



ARCHIVING HONG KONG'S MODERN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

INSTRUCTOR
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ISSUE

In the past two decades, interest in Hong Kong's modern architecture has grown significantly. Numerous publications, exhibitions, and public debates now focus on post-war buildings, housing estates, and infrastructural landscapes that were once considered purely utilitarian. At the same time, continuous urban renewal and redevelopment have placed much of this modern architectural heritage at risk of alteration or demolition.

This situation intersects with several broader trends:

- Advocacy for environmental sustainability has encouraged the reuse and adaptation of existing buildings rather than demolition and new construction, yet the documentation necessary to support such approaches is often incomplete or dispersed.
- The contemporary building industry in Hong Kong is undergoing change and, in some areas, decline, which intensifies questions about how recent architectural production will be remembered and evaluated.
- Architectural conservation has emerged as an important professional and public concern in Hong Kong, marked by both notable successes and prominent failures.

In this context, archiving—through systematic identification, documentation, and interpretation—has become a crucial practice for historical research on Hong Kong's post-war built environment, for architectural conservation and adaptive reuse projects, and for informed architectural design and conversion that engages with existing structures.

This course responds to these intertwined issues by treating Hong Kong's modern architectural heritage as a living, endangered archive in need of careful study and active documentation.

DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on the identification and archiving of modern architectural heritage in Hong Kong, with particular attention to the post-war period.

Identifying Modern Architectural Heritage

Students will learn to recognize and select buildings and sites that qualify as “modern heritage” based on:

- Historical significance: social, political, cultural, and economic contexts of post-war development;
- Architectural and urban design qualities: typologies, construction methods, material expression, and spatial innovation;
- Vulnerability and “heritage at stake”: sites under threat from demolition, redevelopment, or neglect.

The process of identification will draw on multiple sources, including:

- Official records and listings from the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO);
- Press coverage and public debates around contested buildings;
- Social media and community-based initiatives that highlight local attachments and memories;
- On-site fieldwork, observation, and photographic documentation.

Archiving Modern Architectural Heritage

Once sites are selected, students will develop small, focused archives of individual buildings or ensembles by using:

- Photography – systematic visual documentation of exterior, interior, and urban context;
- Redrawing – measured drawings or interpretive diagrams that clarify plans, sections, and key spatial relationships;
- Digital modeling – to reconstruct or visualize buildings and their surroundings;
- Archival and literature searching – collecting existing documents, drawings, publications, and records related to each case;
- Publication and exhibition formats – organizing and presenting the collected material as a coherent, shareable archive.

Through this work, students will learn to see modern architecture in Hong Kong not only as a set of individual buildings, but as a broader historical and cultural record that must be documented, interpreted, and communicated.

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental Sustainability

By emphasizing careful documentation and critical assessment of existing buildings, the course:

- Supports adaptive reuse and conservation strategies that extend the life of structures and reduce demolition waste;
- Cultivates an understanding of materials, construction systems, and performance in post-war architecture, which can inform more sustainable decisions about repair, upgrading, or transformation;
- Encourages students to consider the environmental implications of building on what exists rather than defaulting to new construction.

Cultural Sustainability

At the same time, the course addresses cultural sustainability by:

- Preserving knowledge of modern architectural heritage that is often overlooked in conventional narratives of Hong Kong's urban history;
- Foregrounding buildings and environments that hold social memory and everyday significance for local communities;
- Contributing to a more inclusive and nuanced record of post-war Hong Kong, beyond iconic landmarks, through student-produced archives and exhibitions.

Student projects, in the form of archives and public-facing outputs, accumulate over time into a growing resource on Hong Kong's modern architecture, supporting future teaching, research, and community engagement.

COURSE SYLLABUS

TOPIC 1: ARCHIVING

This topic introduces the theory and practice of archiving architectural heritage.

- Photography: methods and protocols for systematic photographic documentation of buildings and sites; framing, viewpoint, sequence, and notation to support later analysis.
- Digital Scanning: introduction to accessible digital documentation tools (e.g., 3D scanning, photogrammetry, or related techniques where available); discussion of accuracy, limitations, and potential uses of digital spatial data.
- Drawing and Modeling: redrawing existing buildings from field measurements, photographs, or archival plans; creating analytical diagrams and/or physical/digital models to clarify structural systems, spatial organization, and urban relationships.
- Description and Metadata: writing clear, structured descriptions of sites and materials; recording basic metadata (location, dates, architects, typology, sources) to make archives legible and reusable.

