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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

School of Design

***“Mainland House”:  
A Spatial—Cultural Study on Hong Kong People  
Buying House/Home in the Pearl River Delta***

TSANG Siu Yin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Philosophy

September 2005



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TSANG, Siu Yin

## ***Abstract***

The purchasing of “Mainland house” (residential properties in Mainland China, mainly in the Pearl River Delta) was phenomenal in last few decades. But it still remains nearly unstudied in the field of humanities and social science. Besides filling this gap, this thesis also attempts to bring in a cultural perspective to the dominant economic and social discourses revolve around the merging of Hong Kong and the PRD.

In this thesis, culture is viewed as a spatial process of meaning construction; attention would also be paid to the interaction between the social and spatial changes. This meaning construction of the purchasing as well as activities around Mainland house is investigated in three different perspectives (with reference to the framework of Lefebvre refined by Soja): the conceived, perceived, and lived space. The conceived space is mainly examined through the analysis of what and how meaning are and are being produced; the perceived space is investigated by the analysis of the spatial forms of Mainland, including internal spatial design as well as their locations; the study of lived space get it resources mainly from the owners and users’ experiences and narrations.

Emphasis would be on the detail of this threefold dynamics, as well as the changing of the meanings of the Mainland house’s space through time, and the differences of the meaning between different owners and users.

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## **Introduction**

There is a great amount of discussion on the integration of Hong Kong into the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region in recent years. However, much of the discussion focused either on the economic aspect of the integration process, or on what strategic role Hong Kong could play in this new morphology of South China. While some of the debates revolve around the social aspect of this phenomenon, such as the social issue of *Bao Yi Lie*<sup>1</sup>, as well as the social problems that this may give rise to, a comprehensive or specific discussion on the cultural perspective of this process is still insufficient. Despite that the situation has changed in recent years, the amount of literatures on this aspect remains small. Here, the term “culture” would be used in its broadest sense. John Fiske defines culture as ‘the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system... (1989: 23).’ In this study, I view culture as a process of meaning and pleasure production, which is connected to space and spatial practice. In fact all cultural activities are intrinsically spatial—as they have to take place in spaces and places—and the social system that they relate to is also spatial. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Mainland house, because the production of meaning arises first of all from this new geography of Hong Kong—PRD, which is also spatially produced.

The consumption of residential properties in Mainland China grew rapidly in the 80s and 90s of the last century, many of them concentrated in the Pearl River Delta. Yet the expansion of the market was interrupted not very soon, mainly due to the many unfinished projects, which hindered many Hong Kong people from buying houses in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cross-border extra-marital relationship

PRD. This expansion was later revived mainly because the local governments of some of the individual cities (e.g. Zhangmutau) in Guangdong province decided to take better control of the property markets, and the unfinished projects soon diminished as a result. Only after this the real trend reached its peak in the early 90s. According to the statistics released by the Hong Kong government, the new loans drawn down for purchasing properties in Mainland China in a single month was as high as HK\$119 million (Hong Kong Monetary Authority press release July 2003). In fact the change in the behavior of home purchasing is not only a quantitative one, but also a qualitative one. Three decades back, a Mainland property market for Hong Kong people did not even exist, as the most common practice of owning a house in Mainland China at that time was to build one in one's homeland. In recent years the trend has shifted to a preference of end products provided by established developers. Since the economic stagnation after 1998 and given the market saturation, this extensive growth is believed to have ceased over the last few years.

This is an inter-disciplinary research, aiming to study the spatial-cultural aspect of the consumption of residential properties in the PRD, in an attempt to investigate how and what meanings are being constructed.

### ***Background: Reentering the Pearl River Delta***

The movement across the border between both sides is now getting more and more frequent, and the contents of this movement are in various forms. It involves many different 'scapes' of exchange; as the movement concerns the flow of people, information, media as well as capital.

Even before the reunification in 1997, Hong Kong had already started to invest a lot of



its capital in implementing transport infrastructures connecting the PRD. As of this year, six rail projects are due to be completed by the end of 2007, while another six new projects are in the offing, as set out in the Railway Development Strategy 2000. There are also a dozen of major road projects under planning, including Route 10 from North Lantau to Yuen Long Highway, Route 9 from Tsing Yi to Shatin and Central Wanchai Bypass (Hong Kong SAR Government). This development is in tandem with the inland transportation network, a regional network in south China, covering Hong Kong, Macau, Huizhou, Jiangmen, Zhuhai, Zhaoqing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Hundreds of thousands of people now flow through different boundaries of these cities within this network. A well-developed transportation network is now in place in the Pearl River Delta region. There are direct road links between major and intermediate cities, and even with small major towns; some major road constructions are still in progress. Commuting between different hubs in this regional network is becoming easier and easier.

The closer connection between Hong Kong and the PRD is not a recent phenomenon. Immediately following the “open-door policy” of Mainland China of the 1980s, many manufacturing factories seized the opportunity by moving most of their manufacturing processes back to the Mainland and tapping into the cheap labor in the PRD. Yet before this, there had already been a longer cultural history between the Mainland and Hong Kong. During the period from 1842 to the Second World War, the population of Hong Kong was only about 850,000. The connection between the residents of Hong Kong and Guangdong province was very close, and the mobility of population was very high as well (Ma 13). The first major population bloom in Hong Kong took place in the wake of

the immigration waves around 1949 due to the establishment of the People Republic of China. At that time, though, there was a very weak cultural identity among the people in Hong Kong.

The production of cultural identity for Hong Kong is defined by the locality of space. The borderline dividing Hong Kong and the PRD is a political one. A political borderline, although often resembles a cultural borderline, is not always a must. When the political borderline meets its cultural counterpart, it raises the issue of a Hong Kong cultural identity. As identity is always a structured representation that only achieves its positive through the narrow eyes of the negative (Hall 1997), an outsider has to be found in order to define the “us”.

“Hong Kong people” as an identity is somehow like an imagined community (cf. Benedict Anderson’s concept), constructed with the help of the mass media only over the last several decades. Throughout these years, popular culture, especially television, has been trying to culturally detach “Hong Kong” from the PRD as well as from Mainland China. This is done through discriminatively personifying mainlanders into different characters in TV serials (Ma 1996). This labeling of the others had the effect of adding pride to cultural identity.

Hong Kong people are definitely bringing this constructed identity (with cultural supremacy) into the PRD now that the region is thriving. This cultural pride is obviously represented in the consuming of residential properties by Hong Kong buyers. Hence, a

study on this topic will also be an opportunity to find out as to how Hong Kong people interpret the cultural relationship between Hong Kong and the PRD.

The cultural pride of being Hong Kong people vis-à-vis the Mainlanders was also the stabilizer of the identity, but this identification has been met with various challenges in recent years. The social fact of reunification causes an identity crisis, for which a more subtle identity negotiation gets underway. This is a new (re)connection of the Hong Kong identity with the cultural China as well as the political state, and at the same time without losing the unique position of Hong Kong identity. This 180-degree turn leads to an embarrassment of the cultural pride, as the identity and the conception of the relationship between Hong Kong and the PRC (the People's Republic of China) again becomes ambiguous and unsettled. The self-esteem of the Hong Kong identity is further hurt, as one of the bases of the pride—the economic difference—is diminishing. The tourists from Mainland China shock Hong Kong people with their consuming power and the eagerness to spend; it is more embarrassing as Hong Kong people find that now Hong Kong's tourism depends very much on the huge Mainland demand.

### ***The “Mainland house” as a topic***

“Mainland house” is the common term Hong Kong people use to address the residential units in Mainland. Originally written as “大陸樓”, the literal meaning of the third character is “building”, which also means “house”. In order to better capture the phenomenon, it is translated as “house” here. The name dates back to the time when many of the housing projects ended up unfinished. Although Hong Kong people's general impressions of “Mainland houses” has changed drastically, the somehow loaded word “Mainland” remains in use to this day.

The buying of Mainland houses has indeed been phenomenal in the last decade. Still, the issue is yet to be explored in depth by the academia. The Mainland house often appears as a case study in many literatures of humanities and social science (except for the field of economics). There is an interesting fact, the nature of Mainland house as a case is different between the Mainland scholars and Hong Kong scholars. For mainland scholars, the housing estates that Hong Kong people regard as Mainland houses are treated as a special topic on the suburbanization of the cities in South China. On the other hand, Hong Kong scholars, until the late 80s, see the property market in the PRD as totally independent of Hong Kong. In a study undertaken in 1987 (Lee & Yu), the housing conditions of Guangzhou were used to compare and contrast with those of Hong Kong in order to identify the differences in policies and conditions between socialist and capitalist societies. Despite the close connection between Hong Kong and the PRD in recent years, researches conducted in Hong Kong continue to see the situation as merely a case for housing studies. The Mainland house phenomenon makes entry into many different topics as an outstanding example, but it remains hardly a field of study in its own right.

Although scientific and critical discussion on the Mainland house issue is still lacking, a popular discourse has however been in existence for sometime. Be so as it may, the discourse is yet to develop beyond generalization and stereotyping, although it still subject to change from time to time; such as the general impression that the quality of the house is becoming better and better. The mainstream discourse seeks to make sense of the act of purchasing quite systematically, which includes the background of the

buyers, the reasons for buying, as well as the functions of the houses for them. The crux of the mainstream discourse is generally that the biggest pulling factor is the low price, while most of the buyers are from the working class who are dissatisfied with the living condition in Hong Kong but unable to change this situation. Some of them are living in public housing estates and therefore harboring the unfulfilled Hong Kong dream of owning their own houses. The buyers are believed to hope to realize this dream. Some of the buyers have to travel back and forth between Hong Kong and the PRD due to their works. Those house are thought to serve two main purposes: a) to cater mainly to retirees (“parents”), who actually move up north to enjoy the different standards of living there, as only the retired people can stand the boring life in the region and, b) to be used as a weekend and holiday house, which is believed to be the most common reason for buying a Mainland house.

The main arena of the construction of this mainstream discourse is in the popular media, which include news, magazines, advertisements, everyday conversation and words of mouth. This discourse of systemized information provides the major backdrop for the general public to understand and judge on the stories around the Mainland house phenomenon.

### ***Reviewing Space***

I have discussed in the previous pages the historical and social background that the Mainland house phenomenon is situated in. As I have mentioned before, this study concentrates on the cultural meanings attached to the space. It is analytically significant to focus on the spatiality of Mainland house. First of all it involves the meaning of a specific spatial form: house; secondly, in different scales the PRD urban space is

simultaneously the condition and result of this Mainland house phenomenon. It is thus necessary to review the conception of space.

There was a transdisciplinary spatial turn recently since the late 90s. Critical scholars in different disciplines have begun to interpret the spatiality of human life in much the same way they have traditionally interpreted history and social process. A reinvigorated critical perspective associated with an explicitly spatial imagination has begun to infuse the study of history and society (Soja 2000: 7). Derek Gregory and John Urry (1985), while reviewing the connection between social relations and spatial structure, as well as the disciplines of them (sociology and human geography); also point out that spatial structure is now seen not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced.

The does not only happen to the critical study, as Daniel Bell (1978) states that “(space) becomes the primary aesthetic problem of mid-twentieth century culture as the problem of time (in Bergson, Proust, and Joyce) was the primary aesthetic problem of the first few decades of this century.” This all around paradigm shift is best-illustrated by Michel Foucault’s (1986) oft-quoted assertion: “the anxiety of our era has to do with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time (23).”

This spatial turn happens only recently, the situation of not so long time ago was completely opposite. As the opening of the same article by Foucault starts with “The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history (22).” And in the past, space was often treated as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile (1977: 70)” when comparing with another important epistemological dimension—time. In fact,

in the past the spatiality of human life is seen as the results of the interaction between the historical and social process, and the spatiality itself has little causal and explanatory power. This is what Edward Soja (1989) called “historical imagination” that “defining the very nature of critical insight and interpretation. So unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to exclude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life (10-11).”

David Harvey (1989) in *The Condition of Postmodernity* also explains this privileging of time and history, “social theory has always focused on processes of social change, modernization, and revolution (technical, social, political). Progress is its theoretical object, and historical time its primary dimension (205).” This can be traced back to the Kantian dualism that separates the “spatial” from “social” (Gregory & Urry 2); on the other hand the spatial analysis was thought to be a discipline of its own, disconnected with other conditions. The spatial analysis tended to assume that behind every spatial pattern laid a spatial cause, and there were something as purely spatial processes (Massey 1985: 11). In the book, Harvey gives an account of space and time in social life so as to highlight material links between political—economic and cultural processes, in which later on sheds light on the dialectics between the spatial/physical form and social process in *Spaces of Hope* (2000).

In fact, the application of spatial theory beyond absolute spaces to social/physical fields of cultural articulation has also proved fruitful when employed in the humanities and political sciences (Liggett & Perry 5). Geographical concepts like “mapping”,

“boundaries” and “cartographies” are adopted in cultural studies widely, and some spatial metaphors become central in some critical studies of social relation, such as “marginality”, “peripheral” and “central” (Johnson et al 110-111).

The connection between social process and spatiality in fact has already been drawn in another academic tradition. The Marxists have a long history of encrypting spatial analysis into their framework. But the spatiality is still being viewed as a passive entity, in which spatial analysis is viewed as being tied directly to the transformations of society produced by the drive for capital accumulation and the class struggle. This approach would specify an analysis of spaces as simply the expression of the social structure (Gottdiener 1985: 121). The work of Lefebvre ([1974] 1990) brings in another direction. Still basing on the Marxist framework, Lefebvre states that space itself must be considered as one element of the productive forces of society (Gottdiener 1985: 123). So the (social) space is not just a container or a result of the social process.

Similar perspective has been taken by numerous works of Michel Foucault, to him space is a complex of ideology/knowledge and the materialized space; in which the power is constituted and operates in the space that is at the same time material and ideological. This already envisions the multiplicity of space. Yet for almost 20 years, his works which were meant to provide radical critique and disruptive challenge to the geographical imagination, were misunderstood and “sucked back into unchanged disciplinary cocoons (Soja 1996:11)”



Foucault's contribution to the debate of space is multiple, and his concept of heterotopias is challenging the topic. From the notion of utopias, which is "sites with no real place" and "present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, which are fundamentally unreal places"; Foucault (1986) develops the notion of *heterotopias*, which is "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found in the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (24)." Heterotopias envisions a possibility that shows the juxtaposing of different or incompatible spaces in one real space, and also the distinct multiple linkages of space with different slices of time synchronically. This characteristic makes the concept to be widely used in cultural and spatial studies.

The multiplicity of space is also introduced by Henri Lefebvre (1991) in his now thought as classic work on space: *The Production of Space*; Lefebvre explains the multiplicity of space as interlinked, which he calls this "conceptual triad". This conceptual triad involves three different moments of space, which I would like to explain in detail as follows:

- 1) Spatial practice, or perceived space: "the spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction." It is the materialized spatial form that produces and reproduces the special space of a society. This is the realm of the perceived as it has interaction with the corporeality.
- 2) Representations of space, or conceived space: "conceptualized space, the space of

scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.” It is a space that is dominated by the thoughts under the guidance of scientific knowledge, and the knowledge itself is a mixture of understanding and ideology.

3) Representational spaces, or lived space: “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users”, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe (emphasis in original).” It is also the lived experience that Lefebvre emphasizes this space of being dominated, but also as a “counterspaces” that is space of resistance to the dominant order (38-39).

Michel de Certeau (1984), although not directly gaining his vision from Lefebvre, gives a specific insight into the understanding of the different moments of space. He denies the discipline of the representation of space by seeing that “an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them (xiv).” This in fact parallels the quality of “counterspace” that the lived space mentioned above.

On the other hand, while building on the legacy of Lefebvre, the urban critic Edward Soja (1996) extends these concepts as the first and second space as *Firstspace* and *Secondspace* perspectives. His contribution on this is that he sees these spaces not only

as spatial reality per se, but also a perspective from which to study the space; through conceptualizing these two perceptives, he also discovers the different layers of real and imagined space (with the perspective getting from the Foucault's concept of heterotopias). This helps him to have a new perspective on the lived space as a "real and/or imagined" space or what he called *Thirdspace*.

Although the frameworks of Lefebvre and Soja could help to address the social space in a more comprehensive manner, it should not be applied directly into this study. This is because the theory of Lefebvre was built up specifically according to the situation of the French society, and Soja also gives his input according to the cases in the North America. Although they were trying to propose a general theory concerning urban space, the very conclusion they both drew were still context specific. Therefore the Lefebvre's framework (whether with the Soja input or not) should not be taken as universally applicable.

One of the reasons that the Soja interpretation of Lefebvre's framework with North America situation could work smoothly is that they share similar social background. This is a blind spot for most of the critics from the west, or in other words this might not be able to raise any significant discussion in their situation. But this point matters a lot when this framework is to be applied into a society and culture that is different from the academic "west".

For Hong Kong, and especially Mainland China, cultural and historical context is very different. As a result, the representation of space (conceived space) in Hong Kong does not perfectly fit in the framework. For the framework of Lefebvre and the situation in

the French society, the representation of space signifies a dominant space of rationality. This rationality has a tradition of philosophical support, which streamed from Enlightenment to modernism. This framework in fact requires a society that has undergone or is undergoing a particular social process: the modern project. This social process is always mistaken for a universal reality; especially when many places of the world have already gone through the so called “modernization” process. In fact the social mentality and believe that result from this “modernization” process through free market and (production and information) technology are very different from the socio-philosophical sense of the “modern process”.

But rationality as a socially consented metaphysical support is not the case for Hong Kong. No one could argue that in a sense Hong Kong is a highly modernized society. Yet the modern ration had not yet taken root since the colonial Hong Kong. In the colonial period, rationality was more a methodology for managing rather than a philosophical ground. Therefore, although it still takes a dominant position in the production of space; the nature and mechanism that conceived space guides the production process are different.

Although with this taken into account, the contents of different moments of space (or especially the representation of space) would not become invalid for analysis. Every social process of spatial production would have a dominant domain, and rationality indeed plays an important role in the social process. In this study, attention should then be paid on how the moments of space function and connect differently.

## ***Plan of the thesis***

The “space” this research covers is hence obviously not strictly geometrical and mathematical. It is a social space, a social product as well as a social process. Besides the interaction with the historical and social sphere, the social space also has its own internal dynamics such as the conceptual triad of Lefebvre mentioned above.

In order to address the different moments of the spatiality that Mainland house involves, this thesis is hence divided into three main parts (chapter 3-5). Chapter 3 focuses on the advertisements of the Mainland house. The advertisements play an important role in shaping the Hong Kong people’s first impression toward Mainland house. Through close reading on the forms, methodology as well as the contents of those advertisements, I try to trace what image they have built and try to build. I emphasize on not only what this ads reflect, but also its constructing side. The investigation on the constructing side of those ads helps us to see how and what social meanings that they are dealing with. In this chapter I point out how they make sense of and elaborate on the space that the Mainland house provides; and also how they try to redefine the meaning of house/home/family and the relationship between Hong Kong, the PRD and China.

Chapter 4 covers the spatial form of the Mainland house. The physical form of the Mainland house entails different scales. It includes the level of the geography connects with the social environment, and also the internal spatial design. Through introducing the social transformation of space in the PRD (mainly modernization and suburbanization), I examine the role that Hong Kong plays in this change in residential culture. The study on the internal spatial design also indicates the constraints and

possible meanings that the Mainland house brings to the owner.

Chapter 5 focuses on the lived experiences of the owners. This chapter is principally based on the ethnographic materials, with a close look on the experiences of the owners and also how they narrate the experiences. Emphasis is given to how they negotiate between the house and their lives and the social reality that they are facing, as well as the changes in usage through these years. In addition to this, the specific setting of the research also aims to investigate the dynamics between the group and individual household. This chapter tends to examine the particularity of the space toward different users.

These three chapters are not directly structured according to different moments of space, as specific objects of analysis are chosen instead. I take these three chapters as three different concrete and specific angles of interception, and each one of them is a starting point. As such, each of the chapters starts in a specific moment of space, but it will not only deal with a single side of space. Although the object of analysis of each chapter is chosen for a specific moment of space, they will definitely touch other spaces. For example the analysis of spatial form is primarily for the investigation of a perceived space, but on the other hand it is only through this that we can decipher the representations of space (conceived space). So focus is also on the interplay between different spaces, as they are in reality diffusing and affecting each other constantly.

## ***Methodology***

### **House/home and Methodology**

Before deciding a methodology for studying the Mainland house, it is worth taking a look on the history of house/home as methodology first. House was originally the core site for field study. In the past, supervisors would instruct their graduate students that it was essential to live in the homes of their informants (Miller 2).

Anthropologists have generally tended to treat houses as a backdrop, a setting with props where presumably more interesting and important aspects of the drama of human cultural and social life are played out (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1). The house is seen as the heart of the community, in this sense home is relatively a public space. The home is first of all a good physical site to understand and get into the informants' life, as the researcher can get closer and get the rhythm/pace of the informants' lives through sharing the same space, time and routine with them. However, for most of the ethnographers, the importance to live in the informants' house is the public connection of the house, for which it provides great opportunity for researchers to gain exposure to the community even inside the house.

However, this convenience is no longer available, which is mainly due to the privatization of household, which has resulted in the decrease in the connection between individual household and community. So nowadays ethnographers do not live with the family, but visit (Miller 2-3). This is because in nowadays house belongs to the private regime and hence no longer pertains as a public site to gain entrance into the community.

