The city of Taipei is undergoing rapid and intense changes. The population of Taipei increased from 500,000 in 1945 to 1.56 million in 1968, and stands at more than 2.5 million today. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the earliest settlements were port towns on the navigable Tan-Shui River. But the history of the modern city dates back to 1875. At this period, the implementation of the city followed two main principles of Chinese city planning: a symbolic siting between mountain and river according to the feng shui (geomancy, the traditional Chinese art of defining good or ill fortune from the orientation of buildings), and an organization of the built forms according to the system for the distribution of streets and blocks. The Taipei city wall was torn down in 1898 during the Japanese occupation. The shape of the original walled city is still readable in the fabric of the modern city.

The project site is adjacent to the original old walled city of Taipei ku created at the end of the nineteenth century (1878-94). Located at the western edge of the downtown area, on the northern border of the old city, the project reaches the Tan-Shui River. The site of 46 hectares became available for development with the relocation of a surface rail yard to an underground tunnel and the construction of a new central railway station. The client – Taipei Department of City Planning and the Federal Council for Economic Development – sought a plan for a mixed-use complex, stimulating private investment, improving connections with other city districts, creating public space and enhancing the city’s international image, and transforming this area into a new regional transport centre.

The city’s central business district has shifted to the east; one of the goals of the present project is to re-establish the west district as a significant mixed-use commercial district.

The programme of 845,000 square metres includes 604,000 square metres of office space, 93,000 square metres of retail space, 67,000 square metres of department store and 1,140 hotel rooms on 10.72 hectares, 23 per cent of the total land area. Open space occupies 33 per cent, roads 34 per cent, and bus and rail terminals five per cent each.

The opportunity to make a new urban design plan on such a scale in an existing city is rare. Paris in the seventies had the same opportunity with the moving of the central market (Les Halles) outside of the city and the creation of the transport system of the regional subway.

Sasaki chose a high-density solution to implement a series of open spaces edged with traditional pedestrian arcades. The proposed design respects the old urban fabric, extending the traditional grid of the north-south streets and the east-west avenues. A significant planted boulevard expresses the original city walls. The scale of the block also expresses a respect for the existing framework.

In planning terms, the approach of the team is logical and methodical. The master plan integrates different concepts: the extension of the grid, the definition of a major open space connecting the main Terminal Building to the river front, emphasizing the effect of the city entry from the Tan-Shui River (an effect which is reinforced by the siting of a landmark tower); the completion of design by the introduction of complexity through the definition of secondary spaces, ensuring dialectic relationships with the different situations in the existing urban fabric.

Many streets are extended, on and through the site, in order to integrate the various surrounding districts. The major pedestrian connections are made through an extension of the proposed underground retail and circulation system linked to Taipei Terminal, MRT line stations, regional bus stations and underground parking.

A recently constructed east-west elevated highway, entering the city at the western edge of the Taipei Terminal District, forms a significant barrier to the north of the site.
1. View of the existing site.

2. Figure Ground Plan showing the proposed development including the addition of a third major open space adjacent to the old city.

The site section illustrates the pedestrian circulation system, which is considered the key to the district functioning as a mixed-use development supported by transit. The plan provides pedestrian circulation at three levels: underground, street, and second level. The street-level system is an extensive series of parks, plazas, and sidewalks approximately one-third of the land area, connecting open spaces to shopping areas, department stores, and arcades.

The composition is dominated by a landmark tower occupying a central position, seen from a number of important vistas, symbolising Taipei’s image as a contemporary international city. From the base of the tower a long east-west axis in the form of a grand arcade goes to the terminal building. The major component of this axis is a commercial shopping gallery, referencing the arcades of old Taipei’s architecture.

This major design plan on a large scale, in the central district of a modern city, successfully responds to a challenge to create a significant new district, including major investments in public transportation, numerous important open spaces, and buildings adapted for multi-use modern activities.

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