

HONG KONG CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHY FOUNDATION

Submission to LegCo Panel on Planning, Lands & Works

South East Kowloon Development

INTRODUCTION

The HKCP Foundation does not oppose reclamation per se. However, it believes that every reclamation should be judged for potential gains and losses, taking account of the existing natural waterways.

In this case, we believe that Kowloon Bay is essential to the overall harbour setting and amenity value. As the only remaining 'harbour bay', it has great recreational and tourist potential. Thus, the HKCP Foundation urges that the present shoreline is rounded out -- but that the main waterway of Kowloon Bay itself is left largely intact.

PROJECT CONCERNS

Concerning the proposed Kowloon Bay reclamation, the Foundation has seven project-related concerns. These are:

1. The massive extent of the proposed reclamation cannot be justified.
2. The extremely long time-frame of the proposed reclamation is not in Hong Kong's best interests. The last section, that fronting the harbour and so of greatest amenity value, is scheduled for completion in 18-20 years. Thus, for almost a generation, Hong Kong will be deprived of a finished harbour-front around Kowloon Bay.
3. Many of the proposed land uses (kennels, driving school, city farm etc) can in no way justify the loss of harbour area that reclamation entails.
4. Including a 50 hectare park indicates a flawed planning mentality. At enormous public expense, HK will lose 50 hectares of harbour recreation space -- to gain the same area for land recreation.
5. Roads will occupy 40% of the reclaimed land. Yet, given air pollution and other traffic problems, HK must soon come to see what is already accepted elsewhere -- that building more roads, especially in city areas, is only a short-term palliative for transport problems.

PROJECT CONCERNS -- cont.

6. Kai Tak's story is central to that of modern HK. The site has great tourist and recreational potential for exploiting Kai Tak history, with light aircraft and sea-planes using the end of the airstrip and Kowloon Bay. Yet none of this 'air heritage' potential is included in the existing plans.
7. Remarkably, given the Kai Tak story, out of a total Site Investigation Budget of \$109.8 million, only \$0.3 million has been set aside for 'Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment'.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The unimaginative land-uses for the proposed reclamation indicate an extremely shallow process of consultation. More generally, they show very little public input into the overall government planning process.

The quotation below highlights this closed official attitude towards consultation. The quotation is from a speech concerning reclamation, delivered in 1996 by James Blake (Secretary for Works 1991-95). During 1998, James Blake circulated the speech to people on an environment discussion group (which includes Edward Stokes, HKCP Foundation Secretary). The speech, although not specifically about Kowloon Bay, suggests a deeply entrenched 'reclaim at any cost' attitude in certain circles. The speech reads in part:

'The argument remains, is reclamation a sustainable approach for Hong Kong's future generations, or is it an irreversible act of folly taken by those in power today. In the first instance, this kind of argument leads only to frustration unless debated within the framework of logic and reason. Secondly, very little built by humankind in the physical sense has yet been (proved) irreversible. The same technology that lays down a reclamation could be put into reverse, to remove a reclamation should our descendants wish to do so. (sic)

...Where do we find logic and reason? Within the public domain, the vast amount of consultancy studies that have been released (on harbour reclamation) is a good point of reference. Some argue that Hong Kong's legislature must take the lead in debating these issues... Surely the future of Hong Kong City of Tomorrow is of such importance that it must be protected from the vagaries of confrontational politics, especially given the complexities of sustained development.'

In reality, however, HK's extensive reclamations will never be 'removed' in the coming decades. The 'sustainability' of reclamations must be judged today, by rigorous criteria and by wisdom -- not left to be assessed by 'our descendants'.

THE HARBOUR'S RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL

The HKCP Foundation believes that the harbour is central to the community's view of HK -- and also of itself. Moreover, the harbour has great aesthetic, recreational and tourist potential.

Today, with the harbour beset with sewage and 'lap sap', this potential is easy to ignore. However, in the coming years the SSD *will overcome* the sewage problem; and boats are *now being designed* to beat the 'lap sap' problem. With sewage and 'lap sap' banished, HK will once again possess a world-class waterway -- which should be enjoyed by locals and tourists alike.

