the significance of the gardens, see: Section 6.2)

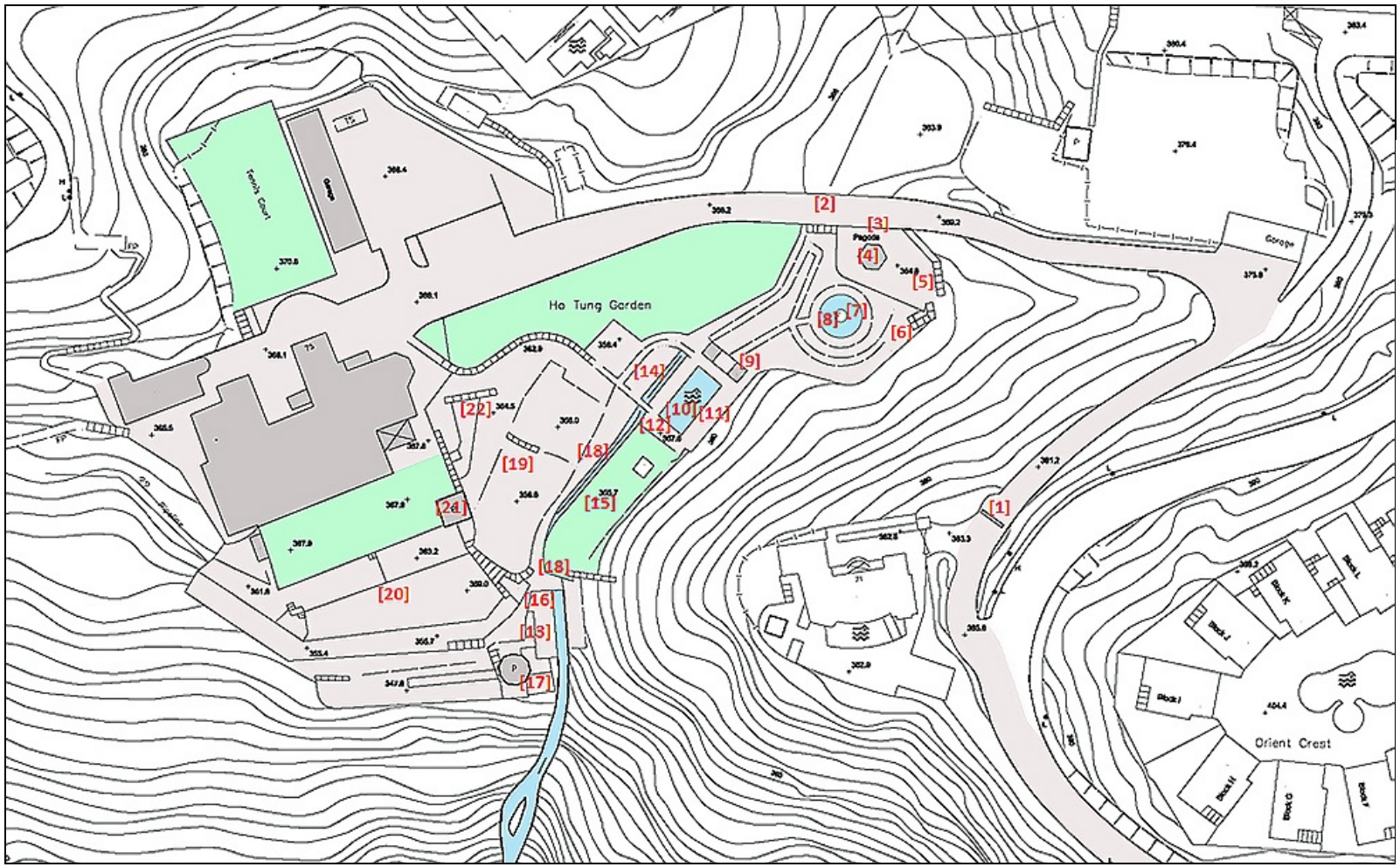
# 5.0 Garden Character-defining Elements (CDEs)

