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VICTORIA PARK: A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC OPEN SPACE FOR INDONESIA DOMESTIC HELPERS (TKW)

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Abstract: Victoria Park is the largest city park in Hong Kong. This city park is not only known in Hong Kong, but also very well known in Indonesia as a gathering place for Indonesia domestic helpers (TKW) in Hong Kong. This research tried to find out some determinant factors that have been affected the public open space of Victoria Park to be a gathering place for thousands of TKW in Sunday and holidays as their day off. In order to get the results of research, some methodological research had been conducted such as: observation (survey), mapping, interviews and literature studies. The results showed that Victoria Park has a number of factors capable of meeting the needs of domestic helpers in Hong Kong, these factors consist of internal factors and external factors. Internally, the character and functions held Victoria Park became a very influential factor, while externally, the accessibility and support functions around Victoria Park also has a considerable influence.

Keywords: urban design, public open space, city park, domestic helpers, democracy

INTRODUCTION

Largest numbers of people are moving from developing countries to more developed regions to obtain better jobs and education and increasingly use the public spaces of the city.¹

Number of Indonesia domestic helpers (TKW) is the largest in Hong Kong. According to the South China Morning, published on June 1th, 2009, from a total of 258,895 domestic helpers in Hong Kong, as many as 125,567, or approximately 48.5%, originated from Indonesia. This figure exceeds the number of domestic helpers from Philippines who had been previously dominated.

In 2010, the respective numbers are 136.723 from the Philippines (48%), 140.720 from Indonesia (49.4%), 3.744 from Thailand (1.3%), 893 Sri Lankans, Nepalese 568, and 2.253 of other Nationalities (Wan, Adrian, 10 November 2010, "Push to lift ban on maids from Vietnam", *South China Morning Post*).

According to the daily, the ability of Indonesia domestic helpers to speak in Cantonese make their service users prefer to use their services compared to the Philippines domestic helpers who use English as a communication tool.

Living in other countries with different social and cultural conditions as their origin country, have been making the domestic helpers needed a community space. A space to come together and do various activities with fellow workers from Indonesia. This need had been bring

¹ Low, S.; Taplin, D.; Scheld, S.; "Rethinking Urban Park: Public Space and Cultural Diversity", University of Texas Press, Austin, 2005

the chosen Victoria Park as a gathering place for the TKW in Hong Kong. Victoria Park is a city park located in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, became a gathering place for the majority of Indonesian domestic helpers, especially on Sundays and public holidays.

This research aims to determine the factors of Victoria Park so it became a choice hangout for most of the TKW in Hong Kong. The research had not only focuses on physical elements (internal), such as spatial patterns, park facilities and urban design factors, but also for external factors such as, both socio and cultural factors, economic, and so on. By knowing the influence factors of Victoria Park as a public open space, is expected to become an input for the development of public open spaces, especially city park, in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

The research activities had been carried out for two months since March 8th until May 10th 2011. In doing research, some research methodology had been used, as in the following:

1. Exploring the history of the formation of Victoria Park from various sources.
2. Collecting data about the various activities of Indonesia domestic helpers in Victoria Park through interviews and literature studies.
3. Doing direct observation at the research location for two months.
4. Mapping the various facilities inside and outside Victoria Park which related to TKW activities.
5. Conducting literature studies about urban design and public space.
6. Conducting an analysis of all the findings obtained.
7. Make conclusions based on results of the analysis.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

The History of Victoria Park

Before becoming a cit park, Victoria Park was originally built as a typhoon shelter. Victoria Park located on the waterfront, on the north side of Hong Kong island, this location strongly supports its function as a typhoon shelter.

The original typhoon shelter was built after the 1874 typhoon, at the present location of [Victoria Park](#), to provide shelter for fishing boats during storms. It was completed in 1883 with

a [breakwater](#) only 427 meters (1,400 feet) long.² As a typhoon shelter, the park had been known as Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter based on its location in Causeway.

The typhoon shelter was moved northwards from its original place in 1953. Meanwhile, the original typhoon shelter in Causeway Bay was reclaimed to provide land for the park, which known as Victoria Park. The park was named as Victoria refers to the name of Queen Victoria, which her statue was built in the park. Victoria Park was opened in October 1957 and has been refurbished from 2000 to 2002. In this periode, domestic helpers from Indonesia (TKW) had come to predominate the park, especially on Sunday and holiday as their day off.

The pattern of public open space

As the largest city park in Hong Kong, Victoria Park has a highly regular spatial pattern and supplemented by various support facilities such as sports facilities which can be accessed for free (soccer pitches, basketball courts, jogging trail and fitness stations), children playground, a model boat pool, garden, and open space. While some other facilities which just able to access with charge, such as: tennis courts, bowling green and swimming pool.