Rising affluence and educational levels lead to more demands for recreation, especially for country and water-based pursuits. Water-based recreation need not be limited to 'elites'. At present, the only sailing in the harbour is from the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, available only to the very well-off. However, as the extremely popular Regional Council boating programmes in Stanley and the NT show, there is excellent scope for easily affordable public boating in the future, cleaned-up harbour - - with dinghy sailing, kayaking and sail-boarding from government/community funded clubs and marinas around Kowloon Bay.

At Kowloon Bay, were the planned reclamation to proceed, this potential would be permanently lost. In fact, if the proposed reclamation proceeds, the tradition of harbour sailing will virtually end -- because, without the deeply indented bay, sailing in the mid-stream channels will be both hazardous and unappealing.

Victoria Harbour's 'community and recreational' potential is illustrated in the attached letter to the SCMP, from long-time HK resident David Sheil. His vision, not of further reclamations, but of a cleaned-up, renewed, and people-friendly harbour surely is what HK now should aim towards.

If wisdom prevails and the Kowloon Bay reclamation is limited to those areas close to the existing shore-line, HK's superb natural harbour will offer great potential to meet future expectations for outdoor recreation and tourist attractions.

NOTE ON

THE HKCP FOUNDATION

The Hong Kong Conservation Photography Foundation is a registered, non-profit society. Its objective is to use photographs to enhance HK's conservation and environment debates, and to inspire a better appreciation of HK's natural assets. The HKCP Foundation believes that development and environmental quality are equally necessary for HK's sustained prosperity and living quality.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We reserve the right to edit all letters. They must carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number, not necessarily for publication.

23/6/98

Make water festival the next grand project

Six years ago I was in Scandinavia when I heard that Stockholm, home of the Nobel Prize, was hosting a Water Festival in its harbour to celebrate the completion of a 10-year project to clean-up its previously polluted harbour.

Hong Kong should conceive a 10-year programme to totally clean up harbour water and renovate the waterfront - culminating in a massive Water Festival that can have international appeal and become an annual event.

The completion of Chek Lap Kok, and the handover to China have been the primary visions to excite the community over the last few years. But these are now almost part of history. Maybe Hong Kong needs a new project to excite and inspire us. In the meantime the Tourist Association is flail-

ing around, as ever, creating PR-driven visions that seem empty and uninspiring. And our precious harbour is at risk from a new round of reclamation that is going to scatter Government buildings and featureless urban parks along the waterfront.

The harbour is one of our greatest assets. I know from past working experience that it is technically feasible to clean the harbour water over 10 years, maybe less.

Thirty years ago, so I have heard, it was possible to see the sandy bottom of the harbour from the Star Ferry, and boys used to dive off sampans for coins thrown by tourists, that twinkled down through the clear water. The present murk is not the natural state of the harbour and it is not irreversible. Surprisingly, Hong Kong's

harbour is naturally as flat as a mill pond. It is only the constant activity of boats that stirs up waves. Dragon boat racing, and maybe even a return to the old cross-harbour swim can be feasible in future.

If a waterfront could be conceived and designed to create an integrated array of harbourfront restaurants, entertainment areas, markets, sporting facilities, viewing points and other community friendly facilities - maybe linked by an overhead monorail - then the community has a new, exciting, and positive project to support. Underlying this can be an effective sewage treatment system that ensures absolutely no waste flows into the harbour.

At present our greatest show of the year is a fireworks festival at Lunar New Year.

Since Hong Kong is the nat-

ural home of dragon boat racing, which has become an internationally popular sport, why not combine the annual fireworks festival with the Dragon Boat Festival to create our new water festival.

This could become an annual fixture that draws both participants and spectators from around the world.

Why not combine all the above in one great annual festival? Only vision, supported by the Government at the highest level, can conceive of a project that combines waterfront development, sewage treatment, tourism, and sport in one go.

Is it possible?

If it is, it would again show what Hong Kong can achieve when it gets a good vision to get excited about.

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