By Lynne D. DiStefano

## 5.1 Introduction

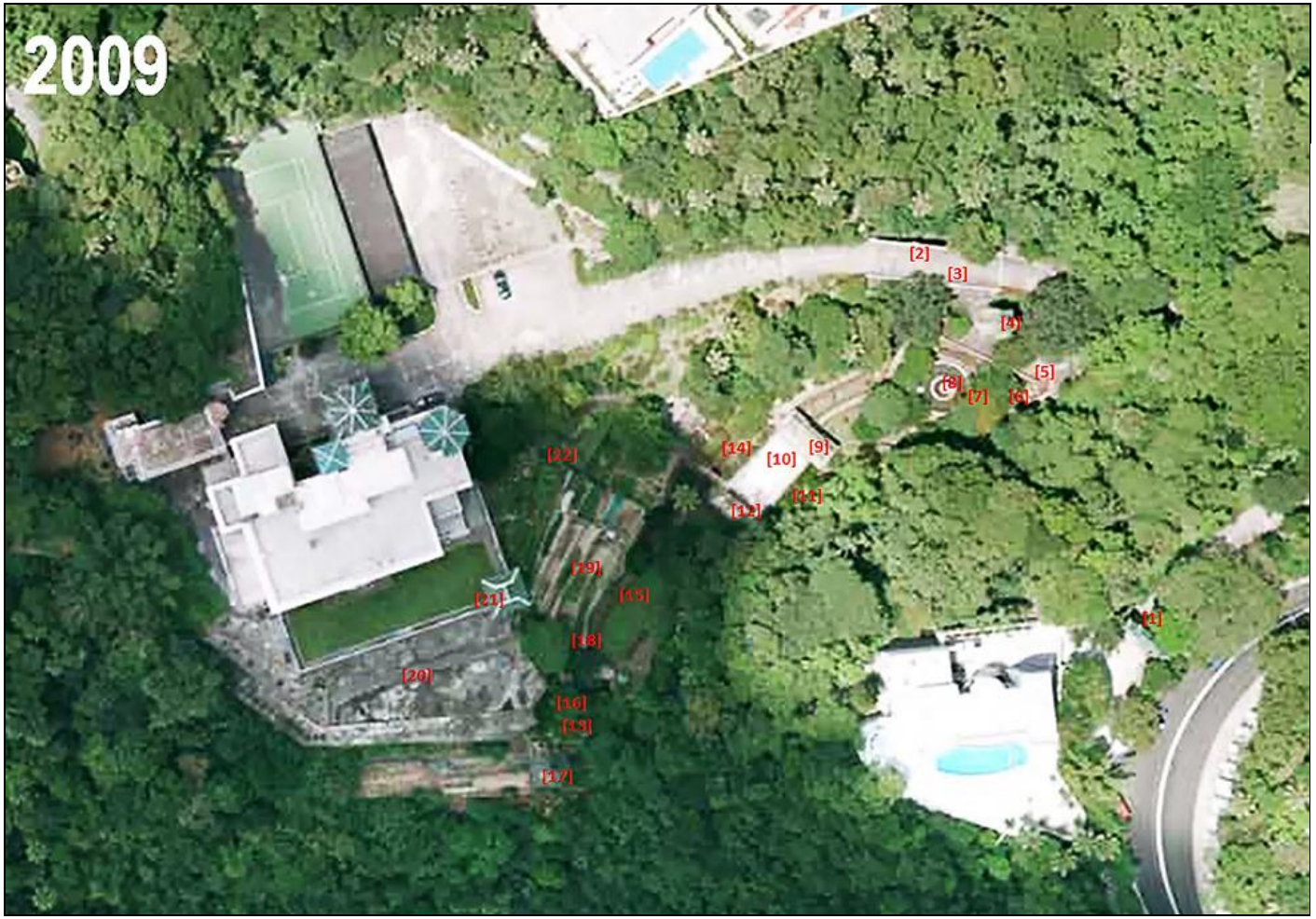
This section generally lists the garden elements in the following order: Approach; Mixed Buddhist Garden, including a “Pure Land Garden”; Recreation Areas, which include relaxation and viewing areas; and Terraces (East-facing Terraces and South-facing Terraces). Please note that many of the references cited are from 吳灞陵 (Ng, Bar-ling).《香港九龍新界旅行手册》,二版 [A Travel Handbook to Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories, 2nd ed.], published in Hong Kong by 華僑日報 (Wah Kiu Yat Po [Overseas Chinese Daily News]) in 1951.

