AN EVALUATION OF THE NEED FOR A QUALITY ASSESSMENT SCHEME FOR PRIVATE SECTOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS IN HONG KONG

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Abstract
The Construction Industry Review Report has highlighted the recent spate of non-compliant construction incidents in Hong Kong, which has prompted widespread public concern on the quality of construction projects. Whilst public housing has received special attention due to extensive coverage in the media, the quality of private housing has seldom been put under the spotlight, thereby raising the question as to whether private sector works are of better quality than public sector works.

Faced with this question and the increasing drive towards benchmarking in the construction industry, it appears that an objective measure of quality is necessary, both for providing feedback to designers and for raising the quality standards of construction works. Being inspired by the benefits brought about by the CONQUAS system in Singapore, the Housing Authority in Hong Kong had developed and implemented the PASS system for benchmarking workmanship quality in the public housing sector since 1990. As yet, there has not been any similar measure of construction quality in the private sector.

Therefore, a recent survey was conducted in Hong Kong to evaluate the need for a quality assessment system for the private sector. This paper draws on empirical evidence obtained from Singapore as to the benefits of a common quality assessment scheme for both the public and private sectors, in addition to depicting findings of the Hong Kong survey, which demonstrate that defects occurrence is equally likely in both sectors.

Keywords
Quality Assessment, Private Sector Construction, Benchmarking

INTRODUCTION

Quality-related incidents have occupied the minds of many people in Hong Kong in recent years, including practitioners of the construction industry, legislators, government officials, the media and the general public. The quality of public sector construction, particularly that of housing, has been put under the spotlight. Two independent reviews were carried out in 2001 and 2003, being conducted respectively by the Construction Industry Review Committee (CIRC) commissioned by the Chief Executive and the Select Committee appointed by the Legislative Council. Whilst the report of the former Committee (Tang, 2001) covered generic issues such as sub-contracting and industry culture, which apply to both the public and private sectors, the latter (Lau, 2003) reported mainly on supervision issues pertaining to public housing. These investigations were partly invoked by substantial media coverage of construction quality problems arising in the public sector. Given the increasing demand for accountability and hence transparency of the government in the discharge of its duties, it is not surprising that public pressure is bearing on publicly funded construction works.