For the purpose of fieldwork of this research, I visited and stayed several mainland houses of the informants. I also visited their houses/homes with them. In this research, there is a parallel between ethnographic work and the informant's life: most of the owners of Mainland houses do not live in their houses, as they only visit them. So the way I choose for the field research does not only focus on the physical object of "house" and treats it as a means for secondary purpose (to gain access to the community); but to pay much attention to the experiences around it, and also try to share the same time, space and experience with the informants.

### **Research setting and strategy**

Given that this is an interdisciplinary research, references, theories and approaches are therefore borrowed from different disciplines. Conservation between them is also expected. Textual analysis based on the approach of cultural studies, spatial analysis and resources gathered from ethnographic work are all key focuses of the study.

The ethnographic observation and interviews in this study are structured around cases. In the 50s of the last century, case studies suddenly lost its appeal as a method of sociological analysis. It is partly due to the vast expansion of quantitative techniques (Mitchell 188). Argument has been also made in social anthropology on the 'typicality' about the case chosen in research, and hence the generalizing ability of the case (Gluckman 1961, van Velsen 1967). Contrasting with the analysis based on survey data in which a person is replaced by the different sets of attribute or trait. The case study forces the researcher to think in terms such as unit of growth or individual life pattern, rather than resorting to trait analysis alone (Goode and Hatt 1952).



Although this research is not a case study, I keep in mind this attitude toward the cases involved. So the importance of the cases is not its ability to generalize. Greater attention would be paid on the specificity of each case, about that relation with other cases as well as the wider context.

Most of the cases studied are collected from members of the same extended family (Leung Family), with the exception of a contrasting case, which was chosen from another group. All of them are married couples, with some of them having dependent children living with them in Hong Kong. The intention for this arrangement is to examine how different groups (extended family and peer group) affect the behavior of the owners connected to them.

Trip observation was done with both individual households and with the whole group at the beginning of the research. This is aimed to compare the variation of their activities when they are “going up” (a common term that the informants would use to express “going to Mainland” or “going to their houses in Mainland”) as individual household and as a member of another group.

Data was collected from both the empirically perceived space—some material space as well as “spatial practices”; and the conceived space—the mental or ideational field, conceptualized in imagery, reflexive thought, and symbolic representation. These two kinds of data from what Edward Soja called the first and second space (1996) are not unbridgeable or mutually exclusive. In fact they are intertwined in reality, in this project I would pay attention to the interplay between these two spaces.

## **Textual analysis**

Advertisement is the major source of analysis in this area. Anthropological studies see advertisements as the ideological mirror of the consumer society and as a cultural expression of changing norms, stereotypes and collective ideas (Cheng 2006). Yet we shall not only see its reflective function, and overlook the active role advertisement plays in constructing and circulating social meanings.

All sorts of advertisement of the Mainland house are carefully examined in this part of research, which includes TV ads, ad-magazine and printed ads. Over 50 TV ads and ad-magazines aired in the past five years are studied, together with numerous printed ads (on newspaper, magazine as well as outdoor advertisements) and brochures. Other texts will also be examined, including floor plans of certain housing estates and also news about the Mainland house and other relevant issue. The review of news is the main source for tracing the development and change of the Mainland house as well as the changes of public view about it through these years.

The main task of this part of analysis is to discern as to what particular cultural symbols are employed to construct the images of an ideal home, and how they try to establish a meaning for the new geography of Hong Kong—PRD. The semiological approach would be adopted to decipher how the cultural symbols serve as signifiers in the secondary language of myth.

Advertising analysis is often viewed as a method of research to provide data for further analysis. However, in this research I view this as an independent sphere, that it has its own meaning structure.

The physical space and built environment are also important subjects of analysis. These range from the interior design of the house to the location of the housing estates in relation to Hong Kong. Attention is mainly paid to the constraints and the potentials that the physical environment brings; and also the social meaning attached to the space.

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Bourdieu (1990) reminds us of the difference between scientific logic and the logic of practice, and the logic of researcher would definitely be different from the practical one. But more than this, what we should be alert is that what an informant tells me should not be treated as the original practical logic directly, or as the pure form of what s/he thinks. As far as my personal experience can tell, they are in fact formulated for a researcher. An informant asked me once when I was making an appointment for interview with her, “what do you wanna study about, let me know and let me think about it, then maybe I can help you.” So I have to bear in mind that this is not the one and only reality per se, but belongs to a reality of “what they want to tell me”.

### **Direct/participant observation**

In the research I participate in and observe on how would some owners manage the houses they own. Participant observation is a method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time (Becker & Geer 133).

The interview provides little opportunity for rectifying errors where they go unrecognized. In contrast, participant observation provides a situation in which the

meanings of words can be learned with great precision through study of their use in context, exploration through continuous interviewing. After all, participant observation makes it possible to check description against fact and noting discrepancies (Becker & Geer 139).

The observation would be done through trips with the informants, and the duration that I stay is totally depending on the plans of the informants. I choose to go up together with them from Hong Kong, so that the observation starts long before we get to the houses. In other words, the field is not only defined in geographical terms, but also in terms of both time and space.

During the time spent with the informants, I would not ask questions all the time or at once, but choose to ask later or during the interview. In doing so, I am not as naïve as to think that this would minimize the difference that a presence of researcher would make. I adopt this strategy during observation, is in fact an attempt to take my presence and interruption into account. So I would wait for the informants to choose to reveal what is significant to them, and what they want to introduce to me as a stranger; and always keep in mind that all the information I collected from them was gathered under this condition.

### **In-depth interview**

I would conduct conversational interviews with some owners and potential owners of housing properties in the PRD. The advantage of conversational interview is that the discourse of the interview is jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent, in the course of which meanings will emerge. Through conversation, a mutual reformation and specification of questions is also possible (Mishler 52-3).

Moreover, as language and words themselves come with a great deal of ambiguity, and is open to interpretation in different specific contexts. Standard research practice such as questionnaire tends to ignore this ambiguity and also the process of disambiguation (Mishler 64).

As one of the major concerns of this project is how those owners would narrate the story of their houses in the PRD, so the wording they use is a very important source. Standardized questionnaire obviously cannot serve this purpose.

All of the informants are then conducted a conversational interview after the trips. The interviews are conducted separately for each individual. Although the interview is conversational, a same set of structured question is asked during the interview, the questions are structured around the previous analysis. All of the questions are open ended and aimed for facts, and the answers to the questions are not the only significant. In fact the important point is to notice *how* they respond to the questions besides *what* they respond. Those questions are basically starting point for each part of the conversation. So attention would also be paid to how they start from one point to another, so the structure of the questions is also ready to be dismantled. For example, an informant would provide the answers of the sixth question during the conversation induced by the second one. This is also important to me, for which this is not just a changing of the order of the questions to ask, but also provides important message on how the informant relates different issues in his/her own way.

## **Chapter 1: On House (, Dwelling, Home and Family)**

The study is about buying houses, which is in itself a specific spatial form; the house has its own meanings and problems. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to the meaning of a house as well as several sets of concept closely connected to it.

### ***The Conflation of House, Dwelling, Home and Family***

The term “house” comes from the Old English *hus* and the related *huden*, meaning “to hide” and yielding also “hut”, “huddle” and “hoard”. This northern European term conveys the fragile and exposed side of the dwellers (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 6). Although both the terms ‘house’ and ‘dwelling’ denote the physical environment, there is still a subtle difference between them. The word ‘dwelling’ (and together with other alternative of ‘house’ like ‘residence’ or ‘abode’) connotes also the practice of people living in it, for which the word ‘house’ does not have this direct denotation in present usage. The English word “home” is unique when comparing with other European languages; with the strong reference to the emotional space, and is commonly used in everyday life (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 121). These two words (house and home) are closely connected in everyday use and are often conflated together.

In fact, there is a long tradition of literature trying to distinguish them from each other. Many authors state that home is more than a house that it privileges a physical structure or dwelling (Giddens 1984, Mallet 65), and the concept of home also possess a wider symbolic and ideological meaning (Valentine 3-7). Home is considered as a concept describing a relationship between people and their environment. It is an emotionally

based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places (Dovey 34). It is a concept of place rather than space, implying emotional attachment and meaning beyond the constraints of the physicality of any particular dwelling house (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 6). Saunders (1986) also asserts that owning a home is a means through which one can attain a sense of ‘ontological security’ in their everyday life. With a review on these works we can discern that they presuppose that the home includes the physical space for which the house is seldom distinguished from the wider concept of home.

Another set of conflation happens between ‘home’ and ‘family’. Many authors view the concepts of home and family as overlapping or even interchangeable, for which Oakley has once stated that home *is* the family: “If society has grown more ‘family-oriented’ the family itself has identified more and more squarely with its physical location, the home. ‘Home’ and ‘family’ are now virtually interchangeable terms (65).” (as we can see here “house” and “home” are already interchanged as she use the term “home” to describe the “physical location”.) And the creation of home life bears the strong imprint of the modern domestic ideal which ‘home’ and ‘family’ run together (Allan and Crow 1989a). Family is also considered as the distinctive element separating home from merely a house. For which it is viewed that ‘home is home *while the family are in it*. When the family are out of it, it is only a house (Gilman 80, emphasis in original).’ Interestingly, on the contrary, the physical unit (house) is considered to be defining a family, as Malinowski’s definition of family specified a group of kin occupying “a definite physical space, a hearth and home” (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2). There is also a trend to undo this strong connection of family by introducing another analytical

unit of “household”. As we can see in works of Saunders & William: “Houseshold, rather than individual, is the most basic economic unit; and it should not be conflated with the family as the kinship system has arguably declined in significance as a structuring principle of social life (82). But in everyday uses, the terms ‘home’ and ‘family’ are still highly interchangeable.

Meanwhile, “house” and “family” would sometimes be interchangeable as well, as clearly pointed out by Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga point:

In Europe, “House” and “family” sometimes become indistinguishable. When we hear of the “House of Windsor”, we know that the reference is not to an architectural form, but rather to a constructed family line extending across many generations (7).

This interchangeability between these several concepts is fully utilized by the advertisements and ad-magazines of the Mainland house. We have to bear in mind that the meanings of home are always context-specific (Dupuis & Thorns 1998), so we have to examine the concepts mentioned above in the context of Hong Kong prior to the study.

### ***Hong Kong’s definition of house, home and family***

In order to understand the concept of house in Hong Kong, it is necessary to take a close look of how the concept is shaped in its own language. Cantonese is the mother tongue of most of the people in Hong Kong, and it is widely used in everyday life as well as in popular culture. Cantonese is a spoken language, which is a Chinese dialect; the written language of Hong Kong is in fact modern Chinese. However, in popular usage in median such as magazines, entertainment news or advertisement, it is common that the written text is in Cantonese instead of the written language (modern Chinese).



The English word “house” can be directly translated into the Chinese word “屋”, is used both in the spoken and written languages. This is the most common term people would use when they articulate the concept of house (a physical unit for living). There is another term “房子”, a term that is seldom used in the spoken language and considered as a more polished term even when used in the written language. Some other terms refer to the physical house are similar to the Anglo-Saxon concept of “dwelling”, such as “住處”, “寓所” and “住宅”. The common “prefix” (the first character of the two terms) “住” is a verb, which means “to live”. All three terms take the form of the written language, and the spoken Cantonese does not have an specific term for “dwelling”. There is another independent set of terms that refers to the physical house. In certain context, Hong Kong people would refer to their “house/flat” as their “樓”. The character itself literally means “building”, for which it definitely does not have the connotation of “living” or “home”. “單位”, which means “unit”, also belongs to this set of terms. People use these terms when they refer to their houses in economic terms, in which case they only talk about the house as a means of investment.

The stand-alone word “屋” means house, whereas its extended term “屋企” is the most common Cantonese term for “home”. It would sometimes be used to signify “family”, as “屋企人” simply means “family member”. Which concept of the term “屋企” is referring (home or family) is always context-specific. So in different contexts, “我屋企” could mean “my home” as well as “my family”. Another term in Cantonese “家” also encompasses the concept of home/family. But it is a more complicated term in terms of

its usage. In the written form, it sometimes has the same meaning structure as that of “屋企” in the spoken language, as the stand-alone “home” and “家人” also mean “family member”. The character “家” also signifies both the concepts of “home” and “family”. There are some other extended terms of “家” emphasize on different meanings respectively. The term “家居” brings back the physical side of “home” as the word “居” is a polished term for “house” (it is quite commonly used for the names of residential property); the other one, “家庭”, means “family”, although the word “庭” means a physical space — garden. It refers to the kinship unit without implication of the physical house. The term “家庭” could also mean household when used in a different context. The word “家” would sometimes be employed in the spoken language, but it seldom has the meaning of “home” in verbal usage. More often than not, it would only mean “family”. The meaning of the word “家” itself is complicated, and it does become more complex when it is used in connection with some other sets of meanings.

“家” is also used to denote Hong Kong. This connection mainly absorbs the meaning of “one’s own place to live”. This is a discourse that reflects the localistic idea of Hong Kong being “our own place”, and it is simultaneously supported by this localism. On the other hand, the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China is portrayed in familial terms, something like a mother-and-son relationship. This is not surprising, as the Chinese term for state or country is “國家” (the first character itself literally meaning state or country). But this term is different from the English term “home country”; as it refers to both one’s own as well as a foreign country. In fact in traditional Chinese philosophy, family is considered as the basic unit of a state. This discourse of

Hong Kong and China as home/family is one of the major motifs found in the ads of local as well as Mainland housing projects.

In the everyday usage in Hong Kong, the concepts of house, home and family are not interchangeable with each other; they are however grouped together under several signifiers. The situation is complicated by the difference between two systems: spoken and written, as we can see in the usage of “家”. So “屋企” is “home/family (house)” and “家” is “family/home”, without mentioning their connotation. But the distinction between “home” and “family” does exist within the Cantonese context. In actual fact, most of the time it is carefully distinguished in the context of use. We can say that in Cantonese these concepts are seen as different aspects of a totality; for which with the same signifier, a particular aspect can be solely focused through usage. There is another factor that helps shaping Hong Kong’s concept of house/home, which also helps explain why a decent home would occupy a central position of the Hong Kong dream.

### ***The Political Economy of Housing in Hong Kong***

House has a specific social meaning in Hong Kong. We cannot fully comprehend this situation unless we have traced the context of the political economy of housing in Hong Kong. Whenever trying to address the property market or more specifically the housing problem in Hong Kong, most of the literatures will start with the scarcity of land as well as the overcrowded population. They see the combining of these two factors as the *natural* reason that gives rise to the housing shortage in Hong Kong, hence the inevitable high price of residential property .

Yet Chan (1997) has pointed out that in fact this kind of linear theorizing of demand and supply was not grounded, and also had its analytical limits. He found that the actual number of housing units was higher than the living households by 5%, and the degree of vacancy in some of the private housing estates was much more serious, or which some of them might reach 27%. The main reason of the housing problem in Hong Kong is the speculative activities, and under this booming atmosphere, many “users” in the market are then forced to buy residential properties.

Chan further stated that the housing problem could not be explained/reasoned in terms of the shortage of land, while the theory of supply could be traced back to the conservative human ecology school and the *laissez-faire* policy of the New Right (174).

Human Ecology is a school of urban sociology, and its founder Robert E. Park tried to apply the rules that ecology discovered in the natural world to the urban and human setting. It suggests the resources and position (both social and physical) that a particular group possesses, is the outcome of natural competition, for which it fails to discern the working of power in the urban setting (Lee 1997, 27). The New Right views the free market as the best platform to settle the interests between different individuals. Through the regulation of the market, the production efficiency would be elevated to the highest and so reach the Pareto Optimum (Lee 1996, 87). So the intervention of government is seen to be unnecessary.

The discourse of those historical analyses of shortage is obviously the synthesis of these two modes of thought. The human ecological reason leads to a loss of equilibrium in the free market. In fact the government plays a very important role in the formation of housing problem.

Orthodox Marxist would put so much effort in explaining the struggle between different classes, which led to an oversight of the internal contradictions within the class. It is obviously too simple to view the housing policy as entirely subject to the manipulation of capitalists and so to overlook the influence of government. In fact for overall speaking, the housing policy is parallel to the long-term interest of the market. (Chan 175)

There is a common saying that the prosperity in Hong Kong's property market is due to the non-intervention policy of the government. In fact it has been pointed out that this non-intervention position of the Hong Kong government is a myth. Chan Chuk-ming has pointed out that the government not only participates and intervenes, but in fact plays an important role the market as well. It is the biggest winner in the market (88). Being the sole landowner in Hong Kong, the government often controls the selling of land so as to stabilize the property market.

The long-period of intervention since the 1970s eventually leads to the unreasonable price of private housing, and also the obvious separation between private and public housing as class difference markers. The housing policy is also the main reason for the forming of the myth of homeownership.

The overall trend of the concept of property maybe is changing from the domination of ownership to right of access (Rifkin 2000), the notion of ownership would become less and less important in the market. Yet this overwhelming trend would face an exceptional delay in the Hong Kong situation, especially in the field of residential property. This is again due to the specific context of the myth building in Hong Kong.

Residential property as consumer goods has many different aspects. On one hand its

value in providing shelter and a place for living cannot be overemphasized. On the other hand, there is the exchange value, with which the owner can make profits from the buying and selling of it as capital (Wu 141).

In Hong Kong, many people tend to accept the saying that buying one's own home is an inborn and natural need of a human being. Yet this is just another myth, as this desire for a private owned property is a socially constructed consequence, rather than a natural need (Chan 185, Wu 148). This myth is founded on the duo grounds of the use and exchange values. Owning a home is constructed as the only preferable housing means/mode, as renting a place to stay is only transient as opposed to a stable living environment. People owning property are led to believe that as long as they possess their own properties, they will enjoy the benefits of the capitalist society (Wu 145).

### ***The Symbolic and Representational Side of House***

Literature has already shown that the built structure is approached as a semantic system of social and cultural identity (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga et. al. 240). In the famous Bourdieu's study on Kabyle house (1990), the house is analyzed as a social and cosmological classifier combining dimensions of both space and time. In fact the main thrust of anthropological work on the material culture of the house in the 60s and 70s was based on structural and symbolic analysis (Miller 9).

The previous part has outlined the background about the connotation of house as social status, which is the main metaphor of houses in Hong Kong. Homes and consumption of homes is the status marker of Hong Kong (Cheng 222). House and its interior are seen as an expression of personal taste, but this taste has class inscribed in it. Although this expression of social position is linked with family, it is often portrayed as personal

struggle, with reference to the self. As Garvey (2001) in his article on interiors of Norwegian home states that reordering the furnishings becomes a means by which the individual escapes from one's own social positioning, or explicit narration of the self.

Besides being opposition or related to one's social position, the interior as well as possessions in the house also has connection with the self on other levels. In the study of domestic objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton find the personal nature of the themes evoked by the objects that people surround themselves with their homes, and the meanings are often coded with self (84). So the interior of a house is not merely an expression of one's taste; new study in the 90s suggests that the phenomenon that people transform their home interiors through 'do-it-yourself' activities is a mode of self expression (Miller 10).

For all the symbolisms around the house, its metaphorical link with the body is the major one (Bachelard 1969). The traditional world has examples of houses that are symbolically linked with body. There are some houses that have direct correlations between parts of body and parts of the house. Meanwhile, there are others cases in which some parts of the house are symbolic representations of sexual union (Dovey 41). Carsten & Hugh-Jones (1995), reasserting that the house is an extension of the person, like a second skin, carapace, or layer of clothes. It serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect. They argue that house, body and mind are in continuous interaction, and it is also an extension of the self.

This association does not only stay at the metaphorical level, and the role they play in building up the self and its relation with the world are parallel. The body and the house are viewed as the loci for dense webs of signification, which affect and serve as basic

cognitive models used to structure, think and experience the world (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 3). The house is commonly experienced as a symbolic body. And just as the body boundary defines the distinction between self and other, the metaphoric body defines the boundary between home and away-from-home (Dovey 41). The correlation of the house with body echoes the linkage between house and self.

The symbolic association of house alone is only the imagined side of the *concept* of house, as there is also the conception of the physical space of house (but not only the *concept* itself). In fact, one focuses merely on the symbolic meaning of the house at one's own risk. This is because using the codes that derive from the symbolism as a means of deciphering social space will surely reduce that space to the status of a message, and restrict/confine it to the status of reading. This is surely to evade both history and practice (Lefebvre 7). However, there is indeed imagined side of space that is based on history and has dialectical interaction with the practice that one has with the house. For instance, home can also be viewed as a private museum of memory, identity and creative appropriation (Chevalier 1998).

The domestic objects may convey memories or recollections of important past events and they may remind one of specific or special relatives or friends (Kamptner 1989). Some authors also state that people's home histories, including their tenure in any given home, are crucial to their understanding of the meaning of home (Mallet 70).

The concept of one's ideal home would also affect one conception of home and also one's own treatment of the house/home. In fact one's ideas about community, family, and even good life, all impact on the notion of the ideal home. The ideal may not be just about the living environment but is also actually generated out of much wider ideals that



a household should be (Chapman & Hockey 1999). Discussion of the ideal home also generally focuses on nostalgic or romantic notions of home (Mallet 69).