## 5.2 Location of Character-defining Elements 1 to 22 on a Map

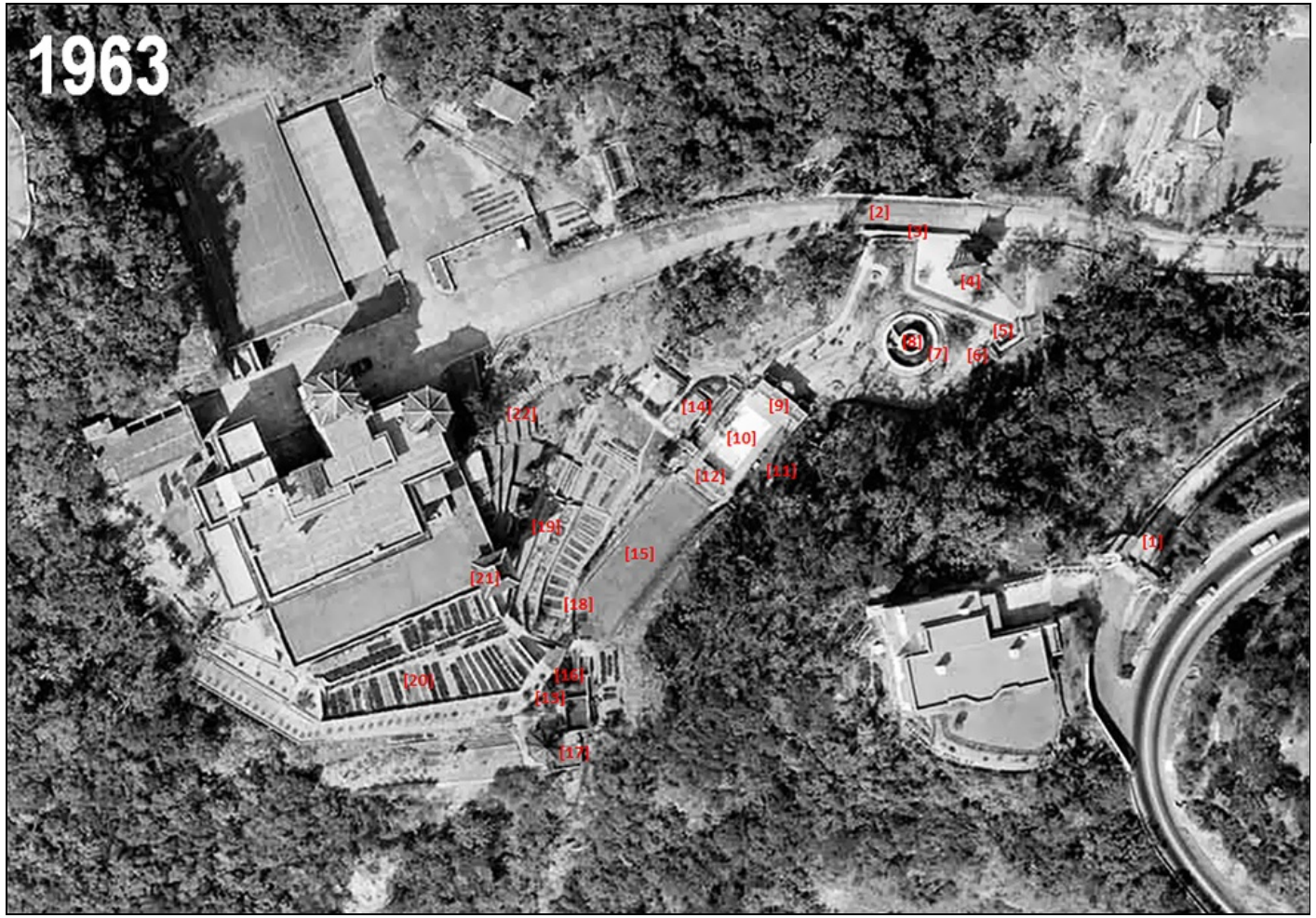



[1] Pai Lou
[2] Bridge
[3] "Cave"
[4] Pagoda
[5] Stairs to Pagoda
[6] Well Parapet
[7] Fountain
[8] Guanyin
[9] Moon Gate
[10] Swimming Pool
[11] Garden Bench; Backless Bench
[12] Trellis
[13] "Bamboo Forest"
[14] Sitting Area including Garden Benches and Table; Access Bridges
[15] Lawn
[16] Zigzag Bridge
[17] Two-tiered Water Pavilion
[18] Stream
[19] East-facing Terraces
[20] South-facing Terraces
[21] Viewing Pavilion
[22] Pathways and Steps

## 5.3 Location of Character-defining Elements 1 to 22 on a 2009 Aerial Photograph




## 5.4 Location of Character-defining Elements 1 to 22 on a 1963 Aerial Photograph




[1] Pai Lou
[2] Bridge
[3] "Cave"
[4] Pagoda
[5] Stairs to Pagoda
[6] Well Parapet
[7] Fountain
[8] Guanyin
[9] Moon Gate
[10] Swimming Pool
[11] Garden Bench; Backless Bench
[12] Trellis
[13] "Bamboo Forest"
[14] Sitting Area including Garden Benches and Table; Access Bridges
[15] Lawn
[16] Zigzag Bridge
[17] Two-tiered Water Pavilion
[18] Stream
[19] East-facing Terraces
[20] South-facing Terraces
[21] Viewing Pavilion
[22] Pathways and Steps

## 5.5 Character-defining Elements 1 to 22

### Element 1

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pai Lou** |  | An elaborate granite entrance gate, constructed in 1938, which identifies the site as "Ho Tung Gardens". | Associated with the death of Clara Cheung (Lady Ho Tung) and the renaming of "The Falls", most likely in tribute to her creation of a complex of gardens that includes a Mixed Buddhist Garden, including a Pure Land Garden. | Reference from Ng (1951: 9-10):<br>"What you will first see is the pai lou with the name "Hiu Kok Yuen" *[on the lintel board]*. Inscribed on it *[on the columns]* are two rhyming couplets: "a pure land for coming and going of life *[referring to the Buddhist cycle of reincarnations – the book's text miswrote the character for "pure" to the homonymous character for "quiet"]*; a scared mountain *[literally, "famous mountain" – traditionally, famous mountains in China are sacred mountains]* for peace and stability in life" and "accumulate good deeds for surplus happiness *["surplus happiness" means more than enough for the living generation, and plenty more for descendants]*; exercise the *[Buddhist]* ways for good fortune." These inscriptions are the work of Yeh Kung-cho *[a renown Chinese politician, calligrapher and a staunch Buddhist; his name has also been Romanized as Yeh Kung-ch'ao and Ye Gongchuo]*, dated to the 27th Year of the Chinese Republic (1938)." |