Based on its access, Victoria Park has been divided into two parts, a facility that can be accessed for free and pay facilities. The division is shown in diagram 1, where the facilities are accessible free of charge located on the western side. On the other hand, the facility with charge is located on the east.

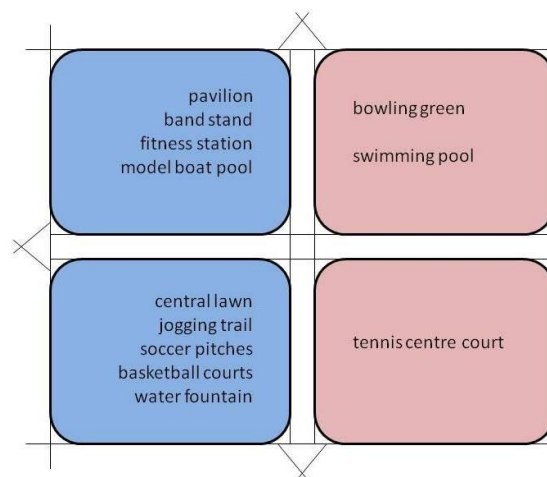
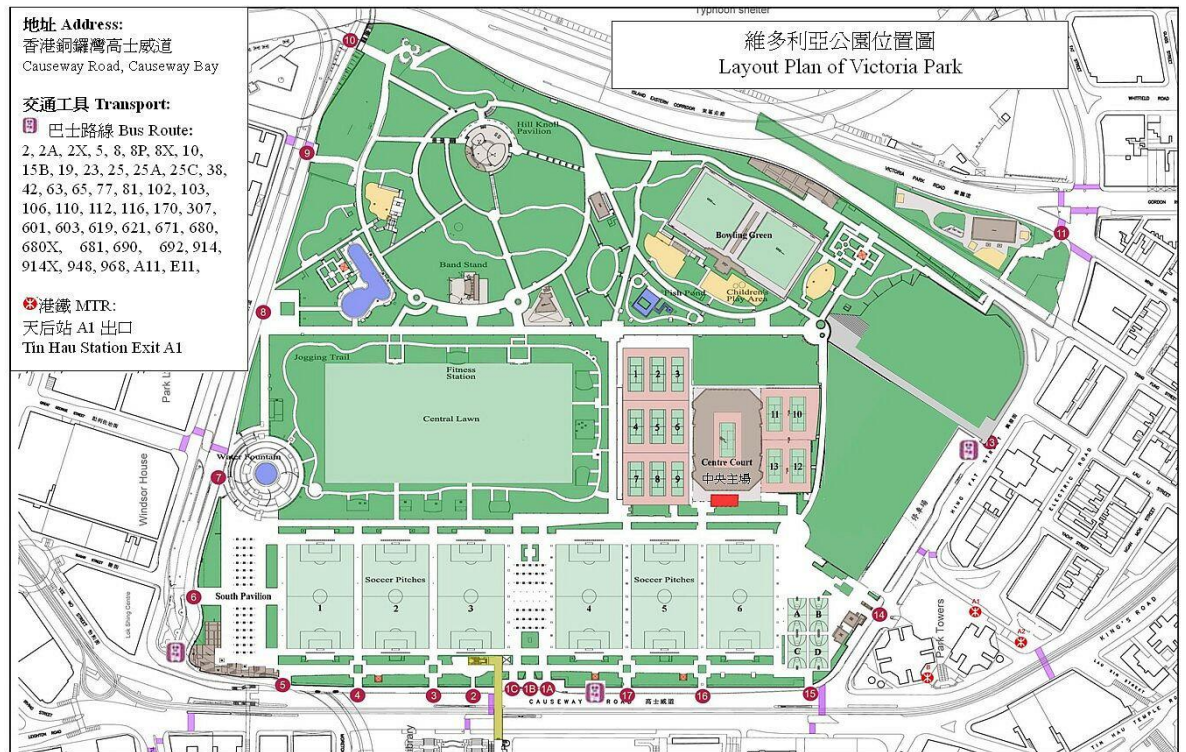


Diagram 1. The pattern of distribution facilities, the left (west) is a free facility, while the right (west) are facilities paid.

² Ho Pui-yin. *Challenges for an Evolving City - 160 Years of Port and Land Development in Hong Kong*. The Commercial Press, 2004



Source: Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Figure 1. Layout plan Victoria Park

Based on the observations over past two months, almost all TKW who are gathered in Victoria Park on the western side. It is strongly associated with existing facilities and accessibility throughout the facility. In addition, the facilities available in the west strongly supports the various activities done by TKW.

