

The current heritage conservation policy in hong kong



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

We can see that some valuable built heritage were destroyed in these few years; however, the public did not acknowledge the impacts of demolishing our precious built heritage and the importance of conserving them. Not only can cultural heritage enhance the uniqueness of the city, it also can contribute to the civic pride and a sense of belongings. Therefore, this study will discuss the effectiveness of the heritage conservation policies in Hong Kong. The current systems are the Three-tier system and Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. Data were gathered by secondary research, such as governmental reports, academic theses and private sector reports. After reviewing the two policies, we found that the strategies lack statutory power to protect built heritage and the preservation of privately owned historical buildings done by the Hong Kong government is ineffective. To further establishing a comprehensive heritage conservation system, the heritage preservation experiences of Macau can provide some insights and directions to the local government. By referencing its experience, we recommend that Hong Kong can improve the current systems and the scope of protection can be extended to private historical monuments.

Background

In the past hundreds of year, Hong Kong has grown from a small rural community into one of the most influencing and renowned cosmopolis. By undergoing a long period of history, plenty of valuable heritage legacies can be found in every district in Hong Kong. In fact, cultural heritage can sustain people's values and allow them to share a collective memory. Therefore, it should be considered as essential and invaluable public assets that are worthy to preserve.

In 1976, in a light of protecting historical monuments and promoting the heritage value, Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance was established by the British colonial government. Some related departments have subsequently set up to protect historical buildings, such as Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), Urban Renewal Authority (URA) and so on.

Unfortunately, due to prompt economic development and large population growth, there are great demands for intense urban development and some significant historical landmarks have been demolished, such as the Queen's Pier and the Star Ferry Pier. As a result, despite historical significance, old buildings occupying potential sites of commercial development are regarded as barriers and cannot be protected properly by legal frameworks.

Introduction

It is obvious to see that the heritage conservation in Hong Kong is yielded to the economic growth and urban development. The Hong Kong government has neglected the importance of conserving heritage and some monuments cannot be maintained for the future generation under the existing heritage preservation policies. Therefore, I find it essential to look into the efficacy of the current policies. This paper aims at examining the effectiveness of present heritage conservation policies and reviewing the experience of Macau.

Procedure

Data for the policy paper gathered are mainly secondary data which was obtained by extensive reading of relevant journal articles, theses and reports. Moreover, I accessed some governmental departments' websites in

<https://assignbuster.com/the-current-heritage-conservation-policy-in-hong-kong/>

order to obtain more official and factual information which are persuasive enough to support my view points.

Existing measures and effectiveness

Three-Tier Grading System of Historical Buildings

The Grading System, which is adapted to record heritage buildings with significant historical and architectural value, is an administrative measure without any statutory power. Therefore, the record is only kept for internal reference for the government. The Grading System comprises three grades, including Grade I, Grade II and Grade III[1].

Since the System lacks statutory status and is only regarded as a reference list to keep record of the historical buildings, the graded buildings cannot be protected legally. Under the System, the information provided by the Grading System will just be sent to other relevant government departments such as the Planning Department which can determine whether protect the graded historical buildings or not. We can, therefore, understand that the System is not powerful enough to inhibit the monumental architectures from destroying.

For example, the Murray House, which was built in 1846 with classical British style, was classified as Grade I building owing to its valuable Victorian architectural design. This historical landmark was originally located in Central; however, it was dismantled in 1982 and relocated to the Stanley in attempt to make way for the Bank of China Tower. Regrettably, due to the lost of parts of the building, this relocation failed to reflect the remarkable historical development and architectural significance of 18th Century. As a <https://assignbuster.com/the-current-heritage-conservation-policy-in-hong-kong/>

result, the AAB decided to remove the grade of the Murray House after visiting the place.

We can clearly see that even the graded buildings which declared as monuments cannot be protected properly under the current system. Thus, it is critical for the government to offer legal authority to the Grade System so that the graded buildings will not be demolished easily.

Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance

The Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (AMO) is enacted in 1976 in an attempt to protect Hong Kong historical buildings. The AMO, which is implemented by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (A&M Office), provides secretarial services for Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB). In the section three of the Ordinance, after consultation with the AAB and with the approval of the Chief Executive, the Office may declare buildings, places and sites, where the Office considers to be public interest by reason of its historical and archaeological value[2]. Therefore, under the Ordinance, the Office is responsible for declaring antiquities and historical buildings into monuments or proposed monuments, which can prohibit them from demolishing.