All of these, together with other representations of house/space (ads, literature, and cultural products etc.), are usually viewed as the imagined space, as opposed to the tangible physical space. But in fact the real and the ideal, or the real and the imagined are in tension rather than opposition, and they are mutually defining concepts and experiences (Mallet 70). Massey (1994) also suggests that there is no single simple “authenticity” of a place or home to be used as a reference either now or in the past (119). They are just intertwined and play out in spatial practice.

### ***House as a Process and Site of Practice***

The Levi-Strauss legacy on ‘house societies’ provides an insight of the house as a specific form of social organization. But his approach is criticized for viewing the house or home as a static entity. In the same vein, Carsten & Hugh-Jones in their book *About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond* (1995) suggest that the opposition between the permanent house and its impermanent occupants always leads to the result that the buildings, the material, being often portrayed as relatively fixed and permanent. However, in terms of the people, their kinship and social groups must be understood in processual terms, and so must the buildings (37-8).

The mobility of the home or the house as a process has in fact been previously raised by some theoretically oriented works by C. Hugh-Jones (1979) and Moore (1986), when they integrate different dimensions of house as building, residences and subsistence units (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 36).

The dynamics of the house is not that stable as, at one point, they express individualism

within a collective ethos, while are later on used in an attempt to suppress rising individualism (Wilk 1989).

This changing aspect of house/home concerns not only its concept or social role, but applies to its physical attribute as well. In fact this view of 'home' as a process is opposed to the static view of house as an act of individual expressivity previously mentioned, as the physicality of home is always subjected to change from time to time through redecoration and refurbishment. So the study on home decoration should not be on the significance of home decoration from the results of home but on the processes of the routine of minor changes (Garvey 48). Again these changes in physical contents also have their own social implications. As the past and future trajectories are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorization, it is therefore a form of projection of ideal social relations. It is in other words a process of negotiation between the contradictions of the household's with the society (Clarke 2001). Another spectrum of house which is also always in negotiation is between public and private.

House/home is often seen as a private space, as an enclosed domain curtained off from the public sphere. The activities within the house/home are viewed as a private affair. It is a place for immediate family that people can have control of the space, that they are free from the scrutiny from others as well as control over access (Allan and Crow 1989, Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999, Dovey 1985). Relatives and friends would be occasionally invited to the home space but are still restricted to certain area according to their intimacy with the family member (Morgan 1975). It also functions as a 'backstage' for concealing the private life as well as managing the image to be seen by the public (Burgoyne and Clark 1984). But this dichotomy has been challenged; some

critics fundamentally challenge the binary opposition of public and private, and some do it by tracing as to how the concept of home as haven is historic and culturally constructed (Mallet 71).

We can see that the domain of private and public is not that clear-cut defined by the boundaries of the house. The privacy within the house itself is already imprecise, as there is a difference between the levels of familial privacy as well as individual privacy (Allan and Crow 5). Wilson (1988) asserts that domestic walls divide space between the public and private, a division that is most important for the development of both the avoidance and the enhancement of human attention. This division applies to the space within the house as well as its relationship with the outside space. That is a more complex relationship between these spheres, because the interior decoration is intended in part for public display; and the home is also used as a mode for the imagination of the occupants' relationship to the public sphere whether or not many other people actually visit (Miller 15).

In the past the built environment is almost neglected by academic anthropology, that house tended to be thought as "cases" rather than a subject of its own (Humphrey 1988). The situation has changed in recent years, but as Daniel Miller (2001) has pointed out, although now there is quite a lot of literature in anthropology that sheds light on the connection with the house and social relations, a considerable literature tends to mediate between the analysis of house itself and that of the social relations of the home with a third category such as 'household' or 'house society'. This mediation still leads to the playing down of the materiality of the home or house (11-12). The return on the materiality of house/home helps on directly observing the processes by which a

house/home and its inhabitants transform each other. He continues that “once one acknowledges the degree to which the home itself is both a site of agency as well as a site of mobility, rather than simply a kind of symbolic system that acts as the backdrop for practice and agency, then the rewards of this focus upon material culture in trying to understand the social relations that pertain to the home become apparent (12).” Bourdieu (1990) states that the meaning objectified in things or parts of space is fully yielded only through practices structured according to the same schemes that are organized in relation to them (273). This is what we need to take in to account while investigating the materiality of house/home. Like Cantonese decides much of its meaning through usage, the practices attached to the material is where and when the negotiation happens; and so is the process and mobility itself.

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Most of the literatures mentioned above presuppose the connection between house and home. That is the house where people actually live in, and some of the concepts would be complicated if the owner only owns the house but not actually moves in and live in the house.

Although a review of the concept of house/home is crucial for the topic, and it provides critical interception points which is necessary for the study, it is obvious that this is not sufficient for understanding the case of the Mainland house. This is because many Hong Kong homeowners of Mainland houses do not live in, but only visit their houses.

The practices around the Mainland house involve activities away from the house, including the trip from Hong Kong to the PRD, the activities they have inside and

outside of the housing estates, as well as visiting others' houses, etc. All of these call for us to put the house in a wider context, so as to focus not only on the materiality of house, but its spatiality as well. The spatiality of the house is not only about the house independently. Rather, it is put in relation with other houses and the new geography of Hong Kong—PRD. The spatiality of the house also involves the real (physical) and imagined, and the review of the concept of 'house' also helps us to discover the different realities of house, including the linguistic, economic, symbolic and physical. They are all linked up together through practice. Paying attention to the lived practice in space would also help us to see how the contradictions of these realities meet, and how meaning is negotiated and decided.

## **Chapter 2: Constructing the Meanings of the Cross-border House/Home**

### ***Introduction***

For most of the people in Hong Kong, they first detected the Mainland house wave not by noticing the many people around them who were purchasing houses “up there”, but probably by feeling bombarded by the advertisements in a merciless manner. These advertisements encompass the different possible forms of advertising. Although not as profligate as those of local houses—which occupy the front pages of newspapers (I still find it difficult to believe it has replaced the headline!)—a full-page advertisement has now become very common for Mainland houses. One can also find it in magazines, train stations, train cabins, and most of all on radio and television. Like many other consuming products, the first and foremost channel through which people to get to know about the Mainland house is advertisement. Advertisement hence plays an important role as a pre-perception for Hong Kong people in regard to the Mainland house.

In a research on the advertisements of local residential properties, Helen Hau-ling Cheng views advertisements as the ideological mirror of consumer society which also reflects the norms, stereotypes and collective ideals. The study of advertisements of residential property is therefore an effective way of knowing the meaning of home and home buying (206). I would be adopting this as my same starting point here, on which we can take it further and go beyond investigating the reflecting ability of advertisements by exploring their constructing function as well.

The constructing or influencing function of advertisement has long been discerned and

criticized The case of cigarette would well demonstrate this aspect. The influencing power of cigarette ads is so formidable that the government has banned the appearance of cigarettes on television, radio and cinema screens (or, on the other hand, we may say this very act of banning officially recognizes their power).

Still, in discussing this constructing function, I will be cautious so as not to exaggerate its ability. In fact, by constructing we are signifying a somehow complicated side of advertising (as well as mass media). With reference to the encoding—decoding theory of Stuart Hall, we know the complexity of how a cultural product (ads in this case) is transmitted from producer to receiver, and the enormous possibilities and variables in it. Hence we can no longer easily state or even trace the impact of advertisement on its audiences and potential buyers, there are already no rooms for us to underestimate consumers as cultural dopes. Sometimes the viewer would reject the given meaning of the ads (Burton & Miller 84-6). The viewer would understand the ad and product creatively. This is best illustrated by John Fiske, that “there is so much advertising only because it can never finally succeed in its tasks ..., that is, of controlling not only what commodities people but the cultural uses they put them to (30).”

In spite of this uncertainty of its effect and efficiency, there is still a hypothesis that advertisement, although not having a direct influence on the cultural contents of a society, would definitely not be (or be satisfied as?) an ideological mirror. It would at least *try* to make a difference on the cultural meanings in a particular field, or in John Fiske’s words, tries to maintain as close a match as possible between social difference and product difference. So figuring out what advertisement reflects and an attempt to

construct is crucial in advertisement analysis.

A successful advertisement may not aim to change the consented understandings, but to wittily relate and situate the product into that system of understanding; or in attempt to place the product in a very special position of a process of settling ambivalent new cultural claims and relations. This is quite obvious in the case of the advertisements on mainland residential property, for which those advertisements are trying to untangle the new relationship between Hong Kong and China (the Pearl River Delta). They also try to restate the concept of home, house and lifestyle. These would be the focus of discussion later.

The main form of advertisement we focus on would be TV ad and the so-called “ad-magazine”—this is in fact an approximately 10-15 minutes long program, broadcasting mainly on weekend before the late news. In analyzing these ads, one of the main references is the local advertisement of house/home, so as to identify the unique cultural meanings of “the Mainland House”

### ***Forms of advertisements***

The great varieties of the forms of advertisement can on a hand be understood as a way to get as wide general coverage of potential costumers as possible; on the other hand we can also discern the specificities of different forms of ads.

### **Transit Advertisements**

Those advertisements in the KCR train cabin (known as inside card) will be a good example, which can be found in the space right above the windowpane. This form of advertising has some advantages. First of all, the budget for the inside card is very low,



it also has a high frequency of exposure as it enters the routine of everyday life of the passengers. The exposure time is also considerably long enough, as it provides the best media for the bored passengers to kill their time (Burton & Miller 500-3). In a KCR train cabin, almost two thirds of these inside cards consists of the ads of mainland house. In fact they are promoting a different kind of properties (comparing to those on TV), and targeting on a different group of people. Unlike other better known mainland houses, which situate comparatively faraway from Hong Kong and dispersedly in the PRD, these properties are all located on the periphery to Hong Kong, mainly in Shenzhen. According to the statistics released by the Planning Department, KCR Train is the major transportation, as over 80% of Hong Kong residents usually choose KCR to go to Shenzhen. These ads are thus aimed for those people who frequently engage in cross-border activities between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. The information they provide is of no big difference from that on TV, but the emphases are distinct. The information can take up nearly half of the space of the entire ad. In many cases, the main message of the ads would also be on information such as “first installment for only twenty thousand”, “ten thousand for a home” or “Hong Kong prestigious life No. 1”, appear as huge-sized texts. Instead of those local houses ads murmuring transcendental feeling, the themes of the words of these ads are pointing to some other different areas. There are three main categories:

- The price of the house: Listing out the low price of the houses at the very beginning is the residue of the old trend, which other forms of ads have stopped using. This innovative method montages the advertising strategy of supermarket into residential property.

- Transportation: The expediency of a property is not only measured by its convenience in commuting with the local city centre, but also by its proximity with Hong Kong, and
- the Hong Kong element: including promises of Hong Kong lifestyle tailor made for Hong Kong people.

The displaying of textbook pull factors in this explicit manner is not easily found in local houses' ads, this is even not a very common practice for other mainland houses ads. They have various significant differences with the Mainland house ads on TV. Hence, this kind of ads would be a good reference point for contrasting what those other ads are trying to do.

Although the main focus of the following discussion would be on the ads on TV, examples would also be occasionally drawn from this form of ads.

### **TV Adverts and Advertisement Magazine**

There are two major forms of advertisement of mainland house that appear on TV. One is the ad magazine mentioned above, and the other is those ordinary 3-minute-long ads. The ad magazine is the archetype of those 3 minutes versions, all the TV ads are all edited from an ad magazine. This form (at least this very term 'ad magazine') of advertising is vanishing, as many ad magazines no longer address themselves as ad magazines, but to simply appear as a TV show. The common strategy is that there would be 3 or 4 shorts TV ads, accompanied with the ad magazines. Those TV ads would each emphasize on a particular aspect, such as one on the theme of family whereas another focuses on the huge (as it says) garden of the property.

## ***Methodology of Ads and Ad-Magazines***

One can always easily distinguish between ads of local and mainland houses. The reason is, in the ads of those “Mainland houses”, there are some distinctive tricks where one will not find in an ad of local houses. Yet all these tricks are nothing innovative at all; they are in fact some most common skills in advertising. They are just new in the realm of selling residential property.

### **Celebrities**

Although the use of celebrities is the most popular strategy of advertising, it is surprisingly not adopted in the ads of local houses. Only until recently has there been an ad of local house invites the singer Kelly Chan and the actor Fong Chung Suen to cast in it. Yet for a certain period of time, it was almost a must for the Mainland house.

The line “I, XYZ sincerely recommend ABC Garden to you.” May sound childish enough for the viewers. In my opinion, children and celebrities are the only two species on earth that would address themselves with their own full name. In fact, no one would believe that they are genuinely “sincere”, because we all know it would be so difficult for them to say this, as they will not say so unless they get paid a huge amount. Although the pleasure of prostituting is not generated, the minimal aim is somehow accomplished—you may not think of ABC Garden every time you see XYZ, because s/he just recommends so many things to you, at least by XYZ you know there is a Garden called ABC.

The long-term relationship a property establishes with the celebrities would illustrate this ambition very well. The relationship between Pauline Yeung and Agile Garden (中

山雅居樂花園) is a good example. Maybe they are very proud of this relationship, so in the ads she keeps reminding the viewers “I took an ad here three years ago.” Throughout the ad magazine, she also keeps on repeating the line “It has changed so much since then.” This classic line for a home-coming protagonist provides a sound scene for the sincerity of Ms Yeung. She tried to present herself not only as an owner of the house, but also to view it as her own home.

The most common motivation for employing celebrities in an ad would be to share their fame. New Paradise (常平新天美地花園) employs Eric Tsang and his hosting partners of a game show (Lam Hiu Fung and Chin Ka Lok), for which the game show was the boom of the season. Although in the ad they did not reproduce the game show, which is a common practice of advertising, their appearances as a group are nevertheless strong enough to remind the viewers of the connection with the show. So the association does not necessarily only restrict to people, but can also to various entities which enjoy popularity.

They also pay attention to the character or characteristic of the celebrity in order to facilitate the construction of the image and meaning of the property.

The Gallen terrace (順德嘉崙台) invites a teen group *Twins*, a group popular with teenagers in Hong Kong, to cast in its ads. The target group is way too obvious, and a new frontier is explored. In the past, it would be considered ridiculous to relate youngster with house purchasing. The fallacy is the attempt to parallel the pocket money or part-time earnings to the price with seven digits.

So the price is the first issue to be addressed in the ads. The advertisers do not adopt in the ads the direct and cheesy way of listing out the low price. Rather, they present it in

another way, such as taking the money from the piggy save to pay the bill and telling the audience that the installment would “cost only as much as a pair of sneakers”. The association of the house to sneakers is another trendy formula. Not surprisingly, in the ads there are many other fancy elements, like the graphic pink in color, and the twins jumping and bouncing all along the ads (they even arrive in parachutes).

Although ‘to wrap it trendy’ is the golden rule for advertising teenager product, the trendy ingredient has its specific function here. Owning a house has always been a non-option for teenagers, and even for young people (over twenty at least) the more common choice is to rent their own house. This is not only because of the expensiveness of houses. The late detachment from parents at marriage is also becoming common in Hong Kong, which allows teenagers to categorize owning one’s home/house farther into their future. These ads demonstrate how to turn a non-option into an option. In fact, they are not merely trying to turn it into an option, but also a trendy choice. This is because trend is the professor of semiotics that connects all and it explains all.

### **Celebrities expert, celebrities as expert**

One of the most popular characters in these ads is expert. They could be famous architect (Gao Man-on), photographers (Sui Wo Tin), or even Fung Sui master (Lee Shing Chak). All the things they say—like many other experts appear in ads—can be concluded as: the house is good in a way that you do not know and understand; all you can do is to trust me.

In the ad magazine of Phoenix City, the architect Gao Man-on, when asserting the desirable attributes of the estate, provided only abstract statement like “architectural design is art, putting human being at the centre, expressing human pursuit of beauty”.

The voice-over narrator then presented concrete evidence to make sense of those oracle-like sentences of the expert. Yet this authoritative figure is not their only presence. The fact is that they could not retain their honorable position in the ad magazines anymore. Sometimes they could not even fight the anonymous narrator.

The ad magazine of Tung Kung Tung Shing (東莞東城) invites a hotel manager called Mr. Erler, who ran 9 hotels all over the world in the past, and is also currently working for a hotel situated in the estate. Sitting comfortably and confidently in the couch and also in a decent suit, Mr. Erler predictably provided professional and positive opinion about the hotel as well as the estate. What surprises the audiences is that after having talked for not more than a minute, the shot cross-fades into a soft-lens garden view of the estate and the voice-over narrator comes to take over, without waiting for Mr. Erler to finish his words. The expert is only manipulated as a prelude to the sentimental praise of the narrator. This has indeed made a mockery of the expert par excellence.

The delegation of the power is mainly because of that they are different from ordinary experts that appear on news report. They are now quasi-experts, as they are no longer trying to present themselves as a distant or disinterested commentators as experts always do, they are here to “sincerely recommend ABC to you”. They are also experts-in-life. So the utmost thrill is not to learn how well the space of the garden is constructed, but to watch those experts dressing in causal wear, holding a cup of tea into their chests, closing their eyes and enjoy the atmosphere of the property, and at the same time showing their taste in everyday life.

The other kind of expert in these ads is those pop stars or actors/actresses. Despite the fact that they are not qualified as experts in any field, they nonetheless appear in the ads

as pundits for life style and living, including the everyday life persona of those so-called experts mentioned above). They know every detail of information about the estates. In the ads they also show how they can fully utilize all the services and facilities provided by the estate effortlessly—in the ad magazine of YinXian Resort (隱賢山莊), Do Do Cheng can in one single day invite Pauline Yeung to her house, followed by going shopping, having massage and finally visiting four different restaurants. It had never occurred to me in the past that enjoying life would be such a busy task. They appear as spokespersons of lifestyle, who *know* lives. They feel confident enough to be in the right position to tell you that there is something called the essence of living (and you can find it there).

### **Theme song and slogan**

Unlike ordinary music in an ad, a theme song with lyrics is of other species. The minimal function of employing a theme song in an ad would be to get the audience to remember the catchy melody and then the product. The ideal situation would be to play the song on radio, so that it can raise the profile of the product further. But the theme song appears in those ad magazines are in fact nothing near a pleasant feature. As far as the Shunde City Plaza (順德嘉信城市花園) is concerned, its theme song first takes the leading role to make the ad magazine looks like a music video, and then it becomes background music, but at last it only becomes disturbing noise. The lyrics often have the similar message that the voice over is telling, so they crash perfectly like two crests of wave and results nothing but annoyance.

I believe most of the people in Hong Kong would be familiar with the line “(anyone) Can be a property owner as long as one have an identity card”, or “Giving you a 5-Star

home.” In fact they are so popular that they become punch lines in various sit-coms, including one that is named “5-Star Home”. The use of slogan is a good way for viewer to remember the product, especially when it is remarkable (in both good and bad senses) enough to enter the everyday language. As many of the Mainland houses have many phases, the repetition of the slogan could also provide the viewer with a sense of continuity. In fact to have a slogan is to view oneself as a brand. This is actually the developers’ strategy. Take County Garden (碧桂園) as an examples. Originally the name of an estate, it has now become that of the developer. Its extending phases aside, the other estate Phoenix City (廣州鳳凰城) is also under its name. Many housing estates would have their slogans as a part of the logos. There would also be sub-slogans to go with different particular phases.

### ***Starting on Language: Emotion or information?***

The language in advertisement is always a foreign language for everyday life, it is truncated and condensed into a miserable length but never specific, like “I’m lovin’ *IT!*” or with an unbearable equivocality. Scholars have argued that this kind of language in advertisement is a form of postmodern language. Jackson Lears has pointed out that it is “manipulating feeling rather than presenting information (quoted from Cross 1996: 2).” This criticism aims at the verbal language of ad, and it would be a good starting point to understand the “language” of ad magazine. It is a more complicated case for the visual media, as it involves the subtle tension between the visual and verbal languages. Although the analysis would be focused on the verbal, the language of ad magazine here does not merely include the verbal or visual language, but the complexities they constitute which then become the *syntax* of the ad magazine. On the other hand, taking a



look at the language could also help us to understand the handling of emotion/ideal and information/reality in those ad magazines.

With those slow zooming shot, wide angle of the natural landscape and soft lens on a family gathering, one could easily tell how much effort the producer has made to create an atmosphere of ideal or even dreamy life. The voice over narrator also plays an important role in the ad magazine. He (the narrator is always a *he*) often speaks in the language far away from the colloquial, hypnotizing the audience together with the already slow pace image. For the characters, the most common line for them is “Wah (wow)!” This can be the expression towards a pleasant view of the lake, the luxurious decorated interiors of the house, or even the fresh air (!). The voice of the narrator together with all these “Wahs!” have a similar function with the chorus of Greek tragedy. They act as a catalyst for the viewer—if the image is not enough to trigger your feeling, they can guide you through. If you still remain unmoved, they already have felt it for you.

In those ad magazines, there will be at least one moment when that “magic word” appears. It is in fact a whole bunch of meaningless adjectives, like tropical, sub-tropical (this is the most hilarious one as everyone knows that Hong Kong is itself in the sub-tropical region), Thai or California(n) etc. The magic word takes a blink and then single-handedly overrides the image by categorizing the whole atmosphere presented on the screen into a stereotyped exotic appeal.

This is the situation that Henri Lefebvre called “the decline of referentials”. What we exchange from those words are obviously not substantial referents; they do not even

trigger any emotion, but point to an iced-cold concept. The illusion of depth provided by the moving image is then forcefully flattened back into a surface concept of 'exotic'. The magic word reveals nakedly the plot, frankly presents the keyword, and so totally rejects all the visual elements built on it.

