

Tamar Site Proposal: Site Planning

***A paper on the development of The Tamar Docklands site,
Hong Kong Island***

Paper 2: Appraisal (RIBA Work Stage A)

***A paper written and published by
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Bamboo said, "She's very strange. What's she saying to the well?"

They repeated Lotus's words for her. " 'I won't jump, I won't jump.' She says she won't jump into the well."

Lotus says she won't jump into the well.

Su Tong.
"Raise the Red Lantern."
1993.

Dedicatory Preface

This paper is written to provide further site planning information in support of my proposal for a Hong Kong Globe type theatre on the Tamar Site on Hong Kong Island. I first presented these ideas in my paper, "Tamar Site Proposal," dated the 31st July 2006.

Both papers are dedicated to the Arts Community of Hong Kong and China, past and present, high and low, whose work continues to fascinate and astonish me at every turn.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In my first paper on the Tamar Docklands Site, I proposed that the area be used to locate a Hong Kong Globe type theatre, which could be built in two phases. The first phase could be a temporary structure in Bamboo, to be erected annually. The second phase could be for a more permanent structure in Teak. I also briefly presented the key idea of a Teak forest as a landscaping strategy, which would also provide a sustainable resource of Teak for the second phase of the construction once the forest had matured after 50 years.

In this paper, I would like to expand upon my initial description of the main landscape strategy. In particular to show how important it is to the everyday elemental function of the building, and not just as a source of timber for the second phase.

I would also like to identify some further aspects concerning the site plan, such as building orientation, site access, fire fighting equipment and signage.

In Chapter 1 I shall cover the basic points regarding the Site Plan, which I did not cover in my earlier paper. In Chapter 2 I shall explain the importance of the Teak Forest in relation to acoustic and noise control, as well as any temporary measures that may be necessary. In Chapter 3 I shall explain the importance of the forest to the cooling and ventilation of the building. In Chapter 4 I shall identify the need for concession stands, refuse collection and washrooms. In Chapter 5 I shall cover the necessity for 'dramatic' theatre signage.

Lastly in Chapter 6, I shall identify the areas requiring further work, such as land ownership research, building costs, financial support and sponsorship, and lastly the need for political and government lobbying.

1. Site Planning

Figure 1 shows the relationship of the Hong Kong Globe type theatre to the rest of the site. The theatre is placed at the centre of the site with the stage on the north side. A private vehicle drop-off and pick-up is located on the northern boundary road of the site. A taxi drop-off and pick-up could be located on the eastern boundary road.

A 20 metre wide access road or avenue cuts through the site from north to south. A 20 metre wide area surrounds the building itself. The road would act as the main pedestrian route through the site, as well as providing vehicle access for fire service appliances, refuse collection and goods vehicles. The road would also act a small fire break in the forest. Building services and public utilities could also be placed in a cable trench and directed along this route. Eg: Street fire hydrants, water supply, soil drainage, electricity lines and television cabling.