TOPIC 2: ARCHITECTURE CONSERVATION AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

This topic situates archiving within the fields of conservation and adaptive reuse, with a focus on Hong Kong's modern heritage.

- The role of documented evidence (drawings, photographs, material surveys, historical records) in decisions about preservation, transformation, or demolition;
- Conservation and reuse strategies—from minimal intervention to substantial reconfiguration—and the role archives play at each stage;
- Local and international case studies in which modern buildings have been successfully conserved, adapted, or controversially altered;
- Ethical and professional responsibilities of architects, researchers, and public agencies in safeguarding or reshaping modern architectural heritage.

TOPIC 3: HISTORY OF POST-WAR HONG KONG ARCHITECTURE

This topic provides the historical and urban context necessary to understand what is being archived.

- Overview of the development of Hong Kong's architecture after the Second World War, including public housing, infrastructural projects, commercial buildings, and civic institutions;
- Connections between specific heritage cases and broader economic, political, and social shifts in Hong Kong;
- How ideas of modernity, progress, and identity were materialized in architectural form;
- How post-war buildings have been perceived and re-evaluated over time, from “ordinary” or “obsolete” to “heritage.”

METHODS

The course is project-based and combines multiple teaching and learning methods:

- Lectures: conceptual frameworks on modern heritage, archiving methods, conservation, and post-war Hong Kong architecture.
- Field Work: site visits to selected buildings and neighborhoods for on-the-ground observation, photography, measurement, and documentation.

- Archival Searching: guided sessions in physical or digital archives to locate historical drawings, photographs, reports, and related materials.
- Digital Documentation: introduction to appropriate digital tools and workflows for recording and organizing architectural information.
- Exhibition Preparation: workshops on curating and presenting the collected material as a coherent archive for public display.

Students will work primarily in small groups, each group developing an archive around a specific building or site, under the guidance and critique of the instructor.

DELIVERABLES

Exhibition: Archive of a Project

A curated presentation of the group's selected building or site, which may include photographs, drawings, models, texts, timelines, and other media. The exhibition aims to communicate the significance and condition of the heritage in a clear and engaging way to a broader audience (within or beyond the school).

Essay: Account of the Archive of a Project

An essay that critically reflects on the process and outcomes of the archiving work, situates the case within the larger framework of post-war Hong Kong architecture, conservation debates, and sustainability concerns, and discusses methods used, sources consulted, and the limitations, biases, or gaps encountered in the archive.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

ABILITY

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Collect and organize data

Systematically gather information on modern architectural heritage using field observation, archival research, and digital tools; record and structure this information in ways that support analysis, conservation, and future reuse.

Use appropriate representational media

Select and produce models, drawings, diagrams, photographs, and other media to convey architectural information clearly, and explain design decisions, spatial organization, and construction logic.

Work cooperatively in teams

Collaborate effectively with peers in planning, conducting, and presenting group projects; share responsibilities, negotiate roles, and integrate different skills and perspectives.

Develop critical thinking and analytical skills

Formulate research questions about modern heritage; analyze buildings and sites in relation to historical context, material performance, social meaning, and sustainability; evaluate sources and evidence, recognizing both their potential and their limitations.

UNDERSTANDING / KNOWLEDGE

Understand the historical development and urban role of post-war Hong Kong architecture

Recognize how historical trajectories of planning, policy, and society shape what is considered modern heritage and how it is valued.

ASSESSMENT SCHEME

SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT

00_Attendance and In-class Participation (10%)

01_Exhibition (45%)

02_Essay (45%)

Total: 100%

COURSE FORMAT

1_Teaching Days

1. Students must attend F2F teaching during these teaching hours.
2. Teaching Venue: TBD
3. Field trips, lectures, and other learning activities may be scheduled outside of teaching days.

2_Student Study Effort_3 credit course (Total: 140 hrs)

1. Class Contact: 39 hrs (Lecture, Tutorial, Critique, Field Work)
2. Other Student Study Effort: 80 hrs (Studio / Self Study)

READINGS

Canada, Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du. *Built Heritage of the Modern Era: Overview, Framework for Analysis, and Criteria for Evaluation*. Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1997.