Yet it would be a casual conclusion if we then certify the languages of ad magazines as being all feeling-dominant. As a matter of fact, the ad magazine of Mainland house provides much more information than usual ads. It would include the price, location, and choices of house types, etc. The information provided by the magazine always resets the ideal tone to the realm of reality.

One of the common tasks of advertising is to embed the information smoothly in the production in order to prevent any sense of abruptness that breaks the overall feeling. In fact, there are many ads nowadays that fail to provide much information at all. However this is not the case for the Mainland house ads or ad magazines, in which there are usually some separated sections of information such as the prices, location for promotion exhibition or permanent showrooms. These sections are often at the end of the whole magazine or at the end of each part, or as mentioned before there are some individual TV commercials edited from the magazines solely for this kind of information. The arrangement of situating the information part at the end of the whole magazine is a notable sign of the director's attitude towards the importance of feeling and information respectively; another remarkable fact is that this sort of section often occupies only one tenth of the whole magazines.

Besides these obviously distinguished parts, there are also many elements that can be

categorized as ‘information’. The subtitle and written text appears on screen on and off have many important functions in the ad magazine, sometimes they show the keywords of a very long description by the voice-over narrator or the conversation of the characters; but most of the time it provides information and so the audiences’ connection to reality. Many of the ad magazines are shot in 16:9, the subtitle often shows at the bottom black bar. There is already an aesthetic distancing effect of redefining the media framing back into 4:3, which brings back the audience a possible consciousness of perception. Yet what more often has the stronger connection with the reality is the content of the subtitle, as sometimes it would be the disclaimer. Such as when the characters are chatting happily on how many things would be for free when you buy a new house there, the subtitle would say that this is only applicable to certain products. This self-discouraging reminder simply pulls the audience’s feet back onto the ground. We can also find small-size words such as “XX Garden real site” on the top left corner. This is another good example of the written text’s connection with the reality. However, this is no longer revealing the reality of the perceiving experience, but a specific historical reality. Back in the 80’s of the last century, when buying a Mainland house was still at its infant stage, the extremely low price was a very strong pull factor that immediately attracted many buyers, yet there were many incidents of unfinished residential properties at the beginning. This was a major concern for Hong Kong buyers, which is like an old wound of the collective purchasing experience, and took about a decade to overcome. As new wave of Mainland residential property is booming, with the image of an outlook of development and the visibility of *finished* houses, buyer confidence has returned. The credit of the (trustworthy) developer would appear at the

very end of every ad magazine, so as to provide confidence for the potential buyers. The tiny text of “real site” however still stubbornly halts on the screen, just like a scar of the old reality/wound.

At the end of the ad is the presentation of the price and the description of it. The line: “(anyone) could be the property owner as long as one has an ID card”, is no doubt familiar to most of the Hong Kong people. Low price is still the selling point of the Mainland house. This presentation is also a ritual for those magazines, although the narrator no longer mentions the price in a high pitched voice as if he/she is selling fish.

The price reveals the realistic logic of capitalism. The luxurious feeling, the leisure space or warm family life presented are all very nice, and the way to realize all of these is to buy it. Every price quoted comes with the word “only”. They list out the prices so nakedly because they have the confidence that they are all reasonable. This is the last bridge to social reality of the viewer. The reality of the viewer is that s/he may not have the ability to purchase such a house in Hong Kong, yet with this low cost, s/he can at last reach their hands to *the Dream*. A dream for \$20,000 ONLY, why not?

Unlike those ads of local houses, we can see from the above that those ad magazines work on both feeling/ideal and information/reality, although some do so deliberately, while others do not. This is mainly because the mentality of Hong Kong people towards the Mainland house has a qualitative difference when compared to local house. This consuming behaviour has not yet been constructed as an unquestionable necessity.

The manipulation of feeling provides distinction with other products in the market, yet the task facing them is not competition alone, but also to create a certain ambience of

the existence of a market. All the ad magazines are on one hand specifically promoting that particular estate, and introducing the whole idea of “a Mainland house as an option” on the other. This needs the help of information, as it offers a concrete ground for potential customers to build up the confidence and puts the Mainland house at a nearer position to the viewers’ life.

## ***Defining House and Home***

### **Conflation of House, Home and Family**

House is often the subcategory of home. Even in the common sense, it is given to understand that the concept “home” cannot be simply reduced into the physical dwelling. This is then naturally the basic consensus in the Anglo-European or Anglo-American studies of “home” in that it privileges a physical structure or dwelling (Mallet 65). Research shows that home encompasses much more than a house that it is also a matrix of social relations. It is the location where the everyday routine is played out, and has wider symbolic and ideological meanings (Valentine 63-71). House is view as merely one of the constitutive factors of home. So in the abundant writings on home, the relationship between house and home is often seen as an ill metonymy. Yet the home/house as a physical environment also has it significance. Peter Saunders (1986), basing on the problem of ontological security by Anthony Giddens, proposes that homeownership offers individuals a means through which they can attain a sense of it.

There are still prevailing discourses or constructions that conflating house, home and family together. Some literatures state that this conflation of house, home and family is part of a broader ideological agenda aimed at increasing economic efficiency and

growth. The governments in many advanced capitalist countries have attempted to shift the burden of responsibility for citizens' welfare away from the states on to the home and nuclear family (Dupuis and Thorns 1998; Mallet 66). This situation is more obvious in the case of homeownership, for which the dividing line between house and home is often blurred.

The differences between house and home are not only seen on conceptual and emotional levels. The physical amendments that the owner does to the dwelling, such as renovation, as well as changing of its setting and decoration also complete the owner's claim of home on a house. So those ad magazines promise the buyers with full house decoration is in fact a hint of the potential of genuinely consuming a home. The only thing that one can do is to pay.

Home/house also has its own affiliation to family and even community, which is often conflated with the house as well. On the contrary, in reducing home to house, the ad magazines deduce the house into all the elements that the concept "home" encompasses, it is an elaboration from the other end.

One of the ad magazines of Country Garden is called "Giving family members a better home", which targets retired people. It begins with a self-narration of the personal history of housing by an old man. It is a description of his long-term struggle for dwellings, spanning several decades, about how he climbed from the congested rented room, then into small public housing flat and eventually moved to a private house. The whole portion has a very strong nostalgic appeal. The hue changes from almost black and white to a yellowed one, and the dim tone of the rental room is getting brighter and brighter. This is in fact depicting a typical trajectory of a successful upward movement,

which is still recognized as a dream of many Hong Kong people. Yet the discontent in this seemingly successful story was displayed throughout.

The ad magazine gives so much effort to emphasize the crowdedness of the old man's previous homes. In the rental room, the kids had to do homework together in one bed. In the public house, the children jumped over the mop when someone (probably the mother) was moping the floor. This decent private house was in fact quite spacious by Hong Kong's standards. Still, the crowdedness was wittily presented by the director. There is a shot showing that the daughter was helping her mother for dinner; yet the mother, who was cooking, had to walk aside to let the daughter bringing the dishes out. Then comes the scene of the family having dinner. There were indeed so many people around the table, and the abnormal close zooming accentuates the sense of crowdedness, as the headroom is abruptly less. This discontent was then explicitly expressed by the old man's voice over:

“Sigh, all that I want is for the whole family to live comfortably. Yet, having worked for almost my whole life, the place we live is still very small no matter how many times we move.”

The narrative ends at the full color and brightness of life at the Country Garden. The depth of the shot is drastically changed. The old couple first appeared up-close to the camera, with their children in the background. Then they turned around and *walked* to their children. This is a qualitative change that the family members were no longer forced to pack together or avoid rubbing each other physically, but first time to come together.

*Another part shows their whole family gathering together to celebrate the old man's*

*birthday. They had turned all the lights off and the old man blew out the candles happily and smiled peacefully. Then comes his voice-over again:*

“I’ve never even dreamt of having the whole family together for my birthday. In the past, when we were in Hong Kong, how could this be possible? The children always came late, or else were just busy and could not come.”

We can see from above how the ad magazine links “home” and “family” together. It depicts the old man striving for his house (which is sometimes called home in the ad magazine) is equated to the striving for his family. The gain in physical space of the dwelling is directly proportion to the intimacy of the family. It may sound making sense as the family members lives in the house, so that it would definitely have some effects on them. Yet the influence is not merely this direct, we can see at the Country Garden, even when their (his) children are not living with them, the house still helps to bring a happy family life. The association has jumped one step on from the house directly to the family. In fact for the old man the house is both the condition as well as the evidence of a happy family. This is because the house is bought for them by their children.

The presence of children in the ad magazine is a very interesting feature, as we watch them grow up gradually through the TV commercial. Their presence is rather important as it carries significant messages, as evidenced in the scenes of their doing homework and mopping the floor. The camera is so focused on them that we cannot even see the face of the mother who is mopping. They at last appeared as grown-ups and voiced out their own opinion of the house as well. This is another substantial hint for the development of the family. The home/family, with growing children, gives the sense of constancy of family, for which it is not stagnant but has the sense of continuity. This



sense of constancy and continuity is also the source for ontological security (Dupuis and Thorns 31-2). The sense of constancy is further supported by the plotting of the narration. As we have mentioned above, the whole remembrance is constructed as a struggle for upward social mobility over decades. Yet this struggle is settled in the colorful and bright *conclusion* at the Country Garden, as it is the answer to the question “Want to enjoy life? (As the ad magazine says)” The polemic “struggle for” is replaced by the natural “growth of” the family, so that they (and you who are viewing) could really enjoy life there.

In another TV commercial of Country Garden, it exemplifies that the house does not only link to home and family, but also to certain moral values concerning family. The ad starts from the birth of a baby, then follows her life until she becomes an elementary schoolgirl. The incidences shown mainly portray how the parents give all their hearts to the kid, as exemplified in their staying up all night just to look after the little girl when she is sick, or their bringing her to the school. The voice-over keeps on saying: *everyone* has parents; *everyone* won't be away from the care of the parents; *everyone's* healthy growth is made possible by the dedication of parents . The last scene shows the little girl gazing out the window, wishing upon the stars, saying “When I grow up, I want to buy a 5-star-home for daddy and mommy.” In this sense, buying a house for the family is no longer a necessity, nor an economic investment, as it acquires a moral value and becomes a moral good, something that *everyone* should work for. So in this ad it gives a clue that an ideal not only brings a happy everyday and family life, but also helps to maintain and show certain moral value.

Although the strategy of conflating house, home and family is prevailing, it is not the

only focus of presentation. Sometimes, other than presenting the ordinariness and homey feeling of the house, the ad magazine would also show the other facets of house. Take the Country Garden ad magazine as an example again. In the later part, the leading roles are taken over by the second generation of the family. They saw it as a gathering place of the family and more importantly as a site for entertainment. They no longer appear as supporting roles to the old man and old women, but are always having fun. They may be bowling, having massage, or enjoying all other kinds of facilities in the Garden. This presentation of different point of view illustrated the multiplicity of house or owning a house, which is a strategy to attract as many customers as possible, as each individual in the family would have different idea of house and home. What we should bear in mind is that, although this depiction of the house does not concentrate on the home-and-family relation, all the characters appear as members of a family, and the main plot is never off.

Finally, we have to pay attention the selectiveness of the conflation. The conflation in the TV commercials and ad magazines does not merely revolve around house, home and family, but *ideal* house- *ideal* home- *ideal* family also. Research has shown that home is never as ideal as it seems, it is also a site where violence and sexual abuse against women, children, young and old people take place (Mallet 72). Socialist feminists also point out that home is place of oppression, tyranny and patriarchal domination of women. The families shown in the ads are also ideal stereotype; they are often with two or more generations, heterosexual structured, and also middle-class. This conflation works as a hermeneutic circle, that house vis-à-vis home and family are mutually defining each other. On the one hand the ideal image of home and family fills up as

ground for an ideal house, and on the other hand the ideal house provides a realistic place for the ideal image to take place, its size define the size of the family and for most of all it hints that you can pay for an ideal home and ideal family.

### **Physical Premises of the product (dwelling)**

If we examine carefully the products shown in those ad magazines, we will find that they are surely not only about the houses. Even if we extricate those feelings, emotions or ideal image from the product, the “products” that those ad magazines sells cover many others entities outside the physical boundary on the dwelling.

One of the most common selling points is the recreational facilities of the estate. As far as an estate is concerned, the clubhouse often takes centre state.. Nothing exemplifies this more than the ad magazine of Chun King Garden, in which the whole estate is in fact turned into a clubhouse. The ad magazine starts with introducing all sorts of facilities that come with the product, ranging from swimming pool, park, cinema to the golf pitch. The shots of the interior of the house take up only 3 minutes out of the 15 minute running time of the ad magazine; they also appear nearly at the end of it. So purchasing a house in those estates means that you are paying for that physical dwelling as well as for the right to access to those recreational facilities.

The thing that one could gain access through buying a house also includes the natural environment. In fact this is not a new concept in the residential property market. In Hong Kong, there are many properties that claim to offer a sea view. This is a skill of privatization of exterior space, and this technique of visual privatization could ease the feeling of limited space in the flat. Moreover, the sea view in Hong Kong is no longer solely a view; it transcends its physical forms to become a symbolic icon of privilege

and ‘high-class’ property (and so there is the term ‘invincible sea view’) (Cheng 226-8). Sea view would not be the case for the Mainland house. Given the geographical constraints of the inland Pearl River Delta, a sea view is impossible. So the view would then be the spacious sky, mountain or, pathetically, an artificial lake and river.

There is also another very important difference here. Besides emphasizing on visually appropriating the outside space, those ad magazines are also more interested in presenting the character empirically moving around in the natural environment. This is obvious when we look back at the ad magazine “Giving the family member a better home”. With a contrast of the flashback to the old days when the old man was still living in a public housing unit, the old man said,

*“For a long time, when I opened the window, all I could see was other people’s windows. And now? After opening the window, I can even walk outside, I can go out to the garden...”*

So the natural environment or elements are no longer only having their symbolic meanings, but are also the elements for empirical action. The homeowner is not only semantically connected to the outside space, but is accessible to it also. The premise that the product covers is also magnified from a small flat into the whole estate.

## **Symbolism of House and Home**

The meanings of house and home are always context specific (Dupuis and Thorns 1998), and especially so in terms of their symbolic connotations. So if we want to examine the associations of house and home and how ad magazines manipulate them, we should first pay attention to the long standing pre-occupation with homeownership in Hong Kong.

One of the main connotations of house and home in the context of Hong Kong is status.

This is first of all due to the housing policy and the land selling methods of the government, which make house prices in Hong Kong perpetually high and turn houses into ultimate luxurious goods. To own a house in Hong Kong is often described as a dream. Residential property was also once the most popular investment product, which contributes to the unreasonably high house prices. This also underpins the important role of a house as one's personal goal. As changing houses does not merely symbolise upward mobility, there is often nominal profit yielded or potential asset as well. Despite the precipitate downturn of the housing market since 1997, property prices still remain the index of the healthiness of the Hong Kong economy. This backdrop explains why in Hong Kong a house is closely linked to one's definition perception of status, and remains the very dominant theme in the public discourse. The area of the house, the dividing line between public and private housing, the location of the house, and even the view of the house all provide criteria for judging the owner's status. In fact, not only does the house contain the connotation of being 'high-class', the very act of owning a house is already a reflection of one's social status. So, if it is said that the home one lives in reflects one's social status, it would be more to the point to say that the home one lives in constructs one's social status.

So the association with status becomes the verve for advertisers. In almost every ad magazine, one can easily find the word 'prestigious'; it can be used to describe the house, the clubhouse, and also the buyers ("to suit your prestigious status"). The most obvious one is the TV commercial of Tycoon Place (聚豪天下), starring John Lone. In the ad, John Lone is always holding his cheek up while standing in front of some grandiose scenes, such as against the backdrop of big red flags waving behind him. In

one scene, he even sits on the ‘dragon chair’ (the chair of ancient Chinese emperors) and the voice-over says, “Here, you will have the feeling of owning the world”. The intention of choosing John Lone is quite obvious. Besides his fame of being an international star, the ad also draws reference to his role as emperor in *The Last Emperor*. In fact emperor is the common perception of the Hong Kong public towards John Lone (and let’s forget for a while the fact that he emperor that he played in the movie happened to be the most vulnerable in Chinese history—Pao Yi). The ad tries to appropriate his emperor connection to build an utmost prestigious feeling. The ad uses up all the time to portray this feeling without even bothering to show the house.

The above is a very good example of how an ad tries to present the concept of prestige, but this is not a common form of presentation in the ad magazines of the Mainland house. The showing (off) of facilities in the ad magazines does not only define the physical encompassment of the product and service, it also suggests a certain lifestyle. We know that we can never clearly divide lifestyle from status, as according to Bourdieu lifestyle is in itself a distinction for social status or class. Thus, those ad magazines wittily take on the subtle relationship between class, taste and lifestyle; they present the concept of status without abruptness or the nakedness of yelling ‘prestige’ like the ad of Tycoon Place (聚豪天下). The focus is shifted to present details of a lifestyle of leisure. It demonstrates how the owner could and should manage their spare time in order to ‘know how to live’.

Although the class distinction is not directly suggested, the traces of status mark are also easily found. In fact a leisure life is already a hint for status difference. A more obvious example is the emphasis on golf course. Golf is considered an upper-class leisure

activity in Hong Kong. The ad magazines not only show how one can play golf like those upper-class people, but also the way in which one enjoys golf *at ease*. They tend to depict golf as merely an element of lifestyle (although a very important one), one can first enjoy the spa then go straight to the golf course, or to the cinema afterward. Hence, to reach a high status does not only mean one possesses the sufficient elements to represent one's status, but also to encrypt it seamlessly into one's everyday life. This urges not only to learn an 'art of living', as it is commonly coined as, but 'knowledge of living'—to have the ability to enjoy the elements at ease. The house is the magic key to all of these.

From this we can examine how the ad magazines and TV commercials work on the re-grouping of existing meanings associated with the product. The meanings of some of the consumer products vary as they pass through the border. Yet in this case of house, the meaning from this side of the border remains the major inspiration for discourse construction. The facial explanation would be that the product is still aiming for the consumers on this side. Yet we can notice that most of the original meanings are no longer valid as the location has changed. First of all, the house in Mainland is actually not luxurious at all. The main selling point of it is its low price. Secondly, the house as a representation of status is not that direct either. In most of the cases, the owner will not live in the house, and the ontological linkage with owners' identities is weak. So the ad magazines have to find a necessary euphemism to reintroduce the core concept of status. 'Lifestyle' is then the diction for this process. To describe a lifestyle as a status indicator is both a less vulgar as well more logical way for the whole story.

## ***(Re)Defining Hong Kong-PRD-China Relationship***

There is a fact that the ad magazines of all Mainland houses have to deal with, in that many people in Hong Kong view the Mainland houses as substitutions for their dreams of owning a house. So in psychoanalytic terms, the Mainland house *is* the dream instead of the local house; as it is the fulfillment of an unobtainable desire. There are several reasons that give rise to this mentality. The first is because of the prices of the Mainland houses. The low price gives people an opportunity to buy a house that they otherwise cannot afford in Hong Kong. The original sin of cheapness makes the Mainland house a substitution for the real thing. Then is the conception of the Mainland by Hong Kong people, which is almost a cultural discrimination. Until recent years, the word 'Mainland' continued to mean anything but positive. The 'Mainland' is undeveloped, dangerous, politically conservative, with high level of state surveillance, uncivilized, you name it. This process of construction and its function on Hong Kong's identity building has been discussed in the introduction, so I shall not repeat it here. This social context makes the position of promoting the Mainland house become so embarrassing. So the main task of those ad magazines and TV commercials is to think how to turn a makeshift into a choice. In the previous parts we have discussed several approaches the ads employed to provide positive reasons to buy a house in the Mainland. Yet the most effective and inevitable way is to work on the narrative of the Hong Kong-Mainland relationship.

Due to the political situation, the discussion on Hong Kong cultural identity has become more and more explicit since the 1990s (Ng 2002). The local conception towards Mainland China is gradually getting better, but the gap still remains. The popular culture



plays a vital part in the construction, but it is never monolithic. The political and cultural identification of Hong Kong becomes complicated and unsettled. This unsettledness of identity somehow helps the ads to elaborate as this situation offers a greater possibility for redefinition.

### **The Geographical and Economical Discourse of Preciseness**

The economic achievement in a relatively short period of time is the major myth of 'Hong Kong', which cushions the sense of locality. Hence, it will not be surprising that the cultural identification is defined in economic terms.

In the past Hong Kong people had a strange kind of tourist logic towards places in Mainland China, especially cities and towns in the Pearl River Delta. The tourist logic means that when people travel, for example to Tokyo, they will usually tell their friends that they are going to Japan. Although this is geographically correct, the logic behind this is questionable. This is because when they are back from Tokyo, they would think that "now I know Japan" but not "now I know Tokyo" (in fact they do not know anything about both of them). This is a metonymy that they identify the city with the whole culture or country. It is the same for Hong Kong people's attitude towards Mainland places. Unless for practical reason, Hong Kong people seldom address Mainland places with their name, but to simply call it Mainland. So whatever places they are going to, they will simply say "going back to the Mainland", or "going north". In this framework, all the places then are put under the category of 'Mainland'. This is the common logic of everyday language. There is an interesting fact that the perception of the landscape is highly linked to the economic development of the places.