However, the AMO does not possess effective and comprehensive statutory power to protect privately owned historical buildings. In fact, private owners have their own right to reject the monumental buildings declaring as monuments on the grounds that they consider the land market and the profit of selling the buildings more than the value of historical value. Meanwhile, the developmental potential of the buildings and the profit may decrease <https://assignbuster.com/the-current-heritage-conservation-policy-in-hong-kong/>

after declaration, which causes them be reluctant to declare the buildings into monuments. Thus, few privately owned heritage assets can be protected and kept as declared monuments.

For instance, Tiger Balm Gardens, which was constructed in 1935 by a wealthy Chinese philanthropist Aw Boon-haw, built in Chinese Renaissance Style with a unique mixture of Chinese and Western styles of artistic decoration. The owners of the Gardens submitted a proposal required the demolition of the whole heritage buildings in 1999; however when the A&M Office acknowledged and approached the matter, the real estate developers had bought the land and dismantled part of the buildings for the redevelopment. Therefore, it is important for the AMO to promote private sector participation in heritage conservation and a comprehensive mechanism of compensation can be established.

The Macau's experience

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the heritage conservation policies in Hong Kong, related experiences of other countries will be studied. In fact, comparing the conservation policies between different places is definitely an effective way to achieve better approach to the preservation of the built cultural heritage in developed countries. In this part, the heritage conservation policies of Macau will be explored; therefore, I hope that their experiences can give Hong Kong an insight into saving heritage.

The reason why I take the examples of Macau is that there are lots of similarities between Hong Kong and Macau, including the high population density and rapid economic growth. More importantly, they both colonized

by Britain and Portugal, which may result in both countries possessing great historical and cultural value. Thus, it will be easier for Hong Kong to seek advice from Macau.

In Macau, Cultural Institute (CI) and Cultural Heritage Department (CHD) are the core statutory departments of heritage conservation. The legal classification system of built heritage, which is under control by these two departments, is consisted of four categories, namely The Monument, The Complex, The Sites and Building of Architectural Interest. Under the classification system, authorization from the government is needed before any repairs, damages and demolition; therefore, most historical buildings in Macau are conserved well. To date, 128 built heritages are preserved and classified as cultural properties in Macau, including 52 are The Monument, 11 are The Complexes, 22 are The Sites and 44 are Building of Architectural Interest. Comparing with Hong Kong, the classification system in Macau is granted with legal force and therefore the classified historical buildings will not be demolished by any parties of society.

Apart from the classification system, the Macau Government has set up a Cultural Fund in a bid to cover the cost of repairing and restoring the historical buildings. As a result, owners of privately owned heritage are willing to give consent to declare the historical buildings as monuments. Moreover, the Macau government has tried their best to invest on revitalizing the historical buildings. Ruins of St. Paulo, Sao Domingos Square and Leal Senado Square, for example, are conserved and reused for social and commercial purposes. By combining the ideas of conservation and economic development, the cultural heritage can be reversed properly and have <https://assignbuster.com/the-current-heritage-conservation-policy-in-hong-kong/>

become famous tourist attractions. We can clearly see the determination and sincerity of the Macau government in conserving the heritage.

Conclusion

The findings clearly indicate that the heritage conservation policies are not extensive and effective enough to protect local historical monuments. Some of the policies cannot protect privately owned heritage while other cannot access their legal force to protect monuments. It can be concluded that to encourage public involvement in heritage preservation, Hong Kong have to consult other countries' opinions so that we can develop a clearer heritage conservation system to protect valuable monumental buildings.

Recommendation

Improvement of the grading system

Since some historical buildings may not be preserved appropriately under the existing grading system, I propose that the criteria of grading buildings be more objective and transparent. Therefore, it is important for the government and relevant departments to reform the grading system.

Incentives to private owners of historical buildings.

Given a lack of incentives and no clear regulations regarding the compensation for conserving privately owned historical buildings, I recommend that a reasonable and comprehensive compensation be provided to encourage private owners repair and maintain the buildings. Besides, tax relief which is a financial tool to help private owners to restore and maintain the privately owned historical buildings can be offered as

<https://assignbuster.com/the-current-heritage-conservation-policy-in-hong-kong/>

conservation incentives. As a result, a wide range of Hong Kong's monuments can be protected for future generation.

Establishment of funding

In view of inadequate support and determination of local government in heritage conservation, it is highly recommend that the government provide funding to support preserving built heritage. It may be useful and effective for the government to cooperate with private organizations and non-profit organizations. Both donations and contributions can be collected as a source of funding so that the maintenance cost of historical buildings can be covered and reduced.