## Element 2

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Bridge** |  |  <br>A robust granite bridge (with balustrades), which leads from the pai lou, crosses the stream and provides direct access to the mansion. It most likely dates to the construction period of the mansion. | Integral part of site; section of access "spine" that heralds one's entry to a Mixed Buddhist Garden and the more secular land beyond, including the east-facing terraces (vegetable gardens) and the mansion with its south-facing terraces. The underside of the bridge provides a meditation area – the cave. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"The bridge is called the Precious Magnificent Bridge *[the name comes from the Buddhist "88 Repentance Chant" in which there is a line that says, "Salute to the All-nothing Precious Magnificent Light Buddha" 南無虛空寶華光佛]*." |

## Element 3

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cave** (beneath the Bridge) |  |  <br>Cave is used metaphorically and refers to the cave-like area beneath the granite arches of the bridge. The three characters above the main arch read 善財洞 – the Cave of Good Wealth. |  <br>Inside the cave, which should more accurately be described as a meditation cave, there is a sitting area (now with two stools and a low table of masonry construction). On the archway nearest the sitting area, an inscription 入三摩地 reminds visitors of the purpose of the cave – "entering Samadhi" (see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samadhi), which means going into deep meditation or a state of nothingness. The cave is clearly part of a Mixed Buddhist Garden, including a Pure Land Garden. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Farther along is the Cave of Good Wealth *["Good Wealth" is the Buddhist name of one of Lord Buddha's disciples, Sudhana, who later became a Buddasava, known as the Child of Wealth; see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudhana]*, and by this time we have arrived below the Precious Magnificent Bridge."<br><br>Please note that the stools and low table may have been moved from another part of the gardens. |

## Element 4

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pagoda** |  |  <br>A five-tier pagoda of masonry construction with timber doors and windows – and multiple roofs of glazed terra cotta. A finial terminates the apex of the polygonal-shaped roof. At one time (and perhaps even until today), the interior contained statues relating to Buddhist worship. The pagoda sits on a terrace with granite walls. | Not only is the pagoda one of the very few historic pagodas remaining in the region, it is also an integral part of a carefully orchestrated Mixed Buddhist Garden. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"In front of the statue of Guanyin are stone seats under the shade of trees, and behind the statue a Buddhist pagoda." |

## Element 5

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stairs to Pagoda** |  | Masonry steps, with solid balustrades and multiple landings, lead from the area containing the statue of Guanyin to an ample terrace (with lattice-work balustrade) surrounding the pagoda. | The stairs are the most direct point of access to the pagoda from the statue of Guanyin. | No reference to date. |

## Element 6

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Well Parapet?** |  | A masonry structure that appears to be the parapet for a well. | The structure may have a connection with ritualistic purification. | No reference to date. |

## Element 7

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fountain** (with Guanyin) |  |  <br>A double-ring masonry fountain with a red decorative Hui pattern (回紋) running around the exterior face of the outer ring and red bosses (nipples) running around the outer face of the inner arcaded ring. In the center of the fountain is a pedestal supporting a statue of Guanyin. It is unclear whether or not the nearby stone seats mentioned in Ng (1951: 9-10) are extant. | There is no mention of the fountain in Ng (1951: 9-10), although the design and materials suggest that parts of the fountain are original. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"On the path out of the bamboo forest, a statue of Guanyin *[the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy]* comes into view. In front of the statue are stone seats under the shade of trees, and behind the statue a Buddhist pagoda." |

## Element 8

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Guanyin** (on pedestal) |  | Guanyin, probably of masonry construction, is supported by a pedestal, probably also of masonry construction, which terminates in a stylized lotus flower. | As part of a Mixed Buddhist garden, Guanyin, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, occupies a place of considerable importance. She provides the physical as well as the spiritual focus for a Chinese garden that is by nature loosely organized and composed of fragmentary elements. *The current statue may not be the original statue.* (See: Zheng and Wong 2011:50-51) | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"On the path out of the bamboo forest, a statue of Guanyin *[the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy]* comes into view. In front of the statue are stone seats under the shade of trees, and behind the statue a Buddhist pagoda."<br><br>Reference from Zheng and Wong (2011: 50-51):<br>Ho Tung Gardens was commandeered by the British military during the Japanese invasion to serve as a logistics base and signal point. On 21 December 1941, Japanese planes bombed the property, destroying military vehicles, parts of the building and the Guanyin statue. A number of soldiers were killed, and the family secretary by the name of Ah Cheung was killed when the Guanyin statue fell on him. |

## Element 9

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Moon Gate** (with Changing Rooms) |  | A masonry moon gate with attached changing rooms on either side separates the fountain with Guanyin and the pagoda (the sacred) from the swimming pool (the secular). (The roofs of the moon gate and changing rooms are of glazed terra cotta; the grills on both sides of the changing rooms are of glazed terra cotta in the shape of bamboo.)<br><br>  <br><br>On the north side of the moon gate, that facing Guanyin, the inscription reads "arriving on the shore of awakening". The inscription, 覺 | The moon gate, a traditional garden form used to frame carefully selected views, is not only used here as a framing device within a garden setting, but seems to be used as a division between the sacred part of the garden – the Pure Land Garden – and the more secular part of the garden - that used for recreation. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Above the swimming pool is a crescent archway, sculpted with four Chinese characters "Together landing on the shore of enlightenment (or awakening)" *[this is a phrase from the Buddhist scriptures, referring to the transformation from the state of bewilderment to enlightenment in the understanding of Buddhism]*, and adjacent to it is a changing room."<br><br>Reference from Gittens (1969: 62):<br>"The swimming pool was tiled and with this went two changing rooms, connected by an open moon gate, through which the pool could be seen from the approach road." |

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 岸同登, is a Buddhism term. The first two characters mean the "shore of awakening". This is from the Sutra that likens one's lack of comprehension of the true meaning of Buddhist philosophy as lost at sea; when one finally understands, he is liken to arriving on the shore.<br><br>  <br>On the south side of the moon gate, that facing the swimming pool, another inscription reads “beautiful state of the West”. The inscription, 西方勝境, is a Buddhism term that refers to the beautiful state of mind a person experiences upon reaching | | |

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | enlightenment (a person gets to go to the "Western paradise" when he/she reaches enlightenment). | | |

## Element 10

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Swimming Pool** |  | A tiled swimming pool, with an elaborate perimeter pattern including stylized swastikas, abuts the moon gate and changing rooms at its north end.<br><br>  <br><br>卐 (swastika) is a Chinese character (pronounced in Mandarin "wan" and in Cantonese "maan") from Sanskrit that represents the sign of Buddhism and means "auspicious". | The swimming pool, carefully crafted in small-scale black and white tiles, signifies the recreation aspect of the gardens – and reinforces the powerful axis established by the placement of the sacred garden elements (bridge, cave, pagoda, fountain with Guanyin and moon gate). | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"…and to the South a swimming pool surrounded by bamboo trees."<br><br>Reference from Gittens (1969: 62):<br>"The swimming pool was tiled and with this went two changing rooms, connected by an open moon gate, through which the pool could be seen from the approach road." |

## Element 11

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Garden Bench; Backless Bench** (currently along east side of Swimming Pool) |  | Along the east side of the pool, there is a garden bench and a backless bench of masonry construction. Behind the garden bench, on the brick wall, there seems to be an inscription. | | No reference to date.<br><br>Please note that these elements appear to have been moved from another part of the gardens. |

## Element 12

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trellis** (at foot of Swimming Pool) |  | A series of masonry posts form a garden trellis at the south end of the swimming pool. | A framing device for gardens that can also offer protection from the sun. | No reference to date. |

## Element 13

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **"Bamboo Forest"** (and related plantings) |  | Mature plantings (trees and shrubs), perhaps including at least one cluster of bamboo, are found throughout the gardens. | The possible bamboo cluster could relate to the bamboo forest mentioned in Ng (1951:10). If so, it should be seen as an integral part of the Mixed Buddhist Garden. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Facing the pool is an open area bounded by rockery, and furnished with stone chairs and tables for use as a resting place. Going down a flight of steps there is a bamboo forest *[there is close affiliation between bamboo and Buddhism]* and a water pavilion *[a Chinese pavilion built on the edge of water]*, and a small pavilion sits over a ravine, across which spans a red timber wandering bridge *[literally, a "zig-zag" bridge]*." |

## Element 14

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sitting Area** (west of Swimming Pool), including **Garden Benches** (2) and **Table**; **Access Bridges** (2) (to Swimming Pool) |  |  <br>Immediately west of the swimming pool is a concreted area with two garden benches (one short and one long) and a table – all of masonry construction. Separated from the pool by the stream, two bridges, probably of masonry construction, link the sitting area to the swimming pool. | The sitting area is an integral part of the garden and was used for relaxation. It may also have been used by those visiting the site for religious purposes. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Facing the pool is an open area bounded by rockery, and furnished with stone chairs and tables for use as a resting place."<br><br>Please note that it is unclear if the garden benches and table are in their original locations. |

## Element 15

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Lawn** |  <br>View looking toward the east-facing terraces.<br><br>  <br>View looking toward the eastern slope. | Adjacent to the far end of the swimming pool is a grass-covered area nestled between the eastern slope and east-facing terraces. The path of the original stream delineates the division between the lawn and the east-facing terraces. | The lawn appears to be a recreation area, although it may (also) have been the location of a bamboo forest. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Going down a flight of steps there is a bamboo forest *[there is close affiliation between bamboo and Buddhism]* and a water pavilion *[a Chinese pavilion built on the edge of water]*, and a small pavilion sits over a ravine, across which spans a red timber wandering bridge *[literally, a "zigzag" bridge]*." |

## Element 16

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **16.Zigzag Bridge** |  | The zigzag bridge, most likely of masonry construction, crosses the lower part of the stream (before the waterfalls), giving access from one side to the other as well as providing a linkage to the two-tier lower pavilion. | The zigzag bridge, an important landscape device in Chinese gardens, links all the different gardens together near the point the stream becomes a waterfall. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Going down a flight of steps there is a bamboo forest *[there is close affiliation between bamboo and Buddhism]* and a water pavilion *[a Chinese pavilion built on the edge of water]*, and a small pavilion sits over a ravine, across which spans a red timber wandering bridge *[literally, a "zig-zag" bridge]*." |

## Element 17

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Two-tiered Water Pavilion** |  |  <br>The two-tiered water pavilion, whose lower tier is partially set into the slope, is of masonry construction. Its polygonal upper tier, which sits on a circular deck of masonry construction, is accessible from the gardens by means of the zigzag bridge. Its lower tier, also polygonal in shape, is reached by a series of external steps from the upper tier. (The floor of the upper tier is covered with tiles arranged in a simple geometric pattern; the terrazzo floor of the lower tier includes a stylized lotus.) | It is more than likely that this is the water pavilion described in Ng (1951:10). It is important not only as a garden element, but as the place where Clara Cheung had poems and poetic couplets (written by friends) inscribed. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>*"Going down a flight of steps there is a bamboo forest [there is close affiliation between bamboo and Buddhism] and a water pavilion [a Chinese pavilion built on the edge of water], and a small pavilion sits over a ravine, across which spans a red timber wandering bridge [literally, a "zig-zag" bridge]."*<br><br>Reference from Cheng (1976: 39):<br>"When Mamma moved to the new house, the land around it was still wild, and she had terraces built leading down to the swimming pool and the waterfall, where she erected a little pavilion. Here it was always cool, calm, and quiet, except for the sound of the falling water. She was very fond of this spot, and on the pillars of the pavilion installed mouldings containing poems and poetic couplets written for her by friends who were both good poets and calligraphers." |

## Element 18

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stream** (technically outside the property) |  | The stream, from which Ho Tung Gardens takes its first name – "The Falls", effectively separates the Mixed Buddhist Garden with its adjacent recreation areas from the east-facing vegetable terraces – and the mansion with its south-facing terraces. The upper part of the stream is now contained within a masonry channel. | The stream is significant. It was the source of the original name for the site – "The Falls" and it became a major focus in the design of the gardens – a feature that helps denote the separate gardens and, at the same time, a feature that helps to unify them. | Reference from Cheng (1976: 37):<br>"The Falls had originally been given that name because a mountain stream flowed nearby. In the rainy season there actually was a waterfall there. Some of the water was used to fill a swimming pool, and this was no doubt one of its main attractions for my parents." |

## Element 19

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **East-facing Terraces** (west of Stream) |  |  <br>A series of irregular, relatively small terraces, almost certainly corresponding to the original terrain, descend from the east side of the main house to the streambed. | Although it is unclear exactly how the terraces were originally planted, it seems clear that many of them, if not all of them, were planted with vegetables under the guidance of Clara Cheung. Fruit trees were planted in the terraces as well, but their exact location is hard to determine, i.e. were they planted throughout the terraces, in selected terrace areas and/or immediately outside the terraces.<br><br>Flowers were grown, but seeds were sown in boxes, transplanted to trays and ultimately placed in plant pots. (Gittens 1969: 99) | Reference from Gittens (1969: 99):<br>"Much of my time was spent in helping Mother (Clara Cheung) with planning the garden. She was still developing the site, trying to place as much of the virgin scrubland as possible under cultivation. She was very anxious to grow fruit trees, which we ordered from Canton: peaches, pears, apricots and tangerines. Terrace after terrace was reclaimed to take vegetable beds all the way down the slope towards the swimming pool. When these were built, she started on the side overlooking the sea until it seemed as though we were trying to reach down to Aberdeen. We studied the seed catalogues from Suttons in England, from whom we ordered most of her seeds."<br><br>Reference from Gittens (1969: 286):<br>"Robbie *[Ho Shai-lai, the second son of Ho Tung, and Clara Cheung, who became a general in the Kuomintang army]* and I spent the next morning in the garden. It still bore evidence of the damage sustained as a result of the war… but Robbie had been at great pains to restore the |

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | general atmosphere to its former elegance. He had planted new fruit trees from Canton, and was nursing a few rose bushes I had sent him from Queensland, as well as some of the orchids which had survived.” |

## Element 20

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **South-facing Terraces** (extending directly south from the main house) |  | A series of relatively larger terraces, almost certainly corresponding to the original terrain, descend from the south side of the main house.<br><br>  <br><br>The upper terrace, rectangular in shape and currently grass-covered, extends directly from the main house at ground level.<br><br>  | The terraces are an integral part of the site, directly tied to the main house and related visually to the other gardens. Although the terrace walls have been reinforced (slope reinforcement), the results are not aesthetically pleasing. | Reference from Gittens (1969: 99):<br>"When these (the east-facing terraces) were built, she (Lady Ho Tung) started on the side overlooking the sea until it seemed as though we were trying to reach down to Aberdeen." (Note: Careful reading of the paragraph containing this quote suggests that the south-facing terraces may also have been planted with vegetables and possibly fruit trees. (See East-facing Terraces for more information.) |