The emergence of the term PRD (Pearl River Delta) in mass media is a different story.

In the past when the PRD area was mainly playing the role of the hinterland for Hong Kong manufacturing industry, it was still referred to as “Mainland”. The more precise reference to the area nowadays may give people a more empirical understanding of the geographical locale. Yet, this is just the product of another elevated conception (maybe the conception itself would have some empirical understanding of the geographical locale). The introduction of the term ‘PRD’ is in a completely different paradigm from everyday life, as it comes with the jargon of strategic planning, political bargaining and the economical policy. This newfound outlook of cooperation, while giving the PRD a new status, nevertheless confines the term in the strategic discourse, which is far from the space of everyday life.

The ad magazines view this as a good intercept to re-establish the image of the Mainland house. For example the ad magazine of Guangzhou Phoenix City, although it emphasizes the property as a resort, is still elaborates in presenting Guangzhou as a metropolis. In the ad magazine there is even a surveyor who analyzes the ‘unlimited’ business opportunities in Guangzhou. Another ad magazine of Agile Garden (La Cité Greenville) even makes reference to the CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Agreement). The prosperity is represented in the ad magazine by the elements like the high-rise building, the busy-but-not-congested road, and the scenes of businessmen shaking hands.

### **The Cultural-historical Discourse of Vagueness**

Unlike other post-colonial scenarios, the promoting of local identity is not the only thing in the Hong Kong cultural-political agenda. Hong Kong is still being confronted with a choice between the Hong Kong and Cultural Chinese identities. Under the concept of

'Hong Kong', it is always considered that there is only some ways of living or collective memories, but it has never reached the level of cultural identity. The local does not have the volume of history. Although the empirical base of local identity may provide a good condition for the emotion and sense of belonging to anchor, the abstractness of Chinese identity also channels force of imagination of greatness and a sense of history. At the arena of popular culture, the almost same amount of populist nostalgia and the so-called 'patriotic engineering (cf. Ma 2002)' juxtapose together; and the struggle between two ends is hard to settle.

The ad magazine of YinXian Resort (隱賢山莊) chooses this as the intervening point, and tries to create a connection between these two seemingly conflicting identities and at the same time places the product at a legitimate place. The ad magazine starts with some black and white photos of old Hong Kong. Presetting the nostalgic mood for the voice-over, it says, "the apex created by one's own hand, will not vanish." This first seems to be the old tricks to reinforce the core myth of the Hong Kong experience, the unique history of struggle that gives rise to the economic myth. However, as the pictures of Hong Kong gradually gain colors, one can notice that the voice-over never mentions the term "Hong Kong people", but uses only the pronoun *we*, followed by the sentence "We are Chinese." It continues with "A group of people who have experienced thousands times of storm." This smartly encrypts the Hong Kong experience into the Chinese identity. With the voice-over saying, "...in it we establish our careers, families and homes." The images change from still pictures of Hong Kong to the images of YinXian Resort (隱賢山莊). After this, the topic shifts to land:

“We believe in the importance of land, on which we can build our own home.”

Later, it moves on to culture:

“We have five thousand years of culture.”

The image then changes into some old-styled Chinese building. At last it goes back to the home-family connection:

”We keep on searching for the ideal home, in order to bring rainbow colors to our families.”

The ad magazine employs the indistinct pronoun “we” as an imperative to summon the sense of togetherness of the audiences first. Then it undoes the physicality of place into a conceptual land, or homeland. The phrase of ‘five thousand years of culture’ further dilutes the embarrassment of political situations and differences, and therefore puts the whole thing in the widest perspective. Here, “Chinese” is not merely a nation or a culture, but a civilization. This grandiose gesture easily beats the Hong Kong living style or (if there is any) culture. The last element of family anchors the entire homeland-culture-home discourse. The “family” has double functions of placing the product (house) in the plot and also as a metaphor for the China-Hong Kong relations.

As the projection of emotion is always devoid of precise definition, the strategy of this ad magazine shows the way to channel the seemingly conflicting emotions into one

direction. It gets this done by categorizing a relatively specific emotion and memory into the vague grand narrative of cultural discourse.

### **Hong Kong/Mainland Contrast**

Besides working on the conceptual level such as promoting the economic prospects of the PRD or rewriting the cultural-political relationship, another bottom-up strategy is adopted too. This approach makes a direct and concrete comparison between two places across the border in terms of the living environment. Many of the ad magazines tend to emphasize on the natural living environment of the estates. They illustrate the greenness of the environment and so the possibilities of a healthy life. The leisurely life presented in the ad magazines is not only an outcome of the bourgeois ideology; it also targets on the city/country nostalgia complex. The imagined country is portrayed as a place uncontaminated by urbanization. So the ad magazines usually use the healthy life in contrast to the tense, congested, polluted (in both senses), and exhausted urban life. The pleasure of enjoying lower standards of living in the Mainland is also a selling point, which contrasts that in Hong Kong, even consumption is a kind of pressure.

Yet the tricky part of this comparison is that it does not suggest a total denial of the Hong Kong living condition. Doing such would be going too far and might lead to a resistance in reading. Those ad magazines also emphasize strongly on the “Hong Kong” elements, for instance Hong Kong’s way of property management, security team, and Hong Kong-style dwelling; the Agile Garden even has an area called “Hong Kong living district”. One of the lines that one frequently hears in these ads is “Living here is not much different from living in Hong Kong.” All the facilities in the estates claim to be designed especially for Hong Kong people, but in the ads one can also see the characters

going out to the local place to have fun. All this suggests that those estates are controlled environment, and the residents can switch between local and (simultaneously) Hong Kong at their will. They atomized “Hong Kong” into a list of desirables and undesirables, then value-add the “Mainland desirables” into the basket. The controlled space allows the residents to feel that they can experience the Mainland desirables without losing the (imagined) Hong Kong life.

### ***Conclusion***

Taking a closer look at the conceived space of Mainland house, this chapter focuses on how cultural products represent the concept of space by revealing it. This chapter also shows the construction of advertisement through the manipulation of visual and verbal languages. These ads in fact operate on a conceptual level; many of the ads re-group and re-categorize different unsettled concepts in order to rationalize and promote the sale of the Mainland house. Therefore, an ad of a particular housing estate to certain extent is at the same time promoting the estate itself as well as buying the Mainland house as a whole. The ads and ad magazines of Agile Garden also promote the city of Zhongshan, whereas the ads of Country Garden emphasize the South China generally; so the ads refresh the image of the places as well. The space portrayed in those ads and ad magazines certainly has another layer of meaning as well as meaning constructing. Those ads do not merely handle the symbolic meanings of the products, but also the social meanings of the Hong Kong—China—PRD relationship.

That different Mainland house ads may present contradictions in their meanings is irrelevant, as they do not require the total acceptance of all the concepts represented in the ads because the viewer can choose whatever message he/she wants.

The advertising skill is also undergoing a change from hard sell to soft sell over the last two or three years. First of all many of the ad magazines are no longer strictly named as ad magazines. In the past, most of them were named as “XXX estates ad magazine”, or inserted with a theme or slogan at most. A series of ad magazines by Agile Garden aired in 2005 summer was called “Agile Garden presents: Summer in Love”. The name suggests it as just an ordinary TV show as many of the Mainland houses also sponsor other programs, such as game show or TV series. So the wording “XXX estates presents: YYY” is rather common, and comes with almost all the shows at prime time.

Besides the naming, the contents of them change drastically as well. That series of ad magazine drop the favorite method of hard sell, with a celebrity recommending the housing estates to the viewer, or the simulated situation in the past, for which some characters play the roles of owners and potential buyers. “Summer in Love” is a well-created romance that took place in the Agile Garden. But the two characters are agents of the housing estates, and there are some odd scenes of them promoting the houses to their girlfriends-to-be. The major portion of the ad magazine is still given to the romantic plot. This is obviously a reaction to the changes in the market. The marginal utility of promoting Mainland houses as a whole is relatively low, as the market size cannot expand as vigorously as in the past. With such a saturated and mature market, those ads are forced to add another dimension of life and imagination into the “fun fun fun” old portrayal of the Mainland house experience.

Although many people think that the phenomenon of the Mainland house is already past, and accept it as a fact, the situation is instead still undergoing changes. The ads are still responding to the changes in the spatial meanings, social meanings, saturation and

maturity of the market, as well as the usage of the owners.



## **Chapter 3: On Spatial Form of Mainland House**

### ***Introduction***

This part the thesis focuses on the physical form of the Mainland house, which includes its design strategy, decoration as well as the spatial configuration. The analysis of these elements would help to point out what kind of constraint and possibility the Mainland house brings to Hong Kong people and their life.

The spatiality of the Mainland house entails different scales. When we talk about the spatial form of these estates, we are not only examining their internal spatial characteristics, but also their meanings in the context of the Hong Kong—PRD relationship. The spatial form is always dialectical with the social process. Social process includes the historical, cultural and political aspects, and these social factors function in tandem with the geographical factors to produce the current situation. The distribution of these estates is the product of this dialectic. At the same time, its presence and development also further influence the situation of the Hong Kong—PRD relationship and also the Hong Kong public's understanding of it.

### ***Social and Geographical Background***

The geographical fact of being the hinterland of Hong Kong together with the political reality and the policy of the Chinese government provide an ideal backdrop to the new Hong Kong—PRD relationship.

The new immigration policy of the Chinese government in 1979 restricted the supply of labour to Hong Kong, thereby leading to a labour shortage at that time. Meanwhile, the

change in leadership to Deng Xiaoping enabled the Open-door policy to be introduced in China, with the Special Economic Regions/Zones (SER) created just next to Hong Kong. This development, together with the low labour cost and favorable location, gave rise to the northward shift of most of the Hong Kong's manufacturing industry into the PRD in the 1980s' (Sit 169-74). The quick response to the new policy made Hong Kong the major force behind the economic development of the PRD, especially in the central and eastern part of the Delta. This new division of labour drastically changed the morphology of the PRD. Many Hong Kong-based factories located unplanned in the small towns of the Delta, and many village-run enterprises were indirectly linked to the global market with Hong Kong as the redirect port. The first phase of the spatial development was directly influenced by Hong Kong, which bypassed the local urban centre. The rapid economic development together with the influx of foreign as well as originally agricultural population fostered the urbanization of the Delta.

This set the preliminary condition for Hong Kong people to buy houses in the PRD area. With more intensive connection with the PRD area, the need for a house in the Mainland became timely. Moreover, with the advent of the reunification with China, Mainland houses began to appear as an option to many people in the late 1980's. Besides simply being an investment strategy, the appropriate distance from Hong Kong gives Hong Kong people a paradoxical perception of both proximity and distance at the same time: on the one hand it only takes an hour to go to those estates, on the other hand it is far enough to provide the sense of the other space as a holiday resort.

### **Colonization of Not?**

It may seem to many that the massive consumption of Mainland houses is akin to the

industrialization phase after 1978, for which Hong Kong had a leading and unidirectional influence on the transformation of the PRD. With the abundant provision of many “Hong Kong style” estates, which scatter all over the PRD without consistent planning, it is massively altering the agricultural land. As such, it may seem logical to view this as the second phase following the manufactory north-shift. Many are under the impression that Hong Kong people go north and literally build those estates just to materialize a Hong Kong dream life. But if we pay enough attention to the development and urbanization of the area, we can see that it is not as simple as it seems. We cannot understand the role of Hong Kong and the ‘Hong Kong element’ in this process without taking into account the context of the urban transformation of the PRD. If we only focus on the effects of Hong Kong on the PRD, we can easily exaggerate the importance of Hong Kong. In fact ‘Hong Kong’ only acts as a catalyst in the process. In this bigger picture, we can also see that in different areas in the PRD, the effects of ‘Hong Kong’ are not identical whether in terms of amount or manner. To analyze Hong Kong’s impact generally on the living culture in the PRD is obviously inadequate.

For the areas closer to a big urban center, like Guangzhou, the situation is that the demand of Hong Kong people is in line with the development of the Mainland. Let us first take Guangzhou and the development of its suburbs as an example. The time right after the Open-door policy was established, the old inner city of Guangzhou were unable to match the huge population growth due to the economic development. The living condition of the old urban center drastically degraded. The building and population density of the inner city was very high, land use were unplanned, residential and industrial land were often found being juxtaposing together (Xu 31-2). This became an

impetus for the development of the area outside the city center. As a result, some new developed areas are located outside the urban center. But at that time most of these suburban districts serve mainly for industrial purposes, and the residential land use only accounted for a small proportion. As a result, the infrastructure in regard to living and commuting was under developed. This soon changed after a couple of years. By the early 1980s, some purely residential districts were set up near the old urban center. At this time this near suburb was the first priority for city center dwellers, while the far suburb still remained unattractive. During the period from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, the far suburb became more and more popular with city dwellers. The low price was one of the key reasons, but the better living environment and development of the suburb living estates were a major consideration as well (Wu et al 198). The way that the city was expanding was not only restricted converting wasteland or agricultural land, some nearby small cities were absorbed into the development as well.

The Panyu County, which is famous for its residential properties, is also a hot spot for Hong Kong people in terms of buying Mainland houses. But for all of the residential properties sold there, almost 60% of the buyers are people in Guangzhou (南方都市报 02/06/2000). As such, it is incorrect for one to always think that Hong Kong money supports the residential property markets across the PRD. Hong Kong buyers only entered this market after it was developed maturely.

The case of Shunde Country garden would be a good example to illustrate this point. It is the most famous Mainland residential estate, and is a prime example in this regard. Shunde Country Garden is situated between Shunde and Panyu. It was built in 1992, and the first phase, with only 400 houses, targeted mostly the city centre buyers from

Guangzhou and Foshan. Then the establishment of the Country Garden School in 1994 marked the turning point of its development. The school became an instant asset of the housing project, and brought fame to the property. Another turning point of the development took place in 1997, when the developer decided to focus on cultivate the Hong Kong market, with huge publicity implemented, showrooms set up right in Hong Kong, as well as the launching of shuttle bus service directly from Hong Kong to the Garden. By 1998, Hong Kong buyers increased drastically, accumulating again capital for its further development. Since then the demand from Hong Kong has become a major source of business for the estate. In a district of the Country Garden, ie. the West Garden, 60% of the houses are owned by Hong Kong buyers.

The Dongguan County, another county in the PRD, has a completely different story. Unlike Shunde and Panyu, which are situated in the Guangzhou—Foshan conurbation, Dongguan is situated inside the metropolitan area of Hong Kong—Shenzhen. The city space of Dongguan is quite unique in the PRD, as the urban center is not as big as Guangzhou, and there is no marked difference between it and its surrounding small cities as well. This is in fact a general condition in the PRD, the degree of primacy within the PRD region's city system has declined as the result of penetration of outside capital (Xu 158). The development of the suburban area is not the consequence of the dispersing urban center. It is due more to outside factors such as investment from Hong Kong. The whole area of Dongguan is comparatively more evenly developed, without obvious gravitational effect from the urban center (Wu 205).

Zhangmutou, situated 38km southeast of Dongguan city center, is one of those cities. It is also only 38km away from Shenzhen, 100km from Guangzhou, and 80km from Hong

Kong respectively. Its location along the main railway gives it the advantages for development. Back in 1992, the Zhangmutou local government led the pioneering work in developing the residential property market in the city, with clear regulations set for construction. It also actively invited outside money to invest in the city. Overseas planning experts were also hired to do a master planning with clear definition for land use in order to create a better property market. Hong Kong was the main source of input. Houses in Zhangmutou were bought up by many in this first wave of the Mainland house development in the early 1990s. After 1995, many unfinished houses were found in the PRD, but this was not the case in Zhangmutou as the local government had a relatively tighter control over the local property market. This boosted the confidence of many Hong Kong people in its residential products. The city now becomes famous for its success in real estate market, and is also a role model for other small towns and cities. Residential property market now contributes 60% to the city's GDP, and over 150,000 Hong Kong people have bought property there. This is the place where genuine buyers from Hong Kong move in to live, rather than owning a house for holiday purposes..Most of them are retired people who plan to spend the rest of their life there.

Zhangmutou is also known as "Little Hong Kong". Not only is it talk of the town among the common people in the PRD and Hong Kong, the municipal government web page, too, introduces the city as "Little Hong Kong". The city has acquired the name not merely because there are many Hong Kong residents living or owning their houses there. More importantly, the Hong Kong way of life has made inroads into the city. Hong Kong's cultural influence is ubiquitous in the city's streets and in the facilities of those housing estates, as leisure and entertainments such as 'yum char', karaoke, Hong Kong-

style restaurants and Hong Kong TV programs are commonplace.

This image of “Little Hong Kong” is in fact a conscious effort by the government and the developer. The local government organizes a “Zhangmutou tour festival for Hong Kong people” every summer. For many of the housing estates, Hong Kong buyers take up over 80% of their sales. Among them, Yu King Garden (御景花園) has gone a step further by requiring that at least one of its property owners possesses a Hong Kong identity card.

This goes to show that Zhangmutou is of an entirely different genre, in that Hong Kong money and people actively involve in the shaping of the urban space. Many of the construction projects are designed and developed by Hong Kong firms, and for Hong Kong people.

## **Consequences**

Manuel Castells has once taken Hong Kong and the PRD as an example of emerging mega-cities. Hong Kong is the center of the metropolitan region and it takes up the managerial and upper functions of the regional economy. It is also the center of cultural innovation (434).

Hong Kong has long been the cultural inspiration for the PRD. In recent decades, Hong Kong relatives of those in the PRD, as well as PRD residents who work in or visit Hong Kong have also introduced Hong Kong culture to the region. Meanwhile, mass media such as movies, radio and television, too, facilitate the penetration of Hong Kong culture into nearly every town and village in the area (Guldin 96). At present, the massive construction of housing estates are also changing the culture of living in the PRD. One

of the main characteristics of mega-cities as a new form of urban life is that the center of the region is connected externally to the global network; on the other hand, the center of the region is internally disconnecting in local population as well as in land use (436). However, the whole situation was not initiated by the regional center even when Hong Kong has become a major market consideration for those residential properties. There are many infrastructures and implementation undertaken to makes those living enclaves directly connected to Hong Kong instead of a network linking up the local areas. The development of land use in many areas in the PRD follows the logic of regional center (Hong Kong), but not the local expansion of development. The discontinuous development of the local area plays a major role in the Hong Kong people perception of the PRD.

The extensive private enclaves which are walled up also lead to the privatization of public and natural space. Larger and lager amounts of natural resources such as lakes, riversides, and other natural environments are now designated as private and limited for the homeowners and affiliates only. Other people are no longer allowed to reach or see them. It is indeed a strange phenomenon that huge areas of natural environment are now artificially revamped in many small cities in the PRD. Only walls and highways are now visible.

### ***Mainland Houses as Gated Residential Communities***

Almost all of these estates appear as a gated residential community. Many of these estates are walled-out with their surroundings, with usually a grand and guarded main entrance and other guarded gates. They are also equipped with their own security teams and high-tech surveillance systems. In fact, the emergence of gated communities is not a



distinct case found only in the PRD, as many other major Chinese cities, like Shanghai and Beijing, have this tendency as well. Although the private sector plays a very important part in this after the economic reform initiated in 1978, government policy is also a contributory factor. Given the belief that gating can be a quick solution to crime as well as a guarantee for public security, the Chinese governments of all levels have included gating residential areas as part of the measures to tackle social ills. For example, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee on the Comprehensive Management of Public Security and the Ministry of Public Security have made gating one of the critical measures in evaluating the performance of local governments (Miao 49). Meanwhile, the extensive gating of residential estates is yet to face any significant resistance. The gating of residential areas may have been criticized by the liberal tradition within Western societies, such balancing force is nevertheless non-existent in China (Miao 60).

The estates that adopt this particular concept of a gated community in fact believe that it serves various functions: it helps develop a leisure and lifestyle community, prevent crime, as well as providing a socially homogeneous living environment within the gate. The functions also vary according to different social groups of homeowners.

### **Lifestyle Communities**

The housing commodification was initiated to solve the housing shortage in the socialist era. However, the extensive building in the 90s has resulted in a large number of vacant housing units. The building boom of gated residential communities together with the trend of sub-urbanization is also a response to this contradiction between commodification of housing and the actual effective demand. With an increasingly

saturated market, the developers need to absorb the new demand for ownership of lifestyle instead of merely the need for basic accommodation, and they do this by inventing well-planned and ostentatious housing estates (Wu 231-2).

According to the categorization of Blakely & Snyder (1997), most of the gated residential communities found in the PRD are lifestyle communities. Within this type of gated community, there are three different subtypes: the retirement community; the golf and leisure community; and the suburban new town (39). Whereas these three types of communities are often distinct in the US, the gated residential communities in the PRD are more of a mixing of these three types. Many of these gated communities in the US start out as second homes to which their owners eventually retire permanently (39). For the case in PRD, many estates are designed for both retirees and a younger middle-class market. Similar to the case of the US, the development of these gated communities is aiming at the growing leisure-consuming society.

Within the wall of these estates, a very large proportion of the area is dedicated to/allocated for recreational facilities besides housing units. The leisure activities that a housing estate can provide become a major selling point for the highly competitive market.