Herz, Manuel, Ingrid Schröder, Hans Focketyn, Julia Jamrozik, Iwan Baan, and Alexia Webster, eds. *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence: Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia*. Park Books, 2022.

Oers, Ron van. *Identification and Documentation of Modern Heritage*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2003.

Pottgiesser, Uta, Ana Cristina dos Santos Tostões, and Jean Molitor, eds. *Modernism in Africa: The Architecture of Angola, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda*. Birkhäuser, 2025.

Tostões, Ana Cristina dos Santos, ed. *Modern Heritage: Reuse, Renovation, Restoration*. 1. ed. Birkhäuser, 2022.

OTHER REFERENCES

Getty Conservation Institute. Philosophy and Approach in Conserving Modern Heritage. 2014. 18:30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QQFP8d2d4s>.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS

Expectations for Professional Conduct

The motto of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is “Through learning and temperance to virtue”. This motto places equal emphasis on the intellectual and moral education of students. In addition to pursuing academic excellence, students of CUHK are expected to maintain and uphold the highest standard of integrity and honesty in their academic and personal lives, respect the rights of others and abide by the law. More information on Postgraduate studies can be found in the PG Student Handbook. <https://www.gs.cuhk.edu.hk/>

Attendance

Class attendance is required in all courses. For an excused absence, the instructor must be notified and presented with documentation of illness or personal matter. Please note: **Three (3)** or more unexcused absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students may be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

Third-Party Assistance

All intellectual work essential to the design project must be completed by the student and cannot, under any circumstance, be outsourced to a third party (including, but not limited to a company, consultant, alumni, and/or friend).

In the design studio context, students may utilize external resources, such as printing services for presentation materials, and/or laser cutting and 3D printing services for prototyping purposes. Use of such third-party services constitutes non-intellectual work done by others. It is only permitted with prior written consent from the studio tutor and acknowledgment of such work done by the third party.

Assistance from other students or friends for aspects of project production also constitutes non-intellectual work done by others; this is allowed only if declared and acknowledged in a written statement attached to any such work that has received assistance.

Under all circumstances, students must declare all work done by others by completing the school's designated form before assessment. This form must include a detailed explanation of the third party's identity (name and relationship to the student), when and how they were utilized, and the specific tasks they performed in the project. The completed form, signed by the student, must be endorsed by the tutor and presented during the final review. The school will collect and retain this form for record-keeping purposes.

Failure to follow this code of conduct may be considered a case of academic dishonesty, to be reviewed by a disciplinary board, and possible failure of the course.

Artificial Intelligence

Students are allowed to use AI tools only for photo editing and text proofreading, which must be explicitly acknowledged at the final exhibition, in the process book, and in the final essay.

Students may refer to Approach 3 of the CUHK 'Use of Artificial Intelligence tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessments' – A Guide for Students.

Student Work

Submission of studio documentation must be complete and correctly formatted. Missing or incomplete submission of the documentation folder will result in the grade for the course being withheld. This will prevent registration for the following term or delay graduation. In addition, a grade deduction of *one letter grade* will be made.

Summer: 18 May 2026 (Monday) – 29 May 2026 (Saturday)

WEEK 01		
18.05	INTRODUCTION	Lecture
19.05	PROJECT	Field Work
21.05	PROJECT	Tutorial
22.05	PROJECT	Tutorial
WEEK 02		
25.05	PROJECT	Tutorial
26.05	PROJECT	Tutorial
28.05	PROJECT	Tutorial
29.05	EXHIBITION	Critique

Grade	Descriptor	Criteria	Points
A	Excellent	Comprehensively excellent performance on all aspects of the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes with distinction.	4
A-	Very Good	Generally outstanding performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes with merit.	3.7
B+	Good	Substantial performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes satisfactorily.	3.3
B			3
B-			2.7
C+	Fair	Fair performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes at a passing standard.	2.3
C			2
C-			1.7
D+	Pass	Barely satisfactory performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes at a barely satisfactory standard.	1.3
D			1
F	Failure	Unsatisfactory performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Not achieving all learning outcomes.	0

Written Feedback to Students

Term: _____

Grade: _____

Course Code: _____

Review: _____

Tutor: _____

Student Name: _____

Student ID: _____

Feedback from Course Instructor:

Achievements:

Challenges: