

Historic Building Appraisal
Former Central Government Offices (CGO),
Central, Hong Kong

The Former Central Government Offices (CGO) stand on an area which had been earmarked by the British in the 1840s for public offices and a larger set of government offices was built in 1847-48, which remained in use until they were demolished after World War II to make way for the present buildings. The three wings were built in phases in the 1950s to replace earlier buildings on site. They were purpose designed as offices for government departments and have remained in this use until recent times.

*Historical
Interest*

In terms of form and massing the three wings are low-rise, horizontal in emphasis and with flat roofs. The buildings show areas of granite cladding and exposed concrete frame in one form or another. They display the characteristics of functionalist architecture, prevalent during the early to mid 20th century.

*Architectural
Merit*

The **Main Wing** was completed in 1957. Its front elevation, serving as a backdrop for many social events and important public announcements, has become the 'public face' of the complex. It originally had the Legislative Council Chamber in a fan-shaped building attached to the north side of the wing. This fan-shaped building was demolished in the 1980s to make way for a new annex added to the Main Wing.

The **East Wing**, although completed in 1954, actually has more of a 1930s feel, with some elements clearly influenced by the Art Deco style, such as the zigzag moulding over the main entrance door. Elsewhere it displays a degree of refinement and attention to detail that is too 'fussy' to be considered properly Functionalist, such as moulded coffers to the car park soffit. It is an elegant building which marks a transition from a classical Beaux Arts towards a more modern functionalist style.

The **West Wing**, completed in 1959, is a functionalist building with a heavy concrete framed grid across its elevations. It is seven stories high across the centre of the site but drops away to give a thirteen storey height at the west end where it fronts Ice House Street. With a heavier, clumsier and more regular concrete frame than the East Wing and Main Wing, the West Wing is considered to be the most utilitarian architecturally.

The **Former CGO site** itself, including its landscape features, is of an integrated whole. It should have higher heritage significance than the individual buildings. One of the reasons why the site is significant is its setting within an open green space adjacent to several important historic buildings.

The buildings are examples of the Functionalist style of architecture. All

Rarity,

three wings have been altered a good deal since their original design. All the wings had an upper floor added in the 1960s and the Main Wing had the major extension to the north in 1989. The West Wing has a new entrance suite on its east front added in 1998. Internally, changes have been made on more than one occasion to the plan layouts and to the fixtures, fittings and finishes. There is little that remains inside these buildings which can be seen as highly significant.

The complex of the Former CGO forms a familiar Central District landmark for more than half of a century. The low rise office buildings and the trees combine with the other well wooded areas (e.g. the Government House garden, Zoological and Botanical Gardens, and Hong Kong Park) to give a large green space in an otherwise heavily developed part of the city. Eleven trees on the complex are on the “Register of Old and Valuable Trees” of LCSD.

The **Main Wing** accommodated the offices of the most senior government officials and once housed the chamber of the Legislative Council and Executive Council. Its forecourt was a popular place for political and public events. The **East Wing** was also the offices of senior government officers. In comparison with the other two wings, the **West Wing** was a site more accessible to the community, where there was a public enquiry counter and a canteen open to the public.

The presence of the Government House and the other declared monuments in the vicinity (e.g. St. John’s Cathedral, Former French Mission Building, and Duddell Street Steps and Gas Lamp) contribute to the setting of the Central Government Offices and add interest and significance to the site. The site itself and the history associated with it are seen as being as significant, possibly more significant than the buildings.

The Former CGO buildings have been vacated after the new CGO Complex at Tamar is completed. The three wings will be preserved for adaptive re-use.