Some of the big developments like Country Garden are developed like a new town, with many city-like developments. Inside the estates they have their own hotels, shopping centers, banks and also other 'public' services including international schools or even hospitals. These facilities ensure that the communities within the gate is self-sufficient, and the homeowners can enjoy their distinctive leisure life without any unnecessary contact with the outside world. Yet, the amenities and space offered in these estates are

not strictly private, as they are subjected to collective use. They do not belong to individuals or households in particular, but to the particular group of people who choose to live together within the gate (Giroir 2).

The shared public space in these developments is privatized and controlled, but more as a social statement than as a safety device. The security measures are also designed to provide distance from unwanted guests and control of amenities besides protection against crime (Blakely & Snyder 47). But as most of the big housing estates in the PRD now establish as a local attraction, many 'outsiders' are visiting those estates everyday, including tourists as well as potential buyers coming to take a look at the show house. So this function of protecting the amenities is further ensured by the member system and also by the gates within the gated communities. The homeowners in these estates are willing and prepared to go through different levels of gate while enjoying their leisure life, through this they give their preliminary consent to the control of the estate.

### **The Discourse of Fear**

The most common justification of choosing to live or buy a house in a gated residential community is for security reason. As Setha Low (2000, 2003) has pointed out, the middle and upper-middle class residents' discourse of violence and crime is often used to justify their decisions to move into gated communities. The Americans' desire to protect oneself, family, and property from dangers overwhelm them (Low 2000: 36). This fear of crime is often specified on urban crime, with the extensive mass media coverage in every detail, with the violence being blown-up (Judd 160-1). So the development of suburban settlements goes simultaneously with gated communities, as the combination of the two forms provides a double-guarantee for preventing crime.

But this double-guarantee may not be enough. The presence of wall and gates is far from sufficient both practically and psychologically. The wall and gates can only provide the image of a safe environment. They offer no guarantee to real safety itself (Miao 50). The wall instead can have contrary effect on crimes. It is because the wall and fences cannot be seen through from the street, leaving criminals unobserved by passers-by or patrol cars; the gates may also provide a false sense of security that encourages lax behaviour on household security (Blakely & Snyder 97). In fact in many big Chinese cities, those gated communities which have reduced crimes always employed measures other than gates, such as effective human surveillance and patrol (Miao 50). Human surveillance and a professional security team is a selling point for many PRD housing estates. On the other hand, the emphasis on securities does not erase fear, but amplifies it instead (Judd 161). The security system serves its own purpose as dealing with the fear, and at the same time reminds the homeowners of the fear as well. There is this fear behind the walls, which the homeowners would still want more (Low 2000: 37). They may be afraid of the workers coming in and out of the estates everyday. But this fear within the gate is kept low by the homogeneity of the homeowners. One of the main promises of gated communities is that it provides a socially homogeneous environment for its members. This promise has many functions (which would be discussed in much greater detail below), one of them is for the homeowners at least not to be afraid of other homeowners. This is especially true for people who genuinely live in there.

In fact different homeowners may need different physical installation to deal with their fear. As there are many people buying those housing units as their second-homes, so the relationship between fear of crime and those homeowners is different. They do not need

the permanent guarantee of crime cutting off from their everyday life, with panoptical security measures as a constant reminder. On the contrary, many of these second-homeowners treat the housing estates as a resort, so they can *temporarily* forget the fear of crime together with all the other pressures in life. So this amnesic state is sustained by the physical image of resort-like environment instead of seeing a patrol of security team. The time when those security measures are more meaningful to them is, paradoxically enough, the time when they are away from the estates, so that the security measures can protect their properties. In this case the fear of crime threatening personal safety is lowered to the property safety.

We also have to pay attention to the gate and wall as apparatuses tackling fear have different meanings for homeowners of different backgrounds, as the meaning of fear would vary according to different users. As far as the case of the gated community in the PRD, the difference is more obvious between Mainland and Hong Kong homeowners. First of all most of the Hong Kong homeowners buy those housing units in PRD gated communities as their second-homes. But the cultural background makes Hong Kong people to be desirous of additional measures instead of merely resort-like physical environment.

If the Mainland users who escape from the urban centre have a more specific focus on local urban crime, the fear of crime that Hong Kong people have is more of a general attitude towards everything “Mainland”. The buying of a Mainland house will not be of any help to alleviate their fear of urban crime. Actually the level of fear of crime on the street is way lower than that in the US. It can even be said that unlike the cases for US and even for Mainland homeowners, the fear of crime of Hong Kong homeowners is not

reflexive of the present living condition; the fear is induced by the very fact that the gated community is situated in the Mainland. As the mass media portrays the PRD/Mainland as a very dangerous place, especially the urban streets, it is unimaginable to many people to own a property and spend weekends at the urban center of any city in the PRD. So those housing estates with physical distance from the urban center are always the priority for Hong Kong buyers (without overlooking the fact that many of the suburban gated communities are well-planned). A high-tech security system and professional security team is considered a must for Hong Kong people to choose a housing estate in the PRD, and almost every ad-magazine would describe their security measure in detail as well. The private streets inside the gated community also guarantee them a crime-free environment. As some of the Hong Kong homeowners buy houses at a place which they do not have any previous knowledge, the gate and wall also protect them from a fear of an unknown place. So the meaning or function of physical space is subject to change with different users.

### **Distinction**

Besides the aim for avoiding crime, the wall and gates are also believed to have many other functions including eliminating public nuances such as peddlers, traffic noise, unwanted salespersons, and flyers slipped underneath the doors (Miao 50). In fact the guards at the gate and patrols have other significance, they all add to the aura of exclusivity. Homeowners may value the simple presence of a security force more than the service it actually provides. They together denote a barrier of status (Blakely & Snyder 75).

The gated communities provide a feeling of social homogeneity within the walls. They are often believed to be of the same income level, social position as well as race. This is the basis for the homeowners to develop a sense of community. In these gated communities, people always have a special expectation, that the neighbors may not know one another, but they can still expect anyone they come into contact with to be “one of them” (Blakely & Snyder 71).

Many Hong Kong homeowners of gated communities in the PRD are not searching for a genuine community, as most of the people treat the house as their second-home. They do not need a community in an empirical sense, which was based on the social connection and face-to-face interaction between the members of the communities. What Hong Kong people need is the extension of the imagined-community in Hong Kong. In other words, most of them just want the presence of many Hong Kong people there. They certainly do not need all the people there to be from Hong Kong, as they know full well this is not possible. All they need is for the place to have a sizeable presence of people from Hong Kong. For them, the definition of social homogeneity is much broader in this situation. Many Hong Kong people know that the other Hong Kong people they meet on the streets inside the estate and in the amenities may not be having the same social position they have in Hong Kong. This is because the low price of the houses has enabled the low-income people to have a chance of owning a house there as well. There are also more expensive houses for the higher-income groups. But as they are away from home (Hong Kong), being from Hong Kong is in itself enough for them to consider one another as “one of them”.

The reason is that every social distinction is made according to the agenda of excluding

the others, and the main thesis of opposition is between Hong Kong and the unsafe-and-bad-taste Mainland.

As mentioned above, a property development in Zhangmutou, Yu King Garden (御景花園), requires at least one of its property owners to possess a Hong Kong identity card to ensure the presence of extended Hong Kong Communities. The Agile Garden, too, has a “Hong Kong Living District”. This aspect is often emphasized in many TV ads, in that many people there “speak the same language”. The semi-enclosed estates can promise the extended Hong Kong community a well defined identity vis a vis the surrounding Mainland.

Many of these large estates have different districts or courts. This planning is first of all convenient for phase-by-phase development; secondly it is suitable for the distinction of different products. Like the Northern district phase II of the Shunde Country Garden, the whole district of the three blocks is exclusively for three-storey villas, with an artificial lake in the center of the district. Those villas are all individually fenced, with the total area of at least 5091.4 square feet, including the private garden. The other villa district Ho Garden (豪苑) even has its own clubhouse, while the international school of the Country Garden is also situated besides the district. There lower price apartments are only found in other districts.

Although the gated community is considered as upper and middle-class project for the buyers to search for sameness (Langdon 1994). Within the relatively socially homogeneous space of those gated communities, there is still another level of highly hierarchical order. The physical space of the estates is carefully controlled, suiting for the social distinction of the residences.



## ***Mainland House as Disneyland***

Alan Bryman has once explained the reason why he used the term ‘disneyization’ instead of ‘disneyfication’. In his book *The Disneyization of Society* (2004), he points out that disneyfication is the rendering of a cultural entity (a fairy tale, novel or a historical event) into a sanitized and trivialized format, so it is more about the direct influence of the company. Disneyization on the other hand means that the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of the society all over the world.

So, to juxtapose Disneyland with the Mainland does not mean that one can find Mickey Mouse in those estates, or to investigate how many Hong Kong families spend their weekends there watching Disney animation. This part, with the help of the current analysis on Disney theme parks, tries to make sense of the logic behind the spatial organization of those Mainland houses, as well as the significance of Hong Kong people choosing to live or spending their weekend in those estates.

## **Theming**

The most obvious parallel of the spatial configuration between the Mainland house and Disney theme park is theming. Theming is in fact a total control of the visual display within the premise, applying a theme to almost every detail of built entity. The source of the theme does not necessarily have any connection with the place at issue. So theming is in fact a denial of a real place, or a denial of real place per se. In a themed environment, the realness of the place is not of the first priority, as the continuity of the experience provided by the carefully controlled place is of much greater concern.

The function of theming of Disney theme parks has multiple levels. First and foremost it

is celebrating America and its achievements. Secondly, it is also a place in which people can leave/escape the harsh reality of the outside world (Bryman 19). Like Disney theme parks, theming functions at different levels as far as the Mainland house is concerned. The primary theme is creating a low density living enclave with North American suburbia as the archetype.

The secondary theming strategy is to configure the space under a specific and exotic theme. Usually many different themes are applied in one estate, with a specific theme applied to different parts of the estate. The Morning Star Villa in Zhongshan, for instance, is an estate co-developed by a Hong Kong corporation Morning Star Limited and a local developer. The first six phases of the villa are all organized around a continuous design motif, the fourth phase of which claims to style on the Mediterranean. For the more recent phases, usually an explicit theme is deployed for each of them, which the theme would then become the name of the phase. For example the seventh phase of the villas is called “Water city Venice” and the eighth one is “Florence”. Although directly named after the Italian cities, one would not find a totally themed environment as that in The Venetian Hotel, Las Vegas. The phase only extracts the canals of Venice as the motif for the landscape design. The whole phase is structured around the careful arrangement under which waterways are running through the back of every house, there are also Gondolas along the waterways for the owners to travel on. The theming of recreational amenities under an exotic theme is another common strategy. Jungjing Golf Homeland, an estate situated in Tongha, Dongguan, although claiming that the estates has are surrounded in an Australian ambience, all its facilities are centered around a Thai theme. Besides planting sub-tropical plants at the public area

(mainly Palm tree), there is also a so-called “Thai swimming lake” as the main attraction of the club house, with a mini artificial beach. The “swimming lake” is again surrounded by sub-tropical plants with an appearance that resembles the swimming pool that one can find in a hotel in Phuket. Not only is the Thai setting of the “swimming lake” able to provide the homeowners with an experience of a Southeast Asia holiday by swimming in it, it is also an image to be consumed. This is because almost all the other facilities of the club house are facing the “swimming lake”, and as such the homeowners are guaranteed of a sub-tropical view even when they are using some other facilities.

First of all theming is a very good method to differentiate one product from the other. This is especially important for a saturated real estates market in the PRD. Apart from the practical reason and the unique experience that theming creates, the socio-symbolic meanings of the theme as well as the reason of theming are also very important (Gottdiener 2001).

As mention before, many of these gated communities are facing two very different groups of potential buyer. In view of this, how to manage a coherent visual spatial configuration that is suitable for both Hong Kong and Mainland buyers is a very critical issue to be resolved. Unlike Disneyland, which tries to translate a shared collective memory of America into visual image, and a fictive narrative of social identity (Zukin 54-5), those mainland houses find their solution in America suburban living. Like the Disney-MGM Studios of Disney World in Orlando, besides the Sunset Boulevard, the referents of the themed environment are of no real place. But it is not themed around an abstract concept; it is themed according to the Hollywood world, including the working environment that produced the movie as well as the movies created in it. Besides the

specific wish for spacious and low density living environment, Hong Kong people, especially those who cannot afford private housing, actually do not have any concrete imagination of a dream home. The North American suburbia found in movies hence becomes the answer.

This is also the fulfillment of another withered dream. Back in the 1980s, migrating to North America was at the top of the dream list of Hong Kong people, and the scene of the dream is always set in the suburb instead of the uptown or more realistically, Chinatown. But the main justification for a desire for migration was not only the longing for suburban living; the prevailing discourse at that time was the fear of the year 1997. With the handover coming to pass almost seamlessly, thanks to the bubble prosperity before the reunification, migration as a way out of the unclear and unstable situation can no longer stand. In fact, the number of people who cannot have this dream come true from the very beginning is greater than never before. Still, the ephemeral but sweet dream of the North American suburban living and the promise that it holds remain appealing, and has become an imagined nostalgia in Hong Kong culture. So the North American spatial expression of those Mainland houses not only appeals to the local people, but is also a perfect substitute for Hong Kong people lost dreams. In fact, it is one of the most common emphases for many ad-magazines in the 1990s. This motif of North American suburban living also has its local reference, as some of the low density residential projects are also developed this way, such as the Palm Springs as well as the Marina Cove.

These exotic themes create a right atmosphere for Hong Kong people to perceive the space and also the function of the Mainland house. The theming parallels the mapping

of travel of Hong Kong people. Hong Kong people have a clear 'theme' for every nearby destination in Asia such as Japan (or, more to the point, Tokyo, as it is addressed in such a way that it equals everything about the country) for Shopping, Taiwan for Food, and Thailand or other Southeast Asia destinations for spa and sunshine. The Southeast Asia-themed environment reminds people of a short but relaxing holiday. The holiday theme reminds the homeowners that they are not in Hong Kong, but this is not the most important point made to Hong Kong people. For them, what is more important is for them to be reminded of the fact that they are not in the place they actually are, namely the Mainland. The broader context of the location is still a hidden pain for many Hong Kong. So the strategy of theming can have the effect of de-orientation, as well as of the de-stigmatization of the locations of the estates.

### **Another space**

Many of the big estates are almost cities in their own right. They would have many 'public' facilities such as schools, hospitals, banks, shopping malls, and recreational amenities together with the residential space. The homeowners genuinely need not have any contact with the outside world. Moreover, they are all situated on an undeveloped land away from public transportation, which minimizes the visual intrusion from the outside. Therefore these estates are detached not only from the urban setting, but from the outside world as well. For Hong Kong people, this function is further ensured. The Disney Company would buy the land around the theme parks to avoid the agglomeration of restaurants and hotels being immediately next to the theme parks. This is because the company believes that the presence of these restaurants and hotels would dilute the Disney effect of entering into another world (Bryman 138). It is constructed in such a

way that the visitors have to travel a long way through the winding landscape from their hotels to the theme park. Hong Kong people take even longer trips as they often travel directly from Hong Kong or Shenzhen by taking the shuttle buses provided by the estates. This gives them an ageographical understanding of the location of the estates. Hong Kong people understand the landscape just as the map presented in the ads—the maps all emphasize on the connection of the estates with Hong Kong. So, like taking the Disney train, after a not so good sleep, we arrive at our dream home.

The way of commuting is also an important aspect in the homeowners' perception of the meaning of the space within an estate. As most of the Mainland houses are just too huge to commute on foot, the dependence on vehicle is inevitable. Walking is a luxury of life within the estate, with minimal functional meaning. The Disneyland uses internal transportation to manipulate the narration that a customer can get from the park, while the gated community also has its own way for imposing a distinct order on its homeowners. The shuttle buses that connect the whole premises are the major way to travel within any of these big gated communities. Their schedule and routes provide an official configuration of spatial praxis. Although escaping from the work-defined time, people in these estates find themselves under another timetable reinforced by the exact interval of the shuttle buses. As far as the routes are concerned, although they all try to reach different courts within the area, one can easily find that they are structured around those clubhouses and the main entrance, and commuting between different courts is thus obviously less important in terms of the arrangement. The emphasis is therefore on the connection of recreation with home, instead of between people. Shunde Country Garden provides an alternative for its homeowners, who can buy a toy-like automobile to travel

within the estates. The automobile has to be registered in order to travel in the estate, but there is no strict restriction for the user. As such, even a kid can operate it like riding a bike. The neat roads within the estates, with almost only shuttle buses and toy-like automobiles establish a clear image of another space other than the highway immediately outside the wall, not to mention the busy urban traffic.

### **The purified city**

Literature has pointed out that the problem that Disney addresses is quintessential urban: crime, transportation and the relationship between work and leisure. But Disneyland tries to invoke an urbanism without producing a real city (Sorkin 231).

The physical space within the gate of those Mainland house are like Disneyland, which is an anti-geographical space and a highly regulated, completely synthetic vision, a simplified, and sanitized experience stands in for the more undisciplined complexities of the city (Sorkin 208). The environment in Disneyland has no guns, no homeless people, and no illegal drinks and drugs (Zukin 52). This is also the mentality of those Mainland houses, keeping all the visual hints of social problem outside of their premises. This is also a social strategy that has the political effect of creating an impression of trust, a trust that other guests are of the same social type (Zukin 65). The social type in the case of the Mainland house is specifically at the upper rank of the cross-border societies. The simplified and safe space within the Disneyland also means that one can take adventure without taking a risk, and have the excitement within a controllable confine. Going for a massage or sauna is still considered as not proper or even dangerous in Hong Kong, as one may have to expose to all kinds of people. It is also hard for one to imagine people going for massage as a family. The massage service provided in the clubhouse gives

many Hong Kong people an ideal place to experience this in a safe place where they can bring their kids along as well.

Both the Disneyland and the Mainland house call for the people in them to focus their mind on the world inside, so as to forget the world outside. The inside reinforces a formulated fantasy by stereotyping the outside world. So the dream life is underpinned by the image of the PRD or the Mainland as being unsafe and backward.

### ***Living Changed***

#### **Dreamt Weekend**

For many Hong Kong owners, the Mainland house is a practical fulfillment of an almost impossible dream; this is especially true for people from low-income groups. But this is in psychoanalysis terms a dream for them, like a dream is the substitution for the wish in reality. This is a compromised fulfillment. This wish is not actually fulfilled through the very reality of owning such a house. But it also requires ongoing follow-up action in order to live in the dream.

Again thanks to the proximity of the PRD to Hong Kong, the Mainland house as a second home is a scenario entirely different from other cases of second home, for instance, an American second home in Florida or a French one in the south. The short distance makes it possible for the Mainland house to enter into the weekly routine of the homeowner instead of a seasonal or even annual event on the calendar.

In the modern time, home is the physical and psychological separation from the workplace, where work is taken away from home and home is defined as a place where



work is to be forgotten. This idea has gained greater credence as not only individual home is separated from the workplace, but the distance between the residential and the industrial areas, such as the suburb. The long distance of traveling from workplace to home takes away the frustration over work and creates a sense that the home is the other part of the world (Harris 7). This experience of space is not solely spatial but temporal as well, and the time frame is socially constructed for work and rest (Cross 1997). In Hong Kong, only a small portion of people can enjoy this spatial experience of temporary shut down. Despite the fact that there are many people in Hong Kong who travel a long way to work or to go home, they will never arrive at a pure world of home. Lets say someone working in Tai Koo and living in Tuen Mun, the place that he/she returns to after one and a half hour of journey would not be a place with only residential houses, but a satellite city, not to mention those who only take 20 minutes to go home. For many homeowners of the Mainland house, the consolation is further deferred to the weekend, and the social time for them is structured on a much larger stretch of land. The original magic of weekend at home is to turn the daily rest place into an enjoyable space of leisure. This magic of timed space is undone by the spatial arrangement of time. But we have to bear in mind that the small flats, which many Hong Kong people live in, cannot really arouse them to stay at home just to relax.

The scene of those Mainland gated communities is on the other hand shaped by social time. With the large proportion of Hong Kong homeowners owning the Mainland houses, these estates become weekend or holiday communities. There are very few people inside those estates during weekdays or working days, which is an extreme contrast to the crowded clubhouses during weekends or holidays.

Weekend and holiday portrayed at the Mainland house can in fact hardly be a rest. A suburban weekend may suggest a concentration on the home itself, gardening or DIY home improvement projects for instance (Cross 1997: 114-7). But this is definitely not the focus of those developers.

Those estates are not planned primarily for distancing home from work, but bridging home and holiday trip. So the logic is not to create one's own world or space vis-à-vis working life, but to encrypt an escapist holiday into the weekend. To make it a point, one obviously should not stay in the house, but to enjoy the amenities provided by the clubhouse. The show houses and floor plans that appear on the promotion items are good indicator of this. The fully furnished and decorated house as a package may seem to control the life and living space of the homeowner in every detail, but as we can see those plans do not have any clear suggestions on the life at home. There are 5 bedrooms and we are talking about a bungalow of about 6500 sq ft in size! There is even no study-bedroom, let alone things like AV room or private sauna room. Another gird of time is taken from the premise of home, while the abundance of amenities attract people to go out of the house and immerse themselves into another busy schedule of entertainment. The Mainland house has an embarrassing aspect of being a semi-home and a semi-holiday resort. What happens there is a temporary but recurring experience, a theme park of dream life. But again, living out a dream is much busier than one may originally have conceived of.