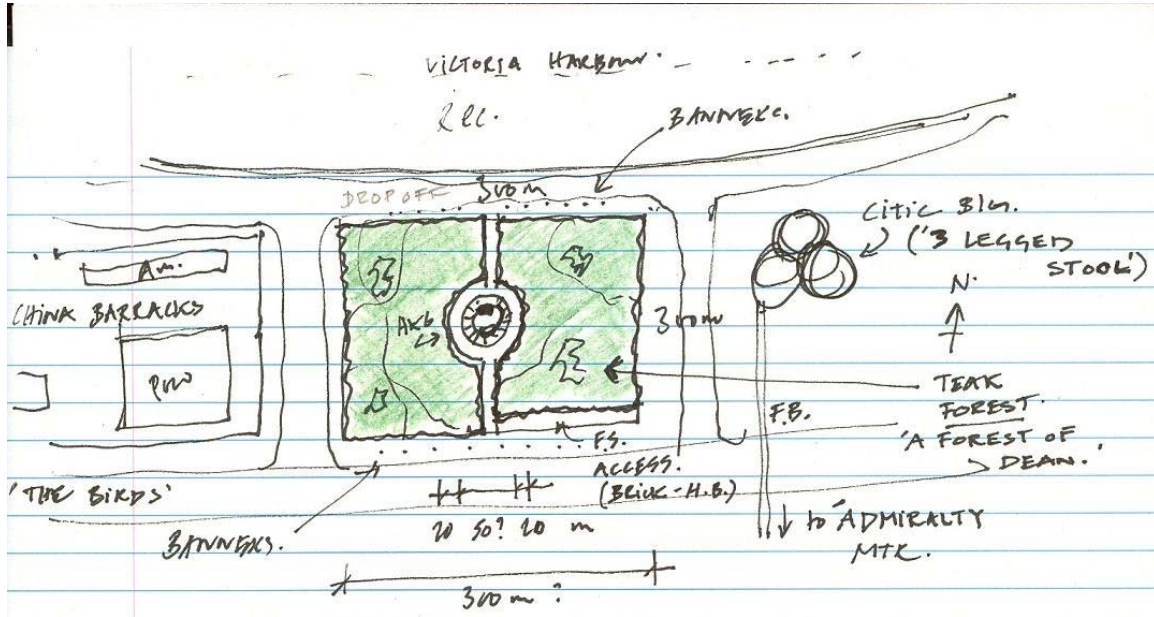


FIG 1: TAMAR SITE: HONG KONG GLOBE (HKG.)
 (TEAK FOREST AS NOISE BARRIER.)

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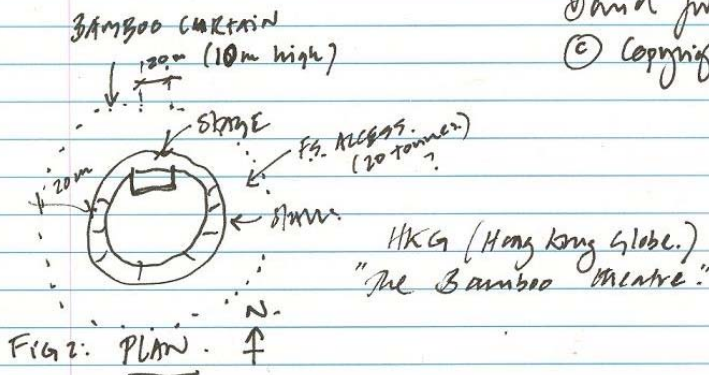


FIG 2: PLAN

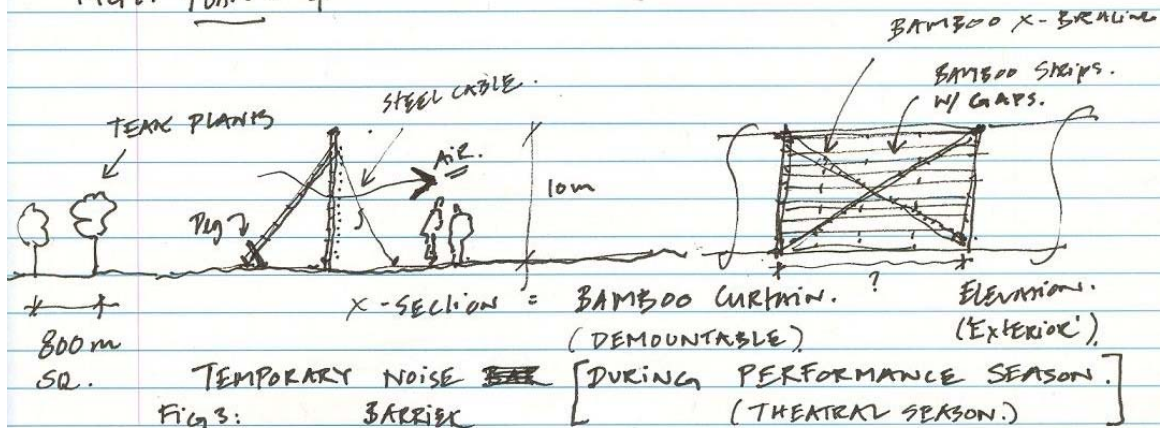


FIG 3: TEMPORARY NOISE BARRIER [DURING PERFORMANCE SEASON. (THEATRICAL SEASON.)]

The access road would need to take the load of 20 tonnes for Fire Service Department appliances. The surface of the road could be in blue engineering bricks with a (red) herring bone arrangement on a 125 mm thick RC Slab.

The Teak forest would cover the remaining parts of the site on either side of the North-South access road.

Some car and lorry parking may need to be located on the site. This could be underground depending on the size of any requirements to be determined by the Planning Department. A refuse collection point will also be required.

2. Acoustics and Noise Control

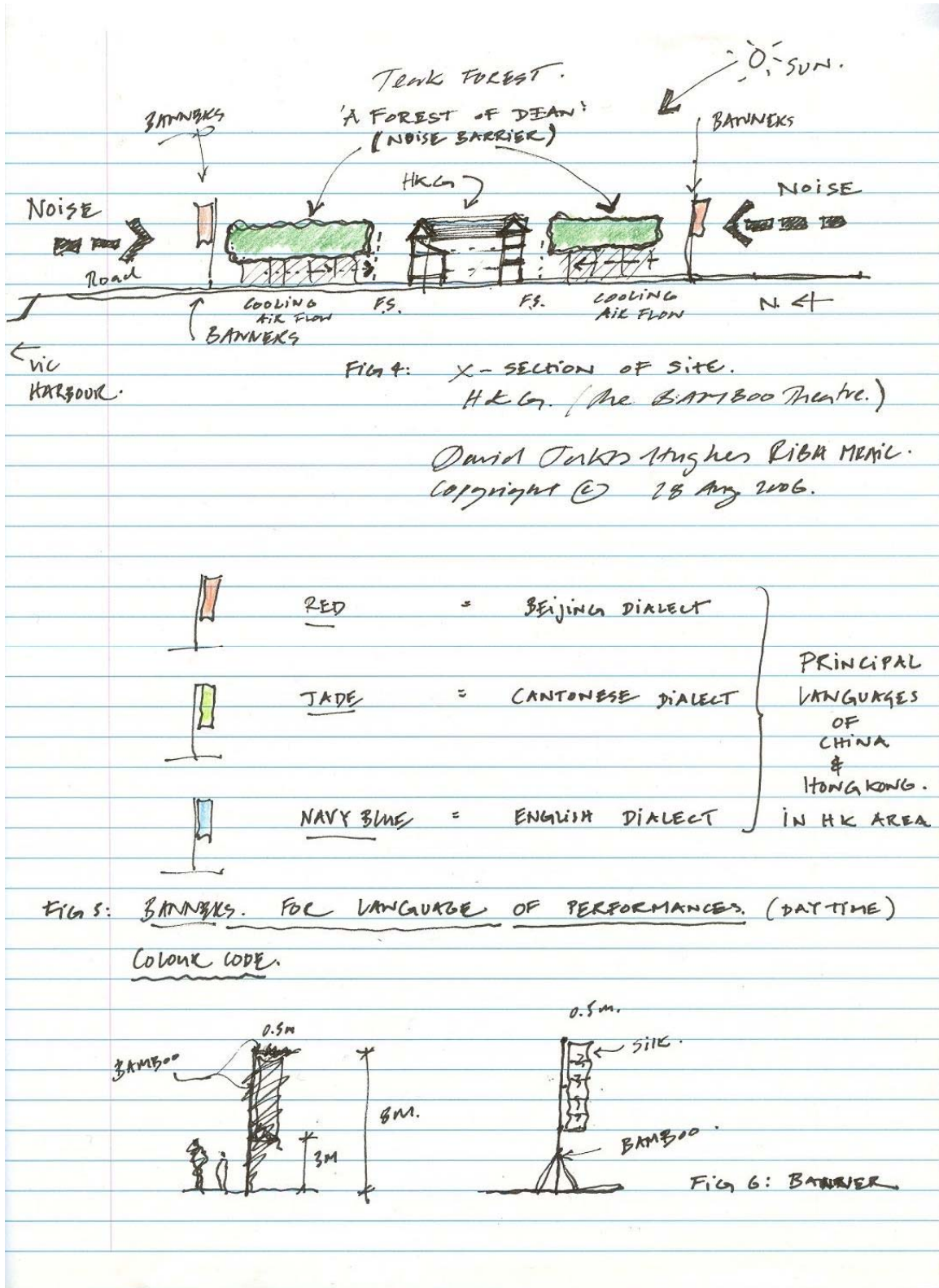
The importance of the Teak forest as a design element integrated with the theatre building cannot be over-emphasized. In my earlier paper I noted that the forest would provide a sustainable resource for timber for the second phase of the construction of a theatre in Teak. The forest will also have an important contribution to make in the areas of acoustic attenuation and noise control.

Building acoustics seem to work best in areas which are composed of surfaces which have high sound absorption capacities. This prevents the echo effect which would otherwise occur leading to reduced sound clarity and increased loudness. Given that the Hong Kong Globe type theatre would be open-sided, the surface of objects around it could then become influential on the sound quality within. The foliage of the tree canopy will certainly prevent this problem from ever occurring.

In addition, the Teak forest, with its high sound absorption characteristics, will also provide an effective noise barrier between the theatre and the city. For plays, lectures, films, book or poetry readings, light music, and meetings (eg: school and university convocations, and even political meetings) the noise of the city would need to be kept out. Whilst for Cantonese opera or loud rock concerts the city itself may need to be protected from such a noise source. (Naturally, the use of the theatre need not be restricted to plays written by William Shakespeare and other Tudor playwrights. It might not work financially if it was.)

(See Figure 4.)

During the period when the tree canopy is underdeveloped, a Bamboo curtain could be raised around the outside of the theatre at a distance of 20 metres from the building edge to act as an acoustic / noise barrier. (See Figure 3.)



3. Ventilation and Cooling

The Teak forest would also have an important natural ventilation and cooling function for both the theatre and the park itself.

The tree canopy would provide shading from the sun during the day-time. This would allow cool air to form beneath it, and with any slight wind from any direction would cause this cool air to flow across the theatre area with its open sides. (See Figure 4.)

On extremely hot and sunny days an attractive collapsible fire proof canopy or 'umbrella' could be erected over the open central area for additional shading. This could be supported by steel tension cables, with gaps in the canopy to allow for ventilation. A white canopy could be chosen to deflect solar rays, and reduce the effect of heat building up in the audience area beneath it.

4. Concessions

No entertainment venue in Hong Kong would be complete without concessions, including outdoor cafes, food stands, bars and gift shops. These could be provided along the side of the access road, and on the outside of the 20 metre clear area outside the theatre itself, provided that allowance is made for fire service access adjacent to the building.

External washrooms and a refuse collection point will need to be provided.

5. Signage: Banners and Lanterns

The use of language to convey ideas, meanings, emotions and stories on the stage lies at the heart of this development proposal.

Hong Kong is a city of many spoken and written languages. And it is easy to find oneself at a function or an event that is not in quite the language that one was hoping for.

In order to avoid this kind of error and the disappointment that follows it, I thought perhaps that it would be an excellent idea to announce the language of each performance in some way. This could be done using different coloured Banners and Lanterns. (See Figures 5-8)

Silk Banners could be used to signify the language of day-time performances, whilst Three-Legged Lanterns could indicate the language of night-time performances. Banners could be located along the roads on both the north and the south of the Tamar Site. Lanterns could be erected along the north-south access road and around the outside of the theatre itself.

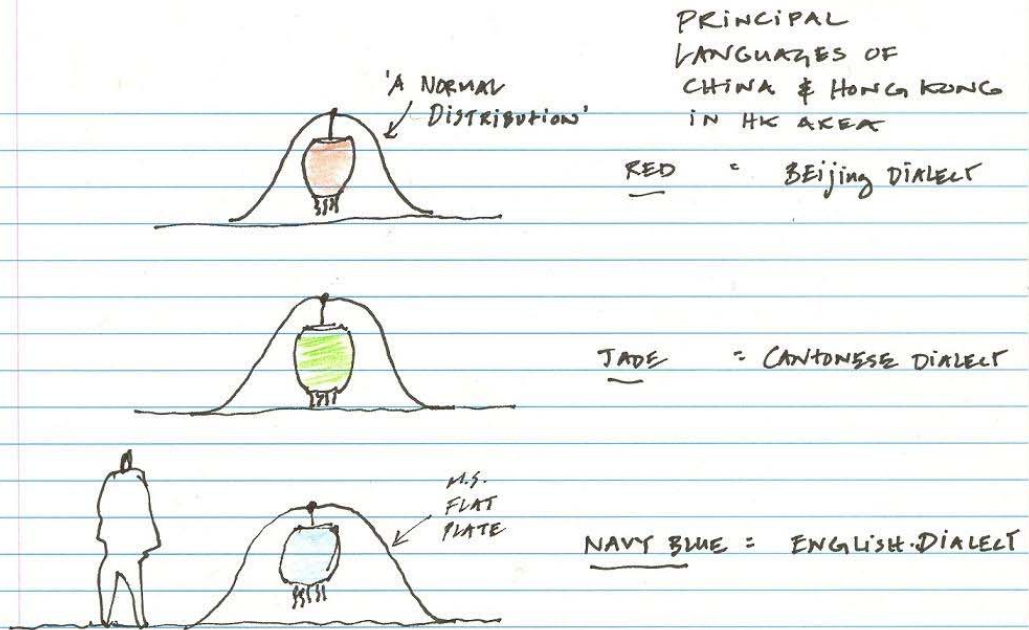
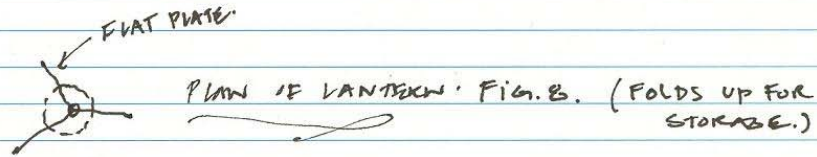


Fig. 7: LANTERNS FOR PERFORMANCES BY LANGUAGE
(NIGHT-TIME SHOWS) AFTER 6 PM. TO LIGHT THE
WAY THRU THE FOREST.
COLOUR CODE. (Lit w/ CANDLES)



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The design of both Banners and Lanterns are of course evocative of the historic culture of China. However, I believe that these should not be too incongruous with the Globe Theatre idea, particularly as many people from China will also recognize a certain Architectural communality with the 'Round Houses' of that country. (I believe these are called *Tulo* in the Province of Canton (*Kwangtung / Guangdong*) and *Zhai* elsewhere.)

The Architectural experience then of being in a Hong Kong Globe Theatre will not be unlike that of being in a 'Round House' of China, particularly if one happened to be housebound for some reason, with nothing to do all day but look out from a rear window. Of course in a Hong Kong Globe Theatre 'murder' and 'madness' will be guaranteed!

6. Further Work Required

Coming up with the idea of a Hong Kong Globe Theatre was the easy part. The next stage of such a project will be more difficult.

This will need to include a land ownership research study, a building costs study, obtaining financial support and sponsorship, and lastly the need to obtain both political and government support. I will now cover the important points of each of these areas in turn as I currently understand them.

(a) Land Ownership Research.

The question of who owns the land is not as straight forward as it seems. To say that it is simply "State Land" is not sufficient, or so it seems to me.

As noted in my earlier paper, formerly the area was a Harbour Basin for the Royal Navy of HMG (UK). It was then reclaimed with sea sand just prior to 30th June 1997. This former ownership title could make it "Military Land". Given the secrecy surrounding the sale and ownership of "Military Land," it could still be designated as "Military Land". It would therefore not be under the ownership of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the PRC, and therefore not subject to the authority of the Chief Executive of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the PRC. Instead, it would be under the ownership of the People's Liberation Army or it's Hong Kong Garrison, assuming that both Royal Assent by HMG (UK) and assent by the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China has been given to the Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong. (Dated 19th December 1984.)

Even if the Joint Declaration has been agreed to by both Head's of State, (I have not yet discovered any evidence that both Head's of State have in fact agreed to it) it could still be under the legal ownership of the descendants of Queen Victoria as stated by the Treaty of Nanking of 1842, as indeed all of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsular (south of boundary Street) could still be if the Laws of Hong Kong still operate in the Hong Kong SAR as promised in that Declaration.

(b) Building Costs Study.

If the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the PRC does own the land or the lease from whoever the owner is, or the development rights to the land, a building cost study will need to be made. This will assist any Joint Venture corporation, whether private or publicly owned, who is interested in pursuing the idea of owning and running a Hong Kong Globe type theatre, in the task of obtaining corporate funding and / or public sponsorship.

(c) Obtaining Financial Support and Sponsorship.

No project like this can happen without financial support and sponsorship. This must come from the entire community of Hong Kong.

Of course, the real cost will be in foregoing the immediate rewards from Land Premiums made by private developers to government. (The size of the premium is based on the expectation that developers will get so much revenue from the renting of office space in the future. I believe that no-one is fooled by the idea that the new Government Centre that the Government intends to build on this site will be entirely composed of the 'Centre' itself. It is will surely have a large commercial office area around it or above it.)

I believe, however, that the Government could find another property site to get its cut from the Hong Kong development sector.

The financial support will of course depend upon the support in the community for the idea of a Hong Kong Globe and a Forest Park. And of course others may have other ideas for the use of this land by the public.

However, as I understand it, there seems to be a strong public need and support for a park in this location. Perhaps a Globe Theatre of this sort might be considered as an added bonus?

Obtaining financial support could then be restricted to the cost of the building and the landscape, and the sponsorship of the theatrical productions as they occur.

Possible sponsors could be the Government itself, the private sector including banks, developers, contractors, construction companies and the artistic community. Sponsorship need not be restricted to cash, but could be in the provision of building materials, and perhaps some voluntary work contributed by both skilled and non-skilled labour.

(d) Political and Government Support

Political and Government support will also be necessary.

If the land is still "Military Land" support must come from the Head of State of the People's Republic of China, who is the Chairman of the State Central Military Commission of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, or from the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Area, or from the "representative" of the Central People's Government, if of course they have the title deeds or any other proof of ownership that is recognized either by the Laws of Hong Kong, or those of the Hong Kong SAR.

If the land is still legally owned by one of Queen Victoria's descendants, then presumably this land will need to be obtained from that person or persons, along with any title deeds, by the Government of the Hong Kong SAR in order for it to make use of the land.

If the land needs to be leased from either of the above, then the conditions of lease will need to be negotiated by the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the PRC, should the Government be willing to manage and finance the Park and the Theatre, or one or the other.

Assuming these issues can be solved, support will need to be obtained from the Chief Executive of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR of the PRC for the project, as well as from the Town Planning Board, the Planning Department, the District Council concerned (Central & Western D.C.) and its District Councillors.

Support from the Arts community of Hong Kong and China will be vital to achieving these approvals at every level of Government. For it is only this community that can truly assess either the need for such a venue, or its potential for success. (The Arts community will of course be the principal users of this facility after all!)

All of the above work will need to be carried out under the aegis of a competent and presumably 'enlightened' group of individuals (or companies) acting as a single corporate body. This (client) body could either be privately owned and operated, or run by a Department of the Civil Service, or a mixture of the two.

Following the successful conclusion of the above, the design development of the project could then proceed under the guidance of a Buildings Department 'Authorized Person.' This could either be an Architect, Engineer or Quantity Surveyor.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1 I covered the basic points regarding the Site Plan, which I did not cover in my earlier paper. In Chapter 2 I explained the importance of the Teak forest in relation to acoustic and noise control, as well as any temporary measures that may be necessary. In Chapter 3 I explained the importance of the forest to the cooling and ventilation of the building. In Chapter 4 I noted the need for concession stands and washrooms. In Chapter 5 I suggested an idea for 'dramatic' theatre signage to cope with the 'problem' of Language.

Lastly in Chapter 6, I noted the areas requiring further work, such as land ownership research, building costs, financial support and sponsorship, and the need for political and government lobbying.

I ended Chapter 6 with the need for the Arts community of Hong Kong and China to lobby Government Officials at every level of Government. For without their active support this project will surely not happen and the Government of the Hong Kong SAR will then doubtless proceed with its own plans to build another office tower(s) on this most important and historic urban site.

I also noted the need for an organizing corporate body of enlighten individuals or corporations to take the lead and act as a client corporation for the project. This will allow the project to proceed with development funds into the next stage of the project, which is design development.

I should add here that I believe there are better alternative sites for any future Government Centre on Hong Kong Island, and sites which do not seem to have the thoroughly perplexing land ownership questions that this particular site appears to have. Indeed, the building I have in mind already exists and is fit for the purpose, although it will require some 'fitting-out!' However, the 'correct' location for a new Government Centre is perhaps a subject that is best left to another paper.

END

The Glossary

CPG	Central People's Government
CPGPRC	Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China
HK	Hong Kong
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HMG (UK)	Her Majesty's Government (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
PRC	The People's Republic of China
SAR	Special Administrative Region

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