



Government Hill should be given Monument Status
to: amo@lcsd.gov.hk

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From: Mee Kam Ng
To: amo@lcsd.gov.hk

1 attachment



Government_Hill_West_Wing_MKNg.pdf

To whom it may concern:

Attached please find my views on the captioned.

With best wishes,
Mee Kam Ng

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From: (Mee Kam Ng, Professor, Department of Geography and Resource Management)
To: amo@lcsd.gov.hk
c.c. info@governmenthill.org
Re: Government Hill should be given Monument Status

30 June 2012

Dear Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) members,

As Government Hill had been the seat of Government for over 150 years, its historic and cultural significance (meaning aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and/or spiritual value for past, present and future generations—CAH20thC) should be beyond doubt. The integrity of this site should therefore be fiercely guarded.

However, we also understand that the Government and some of the members of AAB consider West Wing in Government Hill of lower architectural value and hence agree to redevelop it into a grade-A office glass tower. Not only would such a move destroy the integrity and aesthetic value of this important historic site, such a move contradicts best practices in China as well as the Madrid Document 2011 that contributes to the development of ICOMOS guidelines for the conservation of heritage sites of the 20th century. I would like to put forward the following three points to object strongly to the redevelopment of West Wing:

- A case in Shanghai:

It was about 'the designation of a massive building that was once the commanding headquarters of the Japanese navy during Japan's invasion of China. At the beginning, some experts deemed the building for demolition for three reasons. First, the massive building represented national shame; secondly, the building was 'ugly' and did not meet the criteria for 'outstanding modern architecture'; thirdly, demolition or partial demolition would enable additional room for road-widening work on the south side of the building, thereby improving external traffic connections of the area. However, a number of researchers put forward an alternative view: conservation of heritage buildings should not be defined by its appearance because 'aesthetics' change with time and are subjective criteria; and the status of a building as a symbol of national shame should perhaps form a reason for conserving it. From our point of view, the most important reason to conserve historic heritage is to continue the memories of significant historical events, a viewpoint that quickly gained acceptance from more experts and some government officials. From subsequent published study findings, as well as recent understanding of the author, although the massive building is still not designated as 'outstanding modern architecture', it has at least remained intact' (see Figure below) (Luan and Wang, 2009, p.275).



Source: Luan and Feng, 2009, p.276.

- The case of Shenzhen:

'...from a macro-historical development perspective, as China's most successful Special Economic Zone, Shenzhen's comparative advantage lies precisely in its 30 years of economic reform and open door history. More importantly, this living heritage is created anew each day by the migrant inhabitants and therefore should be conserved part of the collective memory... Shenzhen has already started conservation efforts along this line. In 2005, '10 Heritage Buildings' were elected the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Shenzhen SEZ. All of them were built after 1980' (Liu and Ng, 2009, p.295).

- *Approaches for the Conservation of 20th Architectural Heritage, Madrid Document 2011*
(<http://icomos-isc20c.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/madriddocumentenglish.pdf>)

In the International Conference 'Intervention Approaches for the 20th Century Architectural Heritage—CAH 20thC' adopted on 16 June 2011, the above Document was adopted and I would like to highlight the following to argue for the conservation of all the buildings in the former Central Government Offices, including West Wing:

- To CAH 20thC, 'the architectural heritage of this [20th] century is at risk from a lack of appreciation and care. Some has already been lost and more is in danger. It is a living heritage and it is essential to understand, define, interpret and manage it well for future generations' (p.1).
- 'The Madrid Document 2011 seeks to contribute to the appropriate and respectful handling of this important period of architectural heritage' (p.1).

- Article 2: '... The integrity of the architectural heritage of the 20th century should not be impacted by unsympathetic interventions. This requires careful assessment of the extent to which the heritage site includes all the components necessary to express its significance and also to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes that contribute to its significance. Adverse impacts of development... should be avoided... The input of the original designer or builder should always be sought, where relevant.'
 - ➔ This is a very good reminder for the need of a careful reconsideration of the Government's proposed redevelopment of West Wing.
- Article 5.1: Adopt a cautious approach to change. 'Do only as much as is necessary and as little as possible. Any intervention should be cautious. The extent and depth of change should be minimized... Discrete interventions can be introduced that improve the performance and functionality of a heritage site on condition that its cultural significance is not adversely impacted. When change of use is under consideration, care must be taken to find an appropriate reuse that conserves the cultural significance... Before intervening in any heritage site its cultural significance needs to be assessed, and all components should be defined and their relationship and setting understood. The impact of the proposed changes on the cultural significance of the heritage site must be thoroughly assessed.'
 - ➔ This point is important because when intervention is introduced, it should only enhance NOT destroy the historic significance of the heritage site!
- Article 6.1: Additions need to respect the cultural significance of the heritage site. '...new addition should be designed to respect the scale, siting, composition, proportion, structure, materials, texture and colour of the heritage site. These additions should be discernible as new, identifiable upon close inspection, but developed to work in harmony with the existing; complementing not competing.'
 - ➔ And if addition is necessitated, it should be designed to respect the design, scale, siting etc. of the site. The Government's proposed glass skyscraper is certainly incompatible to the current scale and character of the existing site.
- To highlight, the Document advocates comprehensive conservation. Failing this, any intervention should enhance cultural significance. If new addition is inevitable, it should respect the scale and character, etc. of the site. These expert views echo views of many civil society organisations' call for conservation of the whole of Government Hill as a significant historic precinct and their objection to the redevelopment of West Wing into an office building.

Given the above reasons, I hope Government Hill will eventually obtain a monument status. I hope AAB will grant Government Hill as well as all the 20th buildings on it Grade 1.

References:

Liu, W. and Ng, M.K., 2009. Heritage conservation in China's 'instant city'—Shenzhen, *Planning Theory and Practice*, pp.289-297.

Luan, F. and Wang, Y., 2009. Debates and compromises: conservation and development of the northern old Hongkou in Shanghai, pp.271-81.