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | This terrace is best described as a viewing terrace and it includes a viewing pavilion at the southwest corner and a handsome perimeter balustrade inset with glazed terra cotta grills.<br><br>  <br>The steep terraces below, generally irregular in shape and partially concreted, were likely planted with vegetables and possibly fruit trees. The terraces are only nominally on axis with the north-south axis of the main house as they splay to the east on their western side. | | |

## Element 21

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Viewing Pavilion** |  |  <br>The viewing pavilion, of masonry construction with a low balustrade inset with glazed terra cotta grills and a roof covered in glazed terra cotta tiles, sits at the southwest corner of the upper terrace. (A nominal frieze is inset with glazed terra cotta grills; the floor is paved with tiles arranged in a geometric pattern.) | The pavilion is clearly a viewing pavilion, sited to take advantage of the multiple views to the southeast, south and southwest. As such, it is a landscape element of considerable importance. | Reference from Ng (1951: 10):<br>"Going down a flight of steps there is a bamboo forest *[there is close affiliation between bamboo and Buddhism]* and a water pavilion *[a Chinese pavilion built on the edge of water]*, and a small pavilion sits over a ravine, across which spans a red timber wandering bridge *[literally, a "zig-zag" bridge]*." The "small pavilion" could well be the viewing pavilion." |

## Element 22

| | Image(s) | Description | Significance | Comments/References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pathways and Steps** |  | A number of pathways and series of steps, most of which are concreted, are found throughout the gardens. | The pathways and stairways link the other elements of the garden and, in particular, provide directional clues for moving through all the garden areas, including the Mixed Buddhist Garden. | No reference available to date. |

# 6.0 Appraisal of the Significance of the Mansion and Gardens

By Lee Ho Yin and Lynne D. DiStefano

## 6.1 Appraisal of the Significance of the Mansion

The appraisal is based on the criteria for the grading of Historic Buildings carried out by the Antiquities and Monuments Office and Antiquities Advisory Board.

(a) Historical Interest of the Architecture

The mansion of Ho Tung Gardens is historically significant on two counts. First, it is the first piece of property developed, owned and lived in by a Chinese, who was hitherto forbidden to build on the European-exclusive Peak District under the *Peak District Reservation Ordinance, 1904* and the *Peak District (Residence) Ordinance 1918*. Second, it is the first building in the Peak District whose architecture does not conform to the "European house" tradition established in the Peak District via the *European District Reservation Ordinance, 1888*. Most significantly, the mansion was the first building in the Peak District that was designed with a conspicuous Chinese aesthetic character consistent with Chinese Renaissance architecture as developed in China at this time.

(b) Rarity of the Architecture

While Chinese Renaissance architecture became a popular trend in Hong Kong before World War II, residential buildings in the manner were uncommon. There are probably two reasons for this. First, the aesthetics seems to have been used mainly for institutional buildings, and, second, local upper-class Chinese seemed to prefer Western-style houses. Postwar development has reduced the already small number of such residential buildings to an even smaller number, thus making every extant example a rare specimen worthy of conservation.

(c) Significant Architectural Merit

The significant architectural merit of the mansion of Ho Tung Garden is as an early example of Chinese Renaissance architecture in Hong Kong. In fact, it appears to be the earliest surviving example – of any building type – of Chinese Renaissance

architecture in Hong Kong. It is also dated to an earlier time than many of the examples found in Mainland China.

(d) Group Value of Comparable Extant Examples

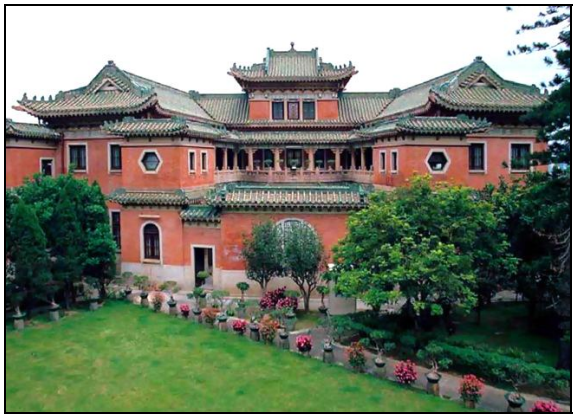
Known extant examples of the residential type of Chinese Renaissance architecture in Hong Kong are:

- Ho Tung Gardens (何東花園), completed in 1927, a Proposed Monument) (**Fig. 2.26**)
- Haw Par Mansion (虎豹別墅, completed in 1935, a Grade I Historic Building) (**Fig. 2.27**)
- King Yin Lei (景賢里, completed in 1937, a Declared Monument) (**Fig. 2.28**)
- buildings in Dragon Garden (龍圃, completed from the 1950s to the 1960s, the buildings and garden are collectively Grade II Historic Buildings) (**Fig. 2.29**)

These residential buildings, built from the 1920s to the 1960s, are a diminishing record of the evolutionary development of Chinese Renaissance architecture in Hong Kong. Clustering these places may present an opportunity for a group heritage designation under the theme of Chinese Renaissance architecture, which will certainly be the first designation of its kind and a breakthrough in the field of heritage conservation in Hong Kong.