Victoria park has an area of more than 19 hectares, laid out with a regular distribution function. The south side is a soccer field with concrete covers its surface. The middle section is dominated by garden with grass covered the soil surface as the cover element. This section is surrounded by a jogging track, allowing users to enjoy the shade of existing trees. Southern and central parts associated with circulation patterns that form a grid pattern. This pattern creates order because the pattern that formed a football field. While in the north, from western to eastern side has a more dynamic pattern. Dynamic pattern is not only seen in the arrangement of landscape dominated by garden and water features, but also shaped by the circulation pattern which is an element connecting the various functions. Circulation patterns are not only act as a linkage between the area within the park, but also connects

the various areas within the park with urban space and the main road.

According to Trancik (1986); Hard spaces are those principally bounded by architectural walls; often these are intended to function as major gathering places for social activity. Soft spaces are those dominated by the natural environment, wheter inside or outside the city. In the urban setting they are the parks and gardens and linear greenways that provide opportunities for recreation or retreat from the built environment. Emphasis has often been placed only on hard space as appropriate to the city. Urban designer, however, must look at both types of spaces for inspiration, as urban functions exist that are better served by soft space.

The combination of hard space and soft space of Victoria Park looks very good. Hardspace was designed to form a space on the various sports facilities like tennis court, bowling green, swimming pool, soccer pitches, as well as the circulation path. On the other hand, soft spaces designed to create an atmosphere of shady, and comfortable for relaxation and perform various other activities (jogging, gathering, etc).



Figure 2. Elements Of The Vegetation That Dominates The Middle Section To Create Shade.

The presence of vegetation elements (fig.2) that dominates the park, have been creating a shady and comfortable atmosphere. This condition was seen in stark contrast to the living conditions of the city outside the park to a packed high-rise buildings and with the high density of traffic.

Character of Victoria Park

Public space is the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds. The streets, squares, and the parks of a city give form to ebb and flow of the human exchange. These dynamic spaces are an essential counterpart to the more settled places and routines of work and home life, providing the channels for movement, the nodes of communication, and the common grounds for play and relaxation. There are pressing needs that public spaces can help people to satisfy, significant human rights that it can be shaped to define and protect, and special cultural meanings that it can best convey.³

This statement shows the role of a public space to accommodate the various needs of urban society. This also occurs in Victoria Park which could accommodate the various needs of domestic helpers in Hong Kong.



Figure 3. TKW Take Advantage Of Sports Facilities.

Figure 3-5 shows the TKW take advantage of various facilities located in Victoria Park. Figure 3, shows that the sports facilities such as football field can be used freely by the TKW. There was no difference in using the facility, the people living in Hong Kong have equal rights to access public facilities. In figure 4, it's seen the TKW take advantage of open space located in Victoria Park as a place to sell and serve the needs of other TKW. These activities economically very helpful because the space for economic transaction has been formed, where the demand will be met with supply. While in Figure 5, shown in TKW was relax and unwind take advantage of the facilities provided.



Figure 4. TKW Utilizing Open Space As A Place Trading



Figure 5. TKW Relax Around The Pool That Serves As A Model Boat Pool.

Victoria Park had been chosen as a gathering place for the Indonesia domestic helpers, because of the hospitality of this city park. According to some of the TKW whom was interviewed, Victoria Park is a city park that is open and safe in doing various activities such as gathering, doing discussion, and worship.

As a city park, Victoria Park has a character that 'open' and 'receive', it is seen through its existing design, both in terms of facilities provided, as well as from the design approach of the 'friendly'. These characters make Victoria Park is never quiet, especially on Sundays and holidays. Even on any working day, some of TKW was seen are resting or gathering at this city park.

Workload experienced of the TKW every day makes they need a place to rest and let go of tired, interact and exchange experiences with other fellow TKW. In addition, the equality rights in Hong Kong, making the TKW can easily express a variety of things. In Victoria Park, every Sunday seen several groups that are being discussed, conducted religious activities, practicing the art, and so on.

The domestic helpers in around of Hong Kong is also active in various activities and competition among domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Figure 7 shows the action on stage and performed by TKW who shows traditional dancing from Indonesia in the contest between the domestic helpers in Hong Kong. The event was organized by the Department of Labor. This event also showed support of the government and the citizens of Hong Kong for all of domestic helpers in Hong Kong. This activity also showed equal rights for all people in Hong Kong, which there is no exception to the domestic helpers.

