

DOCTORAL THESIS

Heritage and public housing in Hong Kong: the case of Mei Ho house

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage has become a significant part of the cultural economy. Often criticized for its top down approach led by experts, and reflecting a western, elite class interpretation of heritage, the cultural heritage management industry has been trying to place the people at the centre of heritage conservation practices over recent years. This change of paradigm is, in part, due to the recognition of heritage as a significant aspect of everyday life, as well as a fluid yet undeniable attribute of identity and sense of place. In Hong Kong, a fast changing and transient city, the need for heritage conservation has only been recently fully acknowledged. In 2007, the authorities launched a new public-private partnership, known as the Revitalisation Scheme. Mei Ho House was integrated in the first batch of the scheme as the last remain of the first generation of public housing in Hong Kong. The building was transformed into a youth hostel with a museum displaying people's life in the post-war public housing estates. The present thesis investigates this seemingly successful conservation project on the premise that heritage is a dialogue between the material world and the individual. It discusses the legal and cultural context of heritage conservation in Hong Kong, and explores the meaning of vernacular architecture in Hong Kong and the discourse suggested by the museum. The visitors' response is also scrutinized as a significant part in the heritage-making process.

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