When considered as a group, the mansion of Ho Tung Gardens reveals another important value – it is the only mansion among the four that is built within the pre-war European-exclusive Peak District.


**Figs. 2.26 and 2.27** (from left to right) Ho Tung Gardens (source: Development Bureau); Tiger Balm Garden (source: from a vintage postcard).




**Figs. 2.28 and 2.29** (from left to right) King Yin Lei (source: Development Bureau); Dragon Garden (Apple Daily).

## (e) Authenticity of the Architecture

As this study shows, the greatest value of the mansion lies in the socio-political meaning behind its aesthetic character. As such, the authenticity of the building is not measured in terms of how much it has been altered and modified, but in terms of whether the alterations and modifications have maintained the overall aesthetic character of Chinese Renaissance architecture.

As far as the external appearance of the building is concerned, the architecture has maintained its authenticity in terms of the Chinese Renaissance aesthetic character despite alterations and modifications. This is evident in the rebuilt portion of the building that was damaged during World War II, and in the addition of the lift core, in

which the same aesthetic character was applied to the exposed lift machine room on the roof.

While the interior has undergone extensive alterations and modifications, these have been applied only in terms of finishes and partitioning, and the structure of the building, which is essential in maintaining the external form of the architecture, remains unaltered.

(f) Social Value and Local Interest of the Architecture

Robert Ho Tung's choice of a conspicuous Chinese aesthetic character for the mansion was deliberate – it was a decision to challenge and subvert the statutory discrimination against Hong Kong's Chinese community by the Colonial authorities and the socially advantaged European community. This means that the mansion is a tangible expression of Robert Ho Tung's identification with his Chinese heritage and his affiliation with the Chinese community. As such, the mansion is a significant and unique monument to the struggle of the disadvantaged early Hong Kong Chinese community for cultural dignity, legal rights and social equity, all of which are universal values to which today's Hongkongers of all ethnic backgrounds can collectively relate.

In Singapore, one of the criteria for designating a National Monument is by its social value, which is defined as "the qualities for which a building has become a focus for spiritual, political or national cultural sentiment for the nation as whole or for a social group."[4] This definition fits well with the social value of the mansion, which possesses the qualities to become a focus for the cultural sentiment for Hong Kong as a whole, particularly for the Hong Kong Chinese social group. As such, it can be argued that the mansion qualifies as *an architectural heritage significant to the historical development and cultural identity of Hong Kong*, and it should be considered for appropriate protection.

## 6.2 Appraisal of the Significance of the Gardens

The appraisal builds on the criteria for the grading of Historic Buildings carried out by the Antiquities and Monuments Office and Antiquities Advisory Board, with focus on the significance associated with Clara Cheung (Lady Ho Tung).

[4] See: Hong Kong Legislative Council Secretariat 2008: 8.

(a) Relationship between the Gardens and the Mansion

The gardens are more than a series of Character-defining Elements (CDEs). As mentioned previously, they are a major component of the place and inseparable from the mansion and its carefully "staged" scenic viewpoints. And, clearly, as the mansion reflects both Chinese and Western elements (typical of the Chinese Renaissance movement), the gardens combine individual Chinese elements within a Western setting.

The connection between the gardens and the mansion is such that it is important to repeat part of the Introduction (Section 1.0):

> The mansion is set within distinctive gardens, and the gardens themselves are an integral part of the place. They are more than an element; they are a major component of the place and inseparable from the mansion and its carefully "staged" scenic viewpoints. Focusing on the mansion alone, rather than the mansion within its garden setting, negates the original design intent: the creation of a mansion within a garden setting, a mansion that is carefully positioned to exploit dramatic views to the south.

(b) Relationship between the Gardens and Clara Cheung

Perhaps even more important than the overall character of the gardens is to the thinking behind the gardens - what informed their planning. Clara Cheung was responsible for the gardens, including their planning, and her influence was fourfold. As a devout Buddhist, she created a meditation garden – what can be called a Pure Land Garden, which she shared with the public. As a caring matriarch, she provided spaces for outdoors recreation for her extended family and presumably their friends. As an avid and accomplished gardener, she created standard-setting ornamental and vegetable gardens.

And, finally, from what can be gleaned from written accounts, Clara Cheung, as a connoisseur of fine things, sought beauty and serenity in her surroundings. Ho Tung Gardens, as a whole, expresses this search. Sadly, the interior of the mansion, as Clara Cheung lived in it, no longer exists. But, the mansion (its exterior), the gardens and the views remain – *a testament to one of Hong Kong's most important women.*

## 6.3 Appraisal of the Significance of Ho Tung Gardens as a Whole: Educational Value

This last appraisal brings us back to the beginning of the study (Section 2.1), in which a fundamental question was raised by Article 67 of *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage 2008: 36): "whether a place might be so valued in the future that it should be protected now." In direct layman's terms, "Why should we care about conserving Ho Tung Gardens?" The reason is that the place provides a tangible educational platform for future generations to learn about such social aspirations as national identity and cultural identity, as well as such universal social values as cultural dignity, legal rights and social equity, all of which are crucial ingredients for the harmonious society that China is striving to become.

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