Figure 3.1: Floor plan of an all bed rooms house

### Extended Territory of Everyday life

To call those Mainland houses physically as extended territory of Hong Kong maybe poetically sound, but as mentioned above, this is not an accurate description as they are also homes or second homes for Mainland people. It however holds true if it is put in the context of the everyday life in Hong Kong. In fact the PRD has already been described as an extended territory or ‘hidden landscape’ of Hong Kong because of its being the production line of Hong Kong manufacturing industry (Gutierrez 2002). This functional redistribution of Hong Kong territory already extends the mapping of Hong Kong to the greater region. The Mainland house in terms of everyday life involves another mapping. As mentioned above, visiting the Mainland house at weekend becomes a constant event in many homeowners’ schedule of recurrence. This is a spatial expression of the time, with a clear geographical definition of the functions of different timed-places. The Mainland house is thus connected to weekend and holiday, whereas the first home in Hong Kong embodies the weekly schedule of Monday to Thursday (many people who have five-day-work would choose to go up on Friday night) or working day. The presence of a Mainland house extends the mapping of everyday life that stretches out of

the boundary of the Hong Kong SAR.

Many people would buy a Mainland house as a preparation for retired life, while there are also many people would buy it for their retired parents. This becomes an increasingly popular approach of Hong Kong people. This is in fact another spatial mapping of time, and the geography of life cycle is set with this Hong Kong—Mainland house connection.

The analytical importance of pointing out this extended territory of everyday life is that it helps us to recognize that Hong Kong people do not empirically involve the PRD in their lives, but organize that understanding of the PRD according to their existing lives.

The specificity of the places in PRD is definitely not the source for their logic of cognition, for their logic comes from Hong Kong social time as well as life cycle. Put it another way, if one buys a Mainland house in Zhangmutou, Zhangmutou is then put onto the map of one's everyday life. The geographical location is of no importance (except the distance from Hong Kong).

This mentality framed a behavioral pattern of point to point traveling, skipping the lands traveled. It is however not correct to think that those homeowners only know the geography within the gate and wall, as they all usually show the awareness of the presence of nearby housing estates. But this knowledge is still limited to the surrounding area. It is true that they possess a fragmented perception of the PRD. Ulysses' story is about the events on his journey back home, the destination. But there could be nothing heroic in going to one's Mainland house, as there is no journey, and the events will only be found at the destination. The location of the estate is not even geographically related to Hong Kong; but is ageographically conceived, under the functional diagram of

everyday life.

## **Re-rendering Social Hierarchy**

In Hong Kong, a house is a very strong indicator of one's social position; the house also suggests or even determines what kind of socially constructed lifestyle one should have. Further, a house is the goal for one to establish a hierarchical identity. This matrix of social hierarchy is clearly defined and highly stable. So buying a Mainland house is in fact an option to free oneself from an almost inescapable hierarchical order. This represents a choice that withdraws from the actual field of ladder climbing. First of all, unlike buying a house in Hong Kong, buying a Mainland house will not have an immediate and direct change in one's social position. This act also subverts the total identity of a house with lifestyle and hierarchical position. This somehow loosens up the bonding and allows one to switch between different hierarchical identities. A family would be living in a public housing condo with only 300 sq ft. during weekdays, but going to the private clubhouses of a Mainland house during weekends and holidays, with all the family members having their own rooms. Buying a Mainland House as a way out of the constraints of the social position shows the possibility of detaching one's lifestyle from the house one possess. The weakness of this is that it is still done by connecting the lifestyle with another house. Moreover, buying a Mainland house which is usually well planned and highly controlled package seals the fate that the imagination itself is still under the signification system of the original order. The decoration and design of the house also have their origin in the prevailing definition, and those Mainland houses homeowners still could not move the formulated lifestyle.

Another fact is that, after those people buy the house in order to get away from the

constraint of a certain social order; they would find that they are going into another well-organized order. In order to appeal to a wider social spectrum, usually those Mainland houses would have numerous different products with different prices. Those different houses are then arranged carefully with the houses of the similar prices built together. Like the houses in Hong Kong, there is a great amount of attributes that divide the price of a house (or flat) from another. The differences are more marked than the differences in areas in which the house are found. They can be determined by if it is an individual house or a flat in a small residential building, or even by some more detail distinctions. All this helps to establish a clear and fine distinction for different houses, with an objective and countable expression in terms of price.

This order provides a framework to translate people from different backgrounds into a new, re-rendered order. This is a cross-border social hierarchy, involving people from different social classes as well as societies. Since the ceiling of the price is very low, the price differences between different houses are not that big, especially in terms of monthly payment. So people originally from different classes in Hong Kong may have the same type of houses in those Mainland housing estates, their social positions are erased or at least re-translated into this new order. The presence of Mainland people in the order only complicates the situation, as the social positions of two different societies that are not originally transferable are rearranged into this laboratory setting.

To Hong Kong people, it is a fantastic order because the order is only valid within the gate of the Mainland house, and is not translatable back to the positive value of their original hierarchy. Those Hong Kong homeowners just jump into another fantastic social order to enjoy a life (temporary) that is prohibited from their social position.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have focused on the spatiality of the Mainland house. It encompasses issues of different scales and dimensions. First of all is the interaction between the social process and the geography as well as the built environment. The physical space is constantly responding to class differences and status differences due to different societal backgrounds (Hong Kong—Mainland), meeting of (living) cultures, as well as political situation; it is also the condition and temporary solution for some of the problems above. Through examining the environmental and architectural design (materialized spatial practice), I discern what meanings the design of the physical environment suggests, and what kind of immediate constraint that the physical form may bring to the homeowners. Moreover, I also put the Mainland house under the frames of different established space, the space in which one can define what Mainland house *is* and Mainland house *is like* — gated residential community and Disney theme park. I further acknowledge the possibility of the meaning of the physical space. Although they do have area that is overlapping, they help us to unveil different promises provided by the Mainland house. The Mainland house as a gated community focuses on the social issues, such as the lifestyle suggestion, reduction on the fear of urban crime, and social distinction; whereas the Mainland house as Disney theme park points to the epistemology of the space. The Disney-like space works on everything that connects with the owners' understanding of the housing estate with the surrounding place, and its relationship with Hong Kong. Through its geographical location in relation to Hong Kong, together with its role played in the everyday life of Hong Kong people, the Mainland house also shapes the owners' understanding of the PRD cities in relation to Hong Kong.

Another main argument of this chapter is that the same built environment would have different meanings according to different users. For example the wall and gate that control the access to the premises of the housing estate only provide a basic suggestion of security; why and how this suggestion is significant varies according to different users. This is most obvious when comparison is made between the Mainland and Hong Kong owners. But the divergence of the understanding of space also occurs among the Hong Kong users. This is because the understanding of space is always user specific. There would be a general consensus on the basic suggestion a space provides. But the second layer of meaning (which is often the most significant meaning that directs thought and behavior), is always produced differently by different users.



## **Chapter 4: The Lived experience**

I have in the previous two chapters outlined the conceived and physical aspects of the Mainland house.

The constraint that a physical space imposes is only a possibility that waits for an actor to play out. The constraint can only function or be resisted in practice. It is a language waiting to be used, and only through practice (usage) that meaning can be produced. Praxis is also the level where the conceived and physical aspects of space meet together.

This chapter would focus on the practice as well as narrative on the owners' experience with the Mainland house, with reference to ethnographical findings and interviews. With a close look at their experiences as well as the narrations of their experiences, this chapter attempts to explain how different aspects of space are empirically linked together, and to understand what the other levels of potential and possibility that lived experience can provide.

The previous chapters work on the general meaning derived from the cultural context of Hong Kong. This chapter would in turn emphasize on the particularity of practice. Contradiction is always expected, as we believe that in different cases, the same condition would lead to different actions, and the same action would always have different reasons behind. The similar action would always have different meanings in different cases. This is because different actors will employ different methods to confront/deal with the contradiction between their own concerns with the space provided.

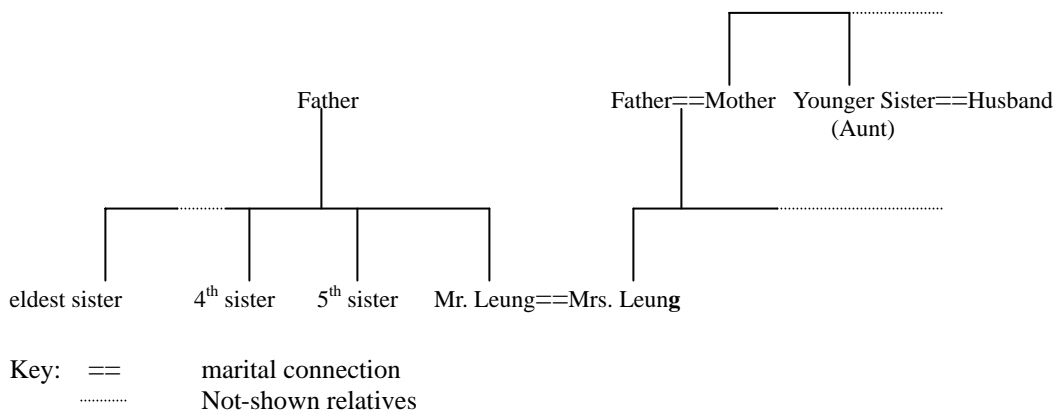
(Some of the terms regarding the cross-border activities around the Mainland used in this chapter, like "Goes up" and "up there", are actually the languages used by the

informants.)

## ***In Their Own Words: Different Stories about the Mainland***

### ***House***

A group of the informants, the Leung Family, belong to an extended family. The relationships of those mentioned in this chapter are shown below. They all bought their houses in the same Mainland housing estate, Shunde Country Garden (順德碧桂園).



### ***Mr. and Mrs. Leung: Between Household unit and Extended Family***

*Mr. and Mrs. Leung are both in their thirties. They live on their own in Hong Kong. The young newlyweds do not have a house in the Mainland, although their relatives do. Mr. Leung's eldest sister, 4<sup>th</sup> sister and 5<sup>th</sup> sister all have their own houses in Shunde Country Garden; Mrs. Leung's aunt, by coincidence, happens to own a house there too. Mr. Leung told me about the old days, when his father was still here. It is about the first house that his sisters bought,*

*“We had somehow lost contact with the relatives in the Mainland. My father suddenly resumed contact with them in the 1980s, and he started to go back to hometown quite frequently. My sisters sometimes went with him. They found that he always lived in a hotel. They didn’t want him to stay in the hotel all the time. Therefore, my 5<sup>th</sup> sister decided to buy a house up there so that my father could stay there when he went up.”*

*Mrs. Leung said that they would often stay with Mr. Leung’s family when they went up there, as aunt’s house was always so crowded.*

*They would usually go up with their relatives, although they would also go up by themselves sometimes. Going up with their relatives would also decide how long they would stay up there. If they went on their own, they would probably stay a day or two longer than if they went with their relatives. But the longest time that they have stayed up there were the time when they spent on their own. So generally they would mostly spend 2-3 days up there when they are on their own. Traveling with their relatives also changes the way they manage their time up there, this is because they would choose to spend most of their time with their relatives and therefore have less time for themselves. For instance, they would usually sleep earlier than they used to in order to get up early to go “yum cha” (飲茶) with their family members.*

*Now the frequency of going up is decreasing. At the time when Mr. Leung’s eldest sister first bought the house, they would go up several times a year. Now they would only go once or twice a year. They told me that it was partly because they were not that enthusiastic anymore. It was also partly to do with the fact that Mr. Leung’s sisters went up less as well.*

*When I asked them what they usually did up there, Mrs. Leung told me, “Actually there is nothing much to do (emphasis mine). Basically we go ‘yum cha’ or go for some dinner. My relatives would watch some VCD, sing karaoke, or play mahjong. Sometimes we go feeding the fish, as there are many Jin Li (a kind of carp) in the pond in the park. It is quite fun. Sometimes we would take the shuttle bus in the Country Garden to go to Guangzhou. Just walking around, with not much to do (emphasis mine).”*

*The kind of life that those ad-magazines portrayed may not ring true to them and their relatives, as Mr. Leung said, “we now mostly go out (outside of the estates premises) to find something to eat. Our visit may begin with the clubhouse, but we get bored quite soon.”*

*That was a small interlude. I slept in the house that they were staying when I went up with them. After several nights, I found out that, almost every night, Mr. Leung would watch DVDs (pirated) that he brought earlier that day or before. During an interview conducted later back in Hong Kong, I asked him if this was one of the enjoyable moments in Country Garden, and he told me this, “in fact I prefer to watch it in Hong Kong, isn’t it better? But now, you know, it’s much harder to bring those stuffs back down to Hong Kong. So I watch them here.”*

*One time when I was going “yum cha” with Mrs. Leung’s relatives, she told me an interesting fact that Country Garden is the only place that two in-law families would meet.*

*More interestingly, they do not only join and have fun, but would include some important meetings such as the meeting of parents before their marriage. Mrs. Leung explained that this was because the house that Mr. Leung’s 4<sup>th</sup> sister had was spacious,*

*and there would be no suitable place in Hong Kong spacious as this. Besides, she thinks her 4<sup>th</sup> sister's husband was quite proud of the house and therefore generous in inviting her family to go over as well. But they will not deliberately plan that. They often meet by coincidence when both of the families are at Country Garden. Then they would visit each other's house and go "yum cha" together.*

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To start with a couple who do not own a house is to state clear that the Mainland house does not only bring changes to the life of the owner, but also to the people involved. In so doing, the study avoids falling into the trap of simply asking: "Why some Hong Kong people buy Mainland houses?" In fact, we can see that, although without owning a Mainland house, the houses that their family members have also bring changes to their everyday life.

Numerous studies have already shown that the meanings of a particular house would be different for different occupants or users of the house. But in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Leung, we can see that the same person will also have different perceptions and usages towards the house or houses from time to time.

When Mr. and Mrs. Leung are on their own, a house is just a house. However, when they are with their relatives, a house means more than simply a single house, for it is then placed in the network of houses that all their relatives have there. In other words, it is placed back to the family network again. Mrs. Leung always divided the houses in terms of familial relationship into "my aunt's way" or "Ah Chung's (Mr. Leung's nickname) sisters' way". Although it is in terms of spatial index (way), it is more of a categorical description than having any geographical contents. One point is worth

paying attention to: Mr. and Mrs. Leung seldom narrate their experiences up there with the house as a focal point, and their conceptual boundary of inside/outside the house is relatively weak. They would rather describe it as a total experience, as the terms that they usually use are more often “up there”, “at there” or “at Country Garden”.

Even when going up is a family business, Mr. and Mrs. Leung would always find some way to create their own space. If possible, they would always choose to stay in a house on their own, even at the time when other relatives are there. Or two of them would sometimes “go out” to Guangzhou. Their experience at Country Garden is constantly switching between a setting for their little world and the extended family. Although the extended family is the initial reason for them to visit the Mainland house, it is not always equivalent to the house, but sometimes serves as a shelter from the extended family for the household unit.

This shows the dynamic and processual aspects of house as a spatial form (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 37); From Mr. and Mrs. Leung case we can see that the meaning of the house changes from time to time.

### **Eldest Sister and her husband: A not so typical “typical case”**

*Mrs. Chiu, the eldest sister of Mr. Leung, is in her fifties, working at a supermarket; Mr. Chiu is a bus driver. Mr. and Mrs. Chiu bought the house at Shunde Country Garden in 1999, almost the same time with the 4<sup>th</sup> sister. Her unit is “itself approximately 700 to 800 sq. ft., and it is 1,300 to 1,400 sq. ft. if the garden is included”. The house that she lives in now in Hong Kong is about 400 sq. ft. the eldest sister had thought of another choice at that time. It was Clifford Estate (祈福新), which is a housing estate also in Shunde, nearby Country Garde. It was also a time when buying a Mainland house was a*

*popular choice. She thought that the transportation of Clifford Estate was much more convenient, but she found that Country Garden offered greater leisure place; it was also more green. She also thought that the “design of the rooms” was better at Country Garden. At the beginning she thought Country Garden as something like “like people say ‘enjoying the world’ (a cantonese expression means having an enjoyable life)”, because “with our (living) standard, how can we have a clubhouse at the place we live? You know, where we can swim and dine.”*

*The eldest sister also goes up less now than before. In the past, she and her husband would go up with the (extended) family almost once a month. Now they only go up once every two months. The eldest sister explains to me in very detail why this is so,*

*“My husband can’t take the holiday that easy now...my husband’s a bus driver, In the past, he drove a better route, from Tin Sui Wai to Tsuen Wan. His colleagues were much more willing to shift with him. But now he’s driving the Causeway Bay route, which is really toilsome, so it’s hard for him to shift with others. So it’s so much rarer for him to be off on Sunday now...”*

*She also said that this explains why I have never met her at Country Garden when I go up with her family members.*

*The eldest sister told me that she always stays there three days and two nights, except when she is having the annual leave, when she will stay for four days. She very seldom goes up solely with her husband, and usually goes up with the entire family. So unlike Mr. and Mrs. Leung, their duration as well as the activities they have up there is not changed from time to time according to whom they are going with.*

*The eldest sister said that up there she would usually go to buy discs (including music*

*CDs as well as movie DVDs), watch TV, or just walk around in Shunde or Panyu; later she said that she would go to wash her hair or massage sometimes. Her husband would spend almost all the time sleeping up there, which the eldest sister described this as the favorite thing her husband would do up there. His husband likes to sleep there because he can “forget all the things and just sleep”. She said that they are mainly to take a rest up there, so as not to get bored easily; she thought might be only people at their age could stand the boredom up there.*

*Although she would go out of Country Garden to some nearby towns with her brother (Mr. Leung) and sisters in the past, now she tends to stay in Country Garden or in her house as she think that she has “already been to all the places around”, so now she is not that interested in going out. She would only go out to places nearby Country Garden for dinning or sometimes to Clifford Estate. She told me now that there were less people up there,, the quality of the restaurants in the clubhouses has also dropped, both in terms of price and service. So she would go out to eat usually, and she also gives a quite typical comment on the price of those restaurants outside, “you know, there are about ten of us, but it does not even cost us \$100, and all the dishes are real big!” She also does not use the amenities in the clubhouse very often, except for swimming, which she did rather often at first. She would also go to the barber’s shop to wash her hair. Now that she finds the prices of the shops outside are much lower, and the quality is somehow the same, so she does not even go for hair wash anymore.*

*The eldest sister does not renovate the house, but leaves it exactly the way it is provided. She rationalizes/explains, “for the general standard it’s ok...hum...acceptable. If you don’t ask for too much, it’s really ok. As I only want it for vacation, so no refurnishing is*



*needed to make it so beautiful.” Furniture did not come with the house at the time when the eldest sister bought the house, so she had to buy it herself. She chose not to buy it in the clubhouse and followed her sisters to a town quite far away to buy it, again because of the price. However, she does not seem to see this as a smart move as she said, “there are so many choices there indeed, but the quality of the bargain furniture was not too high. And if you wanna buy something good, the prices’ not quite different from those of that in the clubhouse, just like the price in Hong Kong.”*

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The case of the eldest sister is quite a typical discourse in regard to the people buying Mainland houses. First of all, she is from the working class, but it is a stable job. It is the same with her husband. Their living environment in Hong Kong is not satisfactory indeed, and the family of four only live in a 400 sq. ft. unit public house. There is also an obvious contrast in terms of the area between their house currently dwelling and the house in Country Garden, in addition to the presence of a private garden. One might be tempted to view this as the typical case and wrap up the story by concluding that the eldest sister is fulfilling her unfulfilled dream in Hong Kong. In fact the eldest sister is quite explicit about this strategy, “In Hong Kong, in the future I dunno, but for now I know the chances (of buying such a house) are really slim.” And “because (we/I) don’t have it in Hong Kong, so I bought one which is a little bit more expensive than I should have bought.”

But even if we focus on the issue of fulfilling the dream of owning a decent house, it is not only about how people came to own the house but also the subsequent activities attached to the house of how the house is really consumed in the longer term (although

the background of how one came to own the house in this case indeed affects the activities attached to it). To own the house is only the first step towards fulfilling the dream, which is the way the eldest sister sees it as she thinks that the house is only meaningful if she can visit it continuously. She described her 5<sup>th</sup> sister's house as "wasted" as the 5<sup>th</sup> sister has not been to the house for quite some time.

It was rather interesting to note that, during the interview, the eldest sister never used the term 'home' to describe the house, which other informants occasionally did. She also does not renovate or refurnish the house. In other words, she neither personalizes nor regards it as reflecting her own aesthetics or order of things. We can see that the eldest sister uses plastic furniture for the living room which one would only find at poolside or some holiday inn (figure 5.1). The only decorated corner is the cabinet of the AV set, the corner that she and her husband used the most as both of them would spend much time listening to music or watching TV in the house besides sleeping. It is complete with a flower basket, and a pair of Hello Kitty dolls on the TV, etc (figure 5.2). Moreover, the eldest sister defines the house quite clearly as "for vacation only". She simply does not have the intention to identify herself with the house to make it a reflection of her existence. For the time being, the social reality is the main obstacle between her and the chance of enjoying the house more fully. She has to work during week days in Hong Kong and her husband's job makes it difficult for him to be off work on public holidays or at weekend. She thus has to compromise by going up less frequently. But even if one day this obstacle is removed, it still does not mean that the eldest sister would make it her home. After all, she is not planning to retire up there, and only treats it as "one more place to go when she is retired."