Some factors of security and freedom of expression, according to the majority of TKW interviewed during the research activity takes place, is the main reason for choosing Victoria Park as a gathering place for TKW. These factors were harder to them to get in public spaces in Indonesia. All of park facilities which open for public is also plays a role in supporting the various activities they perform on every Sunday and other holiday.

The characters of Victoria Park looks very suitable for the character of Indonesia domestic helpers who prefer a city park that has experienced a very strong impression. This is quite different from Philippines domestic helpers who has been chosen a location in city center area, Statue Square, Central. Philippines domestic helpers have been also choose connection space in the bottom HSBC building (fig.8) which was designed by famous architect of the world, Sir Norman Foster. The location is surrounded by high buildings is an option because it is close to public facilities, especially the church.



Figure 6. Gathering, Organizing And Doing Discussion Are Other Activities In Victoria Park.

Differences in social and cultural background between Indonesia domestic helpers and Philippines domestic helpers, also affects the different characters in order to select their gathering place. Most of Indonesia domestic helpers came from some villages in east Java, which more natural place. On the other hand, almost all of Philippines domestic helpers have different life style with more modern performance. Also, most of them are Christian, which influence to choose gathering place near to the church.



Figure 7. TKW Attended Traditional Dancing Competition Which Organized By Labor Department Of Hong Kong

According to Francis (2003), Recently it has become more commonly understood that successful parks and open spaces such as plazas, streets and public gardens are ones that are lively and well-used by people. In brief, we found that successful public spaces are ones that are responsive to the needs of their users; are democratic in their accessibility; and are meaningful for the larger community and society.



Figure 8. Philippines domestic helpers meeting in HSBC building.

Refer to its character, Victoria Park has ability to accommodate the various needs of the public, both the need of doing various activities such as sports and recreation, social needs, the need to express themselves as well as equal rights. These factors are very important for Indonesian domestic helpers who come from developing countries and from the village.

Furthermore, Francis (2003) says; “User needs are defined as those amenities and experiences that people seek in enjoying public open spaces. Needs provide the basic level of support and function in open space; they are the prerequisite for having an enjoyable landscape experience and provide the basis for much design criteria. They can range from the need for basic access to requirements for comfort and passive or active engagement. Put more simply, user needs may include the ability to walk into a space and find a comfortable place to sit and relax without being hassled.”

ACCESSIBILITY

The external factors that support Victoria Park as a meeting point for the TKW is the accessibility to and from the location. Easiness of achievement with a variety of public transportation such as Mass Transit Railway (MTR), City Bus and Light Bus, also has a contributing factor, so that the TKW who live far away from Victoria Park is still choosing this city park as a meeting point.

Another factor is the existence of the Indonesia Consulate office which is not far from Victoria Park. This office is very important because it contributed to the gathering space for the TKW.



Figure 9. Indonesia’s local bank around of Victoria Park.

On the other hand, the presence of TKW in large numbers in Victoria Park, triggering the growth of various other facilities such as local banks, Indonesia restaurants, Indonesia shops, Indonesia airline offices and also the money changer. Thus, the presence of Victoria Park as a largest meeting point for domestic helpers in Hong Kong played a role in the economic movement in the region.



Figure 10. Indonesia Store Which Sell Indonesia Local Product Also Present In Surrounding Of Victoria Park.

CONCLUSION

Seen in a long-term historical perspective, city space has always served three vital functions – meeting place, market place and connection space. As a meeting place, the city was the scene for exchange of social information of all kinds. As a market – place, the city spaces served as venues for exchange of goods and services. And finally, the city street provided access to and connections between all the functions of the city (Gemzoe, 2001).

Based on this research, there are some influences factors that have been made Victoria Park as a meeting point for TKW, which shown in the following:

1. The character of Victoria Park and the presence of equal rights for every user that gives freedom of expression.
2. Completeness of facilities owned TKW support various activities.
3. Vegetation and water features have created comfort in doing various activities such as discussion, worship, and training in the arts.
4. Accessibility which is very easy to and from Victoria Park.
5. The growth of facilities such as shops, restaurants, banks, Indonesia airline , more and more make the TKW find it convenient to gather in Victoria Park.

The condition is actually not a lot they found in Indonesia. Thus, Victoria park can become a reference in designing city parks in Indonesia. A city park that has ability to accommodate the needs of the people, and accessible to every citizen without discrimination.

In a society where concepts such as democracy, diversity and feelings of personal safety are considered important dimensions, the extended use of public space must be seen as a very valuable development. And, for the same reason, modern requirements for good public space quality must naturally be honoured (Gehl, 2007).

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