Figure 5.1: The plastic furniture



Figure 5.2: the decorated TV set

This might seem contradictory: on one hand, the house is the compensation for the eldest sister's unfulfilled dream, yet she keeps a distance from the house and does not treat it like a home on the other.

From what has transpired from our conversation, I can easily sense that she is quite aware of the mainstream discourse. The mainstream discourse is obviously the backdrop of her understanding of the action of buying a Mainland house. She employs quite often the phrase "Like people say". She uses this when she describes there are less people in the estates compared to five or six years ago ("people say that it is because the economic environment is worse..."), introduces her experience to me ("like people say 'enjoying the world'"), or even when she reviews the decision made ("not as regarding as people say"). She is simply too aware of the presence as well as the contents of the mainstream discourse in regard to Hong Kong people buying Mainland houses. So much so that every single choice or explanation that the eldest sister makes, she is making it vis-à-vis the mainstream discourse, no matter she is for or against it.

The mainstream discourse reveals every secret behind the mechanism of this partial fulfillment of the Hong Kong dream, which makes the whole situation explicit in front of the owners of Mainland houses. Knowing that she bought the house at Country Garden only because she could not buy one in Hong Kong, the eldest sister is so realistic about the positioning of the house. Although the mainstream discourse plays a major part in influencing her attitude towards the house as well as the subsequent activities attached to it, this is not yet a sufficient and decisive element.

In fact, for the Leung family, buying a house in the Mainland is never a merely a solution to the economic limitations of the individual, this is also true in the case of the eldest sister. She told me that in the past when she saw the ads, she “liked them a lot”, but she would not buy it on her own. She would only buy it when others had already already bought a house there. She thought it would be boring if she had to “take the train on her own”, which she describes as “dumb”. Because of this family background, she almost never goes up solely with her husband. After describing all the activities she would usually do up there, the eldest sister at last concluded that the houses (she addressed the several houses that she and her sisters owned together as a whole) was a place for all her brother and sisters to meet and chat.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Sister: A touch of home**

*The 4<sup>th</sup> sister works in the trading industry, which requires her to travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and also other places in the world. But we will soon discover that this is not the main pull factor for her to buy a house in Mainland. According to her, although she should have bought the house at the same time with the eldest sister, namely 1999, she nevertheless bought it one year later in 2000 . Her unit is on the*

*ground floor of a small residential building. It has an L-shape private garden fenced up from the other occupants of the same building (similar to the one of the eldest sister, except for the size of the private garden, as the one of the eldest sister can only be regarded as a lawn). The area of the unit is about 700 sq. ft., similar to the one the 4<sup>th</sup> sister has in Hong Kong; but the garden is 2000 sq. ft. in size with a pavilion, a fishpond, and a Christmas tree at the entrance. It took her almost a month to make the decision to buy the house; the main concern of her was whether the house would be really “useful” for her and her husband. She intended to buy it for vacation, but might also use it for retirement. She told me that,*

*“after all it is the question of standard of living. (I/we) may not have the money to migrate to other places, so moving back to the Mainland would be a good choice. Moreover, in Hong Kong (I/we) may not be able to afford such a big house.”*

*She also thinks maybe she would buy a bigger one if she would really spend her retired life up there in Country Garden.*

*The 4<sup>th</sup> sister is the only one among her sisters that does not reduce the frequency of going up; she goes up every one and a half month, which remains “almost the same over the last 5 years.” The only difference is that in the first few years she would go up with her friends but now it just rarely happens. For most of the time she would goes up with her husband, and would only goes up with other family members twice or thrice a year. She seldom gets out of the area of Country Garden, except for going out to eat. She thinks all the restaurants in the clubhouses are not good enough. So she spends most of the time in her house, as*

*she said that the main purpose of going up is to take a rest. When up there, she would usually read and watch movies in the house, or help her husband do the gardening. Taking care of the private garden is the most favorite activity of the 4<sup>th</sup> sister's husband, who actually spends most of his time on that. One time I went up with them during Chinese New Year. It was at the end of January), but the 4<sup>th</sup> sister's husband still brought up a lot of Christmas decoration for his garden. Mr. and Mrs. Leung, the 4<sup>th</sup> sister and I all together helped him finish the decoration work immediately after we got there.*

*So it is not surprising that the garden is the place that they alter the most in the house. They change one fifth of the grass into rock ground and also patch a small path from the entrance to the back of the garden via the pond and pavilion. There is relatively little change inside the house; the 4<sup>th</sup> sister has only changed some of the lights and water tapes, something that she considers might pose some problem in the future (“you know those Mainland stuffs”). She also bought the furniture from a big furniture market nearby. It was one of her relatives in Shunde who took her there. She also chose the furniture for the 5<sup>th</sup> sister as well. The furniture in her living room is all made of vine that apparently is of the same set. Although her house has much more decoration and displays when compared with the houses of her sisters, the 4<sup>th</sup> sister still thinks that her house has nothing at all.*

*The 4<sup>th</sup> sister also does not visit the clubhouses of Country Garden much, as she said that those clubhouses are just “not suitable for her”. She does not even swim in the club as she quite worries about its hygiene. She also cannot find playmates for ball games as well. Her daughter quite enjoys bowling in the clubhouse, but she is not really into it, so*

*most of the time she would just sit aside and watch while her daughter is playing. But this is not a common case, as her daughter does not go up often with them. She also thinks that the service of the clubhouse has been deteriorating given that there are less people up there.*

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The background of the 4<sup>th</sup> sister again matches a common *factor* that is believed to be peculiar to the people who buy houses in the PRD—that her job requires her to travel quite frequently between the PRD and Hong Kong. Having a house in the Mainland can be convenient for her when she needs to stay up there. But we also find that she did not buy the house for that particular purpose. In fact the house is detached from her work, and the house is designated for her to take rest or relax.

Unlike some other people that would choose to have a rather tight schedule in these housing estates, the 4<sup>th</sup> sister chooses to read or stay in the house instead. She told me although she may sometime watch movie when she is home, she really does not have the time and mood for reading in Hong Kong, as it is usually quite late when she gets back from work, and also a lot of housework awaits her.

Although home as a retreat (from work) is quite central to many people's conception of home, it never happens in such a clear-cut manner in reality. Since the time of industrialization, and further with urbanization and urban planning, work is allocated away from home, but work still direct or indirectly controls the home life. The time and space at home is still under the influence of work (Cross 1997), as for the 4<sup>th</sup> sister, her work determines the time she can spend at home. People are also engaged in paid or unpaid work at home, especially women (Mallet 72). Regardless of whether one can

afford a big house, owning a house to relax oneself remains an unachievable dream in Hong Kong. The house in the Mainland provides an opportunity for the 4<sup>th</sup> sister to experience this ideal side of home. The Mainland house is genuinely a theme park of home. To say that it is a theme park does not only mean that people go there to have fun and forget the real world but also that, like Disneyland, those housing estates provide a simplified version of real life.

There is no housework to be done in the house, the minimal housework that one has to do is transformed into a personal enjoyment (such as the limited amount of gardening work). The 4<sup>th</sup> sister hires a housemaid to clean the house before they come. She also has a gardener to help her maintain the 2000 sq. ft. garden. The effort that the 4<sup>th</sup> sister's husband needs to make on the garden is thus carefully kept at a pleasant level; the short time span also ensures that the garden provides carefree enjoyment. As the 4<sup>th</sup> sister admitted, "only 2-3 days, it's hard to find any problem." The 4<sup>th</sup> sister also takes the advantage of enjoying the ideal time at home in her Mainland house as well. She can read some books, something that, as far as she is concerned, is pathetically a luxury in Hong Kong. So every time the 4<sup>th</sup> sister and her husband come to the controlled and prepared Mainland house is an opportunity for them to experience their ideal side of home.

The search for an ideal home could be a never ending story, so could the search for its simulacra. The 4<sup>th</sup> sister always views this as an unfinished project. When talking about her house, she always said that "wait until the house is refurbished", or "but now I haven't refurbished the house yet, so..." She often expresses the regret that she does not have the time for that yet. This goes to show that the 4<sup>th</sup> sister's wish to personalize the



experience, but it also reveals another fact. The Mainland house at last becomes more of a reality, as one can see from the 4<sup>th</sup> sister that, to refurbish her house starts to become a burden in her time management. This is a more critical problem for her another sister.

### **5<sup>th</sup> sister: The first and the first-to-be-abandoned house**

*The 5<sup>th</sup> sister, as it is called by all the other people in the Leung family, is obviously, the sister of Mr. Leung. She is the first one among the Leung's sisters to buy a house in Country Garden. At first she had difficulty in recalling the year that she bought the house. After some effort of trying to remember, she was eventually sure that it was 1998. Her unit at Country Garden is 1020 sq. ft., on the fourth floor, with a balcony; whereas the apartment that she now living in Mongkok (Hong Kong) is 200 sq. ft. only. The 5<sup>th</sup> sister herself made a comment that it is "a very big contrast" after telling me the information. She also stated and repeated several times that "it is hard to get such a big house in Hong Kong." Although almost all the other family members refer to the same story about the father as the origin of the desire to buy a house in Country Garden, or the fact that the 5<sup>th</sup> sister was the protagonist who made the decision, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister has another story to tell,*

*"One morning when I was having breakfast, I read the newspaper and saw the promotion (ad). I thought it was a good ad. You know, I live in Mongkok, and their showroom is in Mongkok as well. It's just around the corner, very convenient. So I went and checked it out, I found that it was not too much of a burden, as the first installment cost only \$10,000! The demonstrating models there were very beautiful as well. And, you know, it's only a couple hundred bucks a month!"*

*The “second reason”, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister added, was the location, as Country Garden is situated in Shunde. Her hometown is Shunde, she told me that there was a “hometown affection” despite the fact that she knew nothing about her hometown at that time. She said that it had got to be her hometown if she wanted to buy a house in Mainland. Only after all this she mentioned about her father, albeit saying only that “my father’s a Shunde people, I bought (a house in) Shunde, so he’s happy too,” without bringing up the story about his father sudden resumption of contact with the relatives in hometown, and his stay in hotels.*

*When the 5<sup>th</sup> sister first bought the house, she went up more frequently (once every 2 to 3 months, although it was considered as not frequent by other informants). At that time she often brought her friends up there, now she seldom does that. Although some of her friends also have houses up there, they have never met up there. The frequency dropped three years after she have owned the house. The 5<sup>th</sup> sister now hardly goes up once a year, attributing it to the fact that is now studying, therefore she has to take exams every public holiday and so does not have the time to go up. Another main reason is that she has to take care of her 4 dogs, which makes it quite impossible for her to travel. She emphasizes several times that this is only because of her personal situation, in spite of the fact that she thinks there is nothing wrong with Country Garden. The house is now practically abandoned. Besides the 5<sup>th</sup> sister’s low frequency of going up, she will not go to her own house even when she goes up. She usually stays at her sister’s house, because she does not even bother to climb the stairs. The 5<sup>th</sup> sister also notices that there are far fewer people up there, and thinks this is “no good”. Although in the past it was quite crowded and there were long queues no matter what one wanted to do, less people just*

*makes the 5<sup>th</sup> sister feels less safe. She also discerns that less people contributes mainly to the downgrading of the service at the clubhouse (she shares the same stance on this matter with the eldest sister and the 4<sup>th</sup> sister).*

*As far as the interior design and decoration of her house are concerned, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister did not refurbish the house and totally accepted the interior done by the developer (the 5<sup>th</sup> sister considers the interior as one of the things that she was most satisfied with regarding her house). She did not even buy the furniture by her self, but asked her relatives to buy it for her. She also does not bring anything up for ornamental displays.*

*The 5<sup>th</sup> sister now has a stable routine when she is up there. She would have massage, go dining every time, stroll in the parks, watch some movies (DVDs) in the house together with the family, and chat with her sisters and brothers. She said that as she is “lazy”, she seldom goes out to Guangzhou or Shunde nowadays, as she “has already paid a visit and taken a look at those places around, and it doesn’t mean much to go there anymore.” But this does not mean that the 5<sup>th</sup> sister spends most of the time inside Country Garden. In fact, she spends half of the time in the area surrounding Country Garden. Many of the activities mentioned above took place outside Country Garden, where she thinks both the price and quality are better when compared to the clubhouses in Country Garden. She would only use the library at the clubhouse; it is because she can read some Mainland magazines which she rarely reads in Hong Kong. She is just not interested in other amenities such as bowling or squash (as listed by her), except she may swim sometimes.*

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If the eldest sister represents a more general background (mainly economic) which

conforms to the public perception of buying a mainland house, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister has her generality concerning her usage of the house. Like many other people, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister does not go up to the house at all, which contributes to the somehow deserted scene now one can find in many of the residential properties in the PRD. When the 5<sup>th</sup> sister tries to make sense of the fact why less people go up now, she explains it through the context of the overall economic environment of Hong Kong:

“When I bought it the (economic) condition was better, but you know, now it’s just worse, far worse. Going up once won’t cost too much, perhaps \$600-\$700 per person, but then you calculate yourself how much it would cost a whole family.”

Although the 5<sup>th</sup> sister herself has personal and particular reasons for reducing the frequency of going up, she sees others’ situations as connected to a more general and wider context.

There is an interesting point concerning the different stories told by Mr. and Mrs. Leung, other sisters, and that by the 5<sup>th</sup> sister herself. The story of their father has now become more of an “official” story of the family, which is obviously formulated and has been circulated among the extended family members. Being the first one to buy the house, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister is thus at the center of the narrative. However, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister chooses another completely irrelevant scene within life as the background of buying a Mainland house. In fact we can find that the stories that they tell about the reasons for buying resemble the situation when they bought the house. What the 5<sup>th</sup> sister has described is a solitary scene of how a person is struck by an ad during having breakfast alone, which characterizes an individual concern. As a matter of fact the 5<sup>th</sup> sister bought the house on

her own, while others all view this as a group activity among the siblings. Other sisters believe that the houses that they individually bought are all connected with this story. We have also to pay attention that this “father story” is used to explain the *origin* of all of the houses they buy only, as others also have their own reasons for buying their own houses. This is particularly true for Mr. and Mrs. Leung, as they do not have their own reason of buying (since they have not bought one). Therefore they provide the most detailed version of the story. By contrast, for the 5<sup>th</sup> sister, there must have been a prehistory, i.e. the chance encounter with the Mainland house ads during breakfast. Prior to this, she must have seen other ads of Mainland houses, and she also definitely knows the “father story” but she chooses the breakfast as the defining moment for taking action. Although with this difference of the narration about the origin of buying the Mainland house (between individual and extended family), the 5<sup>th</sup> sister is no different from her sisters in “going-up”. She sees this as entirely a group activity, and she just hangs around with her sisters all the time almost every time when she is up in Country Garden. As her “using rate” (in the 5<sup>th</sup> sister’s own words) drops lower, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister seems to regret her casual decision of buying the house. She thinks that she had simply failed to do more investigation on the information. Neither had she thought it through enough. As she is confessing this, she also complains that she does not even know that there is a cement factory at the back of the hill that her house is facing, which makes her house rather dusty from time to time. She so deeply regrets that she sums up the whole experience as a “very stupid decision”.

In such a congested living environment like Hong Kong, owning space is one of the important parts of the ideal home/house dream. This is well illustrated by the 5<sup>th</sup> sister’s

evaluation of the house. During a conversation, she repeats thrice that she owns a 1000 ft. house “...to *have* an 1000 ft. house, 1000 ft., so it is a house of 1000 ft., and so I’m happy with it, to *have* such a big house (emphasis mine).” What is worth taking note is that she chooses the words “to have” instead of “to live in” such a big house. To own a big house is a status marker in Hong Kong. It may not be as effective in the Mainland, it nevertheless generates a feeling of well-being to the owner, at least for the 5<sup>th</sup> sister. In the beginning, the 5<sup>th</sup> sister thought that owning was already sufficient for accomplishing the Hong Kong dream of “owning a big house”.

When purchasing a house, the buyer does not divide clearly between owning the house and the space and actually enjoying them. One would have the preoccupation that owning implies enjoying. But for Hong Kong people, the Mainland house is completely different. In the case of the 5<sup>th</sup> sister, she soon found out that the house just did not fit into her everyday life; it has now become a side project of her weekends, which requires her effort and planning. Her present situation makes her feel that she cannot fully enjoy the big house. She may still own the house, but without being able to enjoy it, the house gradually means less and less to her, to the extent that she does not even bother to go to take a look at the big house that she still owns when she goes up.

### **The Lee couple: The Extended Hong Kong Community**

*Mrs. Lee is not a member of the Leung Family. She is in her fifties, now retired; her husband is still working at a bank. They bought an apartment in Royal Garden (帝豪花園) of Zhangmutou in 2000. Royal Garden’s tagline, “Hong Kong people’s Home”, is part of the housing estate’s logo. Mrs. Lee told me her husband had always been deeply interested in buying a house in the Mainland long before they actually made the move*

*and bought the house Zhangmutou. Since then Mr. Lee often brings her along whenever he travels to the PRD to take a look at the many houses there. She was however not interested at that time, because she thought that it would soon become boring as there were only two of them. She also foresaw that they would soon stop going up there. Mrs. Lee changed her mind as some of her friends bought houses in Royal Garden too. She thought that with friends around, they could hang out together up there. Her friends bought houses up there are all from the same group, who came to know each other from their singing class.*

*Not to wait for me to ask her, Mrs. Lee could not wait to tell me her short story about her friend's sister Wai who was toying with the idea of buying a house in the Mainland;*

*“The husband of Sister Wai was a smoker; he was a smoker at that time. He doesn't smoke now, because he's sick. There was a place for people to smoke, and also for children to play, there were swings there also. Sister Wai's husband went there to smoke, and she found that it's beautiful there, and the environment cozy. He was hence intrigued into wanting to check it out ...”*

*Again sister Wai was the first among Mrs. Lee's friends to buy a house there. There are now seven couples who have houses up there. Since there were friends up there, it did not take much time for Mr. and Mrs. Lee to make up their mind and bought the house. But they did struggle a bit though, as they did have some worries despite having friends up there. The house they wanted to buy belonged to the second phase of the housing estate, which was not yet built. “Wah! It was only some hills, the Mainland's stuff, you know...yeah, they draw it really beautifully, but how can I know it'd really be like this? How can I know if the materials they use are good?” This worry was only solved when*

*Mr. Lee went to the showroom in Mongkok to find out more about the estates.*

*When it comes to the interior of the apartment, Mrs. Lee said it was already all-done when they moved in. The developer provided them with some basic furniture as well, which she described as “you can just take a suitcase and then move in to live.” But she chose not to take the furniture that came with the house, and she got the refund for it. She took the money to buy the furniture she wanted in Zhangmutou by herself. She also revamped the interior of the house, saying it would then be “all white” if the wall was not re-painted. She was also afraid that the paint used by the developer was not good enough and might have some problem in the future. She felt more assured after the wall was painted over.*

*Mrs. Lee said that she and Mr. Lee “very seldom” go up there on their own. Almost always, they go up with a group of friends. And usually they have about 10 people or more going up together.*

*Except for holidays, the Lee couple and their friends would stay there for two days most of the times. They usually go up on Saturday and come back on Sunday, as many of the couples all have at least one member that is not retired and has to work on weekdays.*

*The Lee couple have also reduced the frequency of going up. Unlike others like Mr. and Mrs. Leung who seldom go up now, Mr. and Mrs. Lee still go up about once month, which is rather regular..*

*Mr. Lee told me that they follow a similar routine every time they go up there. Usually they will go up when Mr. Lee is off from work on Saturday, and it will be about dinnertime when they get there. So they will have dinner with their friends. After dinner, if it is not too late, say before 9pm, they would go to one of the friends’ houses to for a*



*chat or some karaoke. They would also plan when they would go for “yum cha” in downtown Zhangmutou the next day. Next day after “yum cha”, they either hang out separately or, more often than not, go for some karaoke together. This was exactly what they did when I spent one weekend with them.*

*Regarding going out for lunch, Mrs. Lee said that “the estate itself does not has this kind of stuff, it is purely for living.” She also thinks that the clubhouse has nothing, and considers it as “just a showroom”. In fact there are different kinds of amenities including a tennis court and a swimming pool. Although Mrs. Lee is aware of this, she nevertheless told me that given the tight schedule up there, “How would there be anytime to play with that.”*

*Karaoke aside, the Lees and their friends would go to Guangzhou if they go up during public holidays, when they can stay a little longer. They also have other activities. Once they went to an elderly house nearby Zhangmutou to do voluntary work. As they are themselves in a choir, they presented a performance by singing some old songs for the old people and their relatives. After that Mrs. Lee told me that she thought it was quite successful. She was still quite happy while mentioning this during the interview. In fact they have been doing this sometimes back in Hong Kong, as their choir and singing class is affiliated with an NGO.*

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In chapter 3 I argued that the advertisements or ad magazines are on the one hand promoting the particular housing property, but in fact they also have the general function of promoting the whole business of buying houses in the Mainland. The case of Mrs. Lee illustrates this very well, and it reveals another function of those ads as well. I asked

her about her impression of the ads on her house. At first, she answered me, “it’s still being shown; you can also get the leaflet in Mongkok.” Then she told me, “I watch those ads on TV (of Royal Garden) only after buying the house. It is because in the past we went to the place to watch how it was, so why bother watching the ads.”

Although she had seen some ads or ad-magazines about Mainland houses before, she did not pay much attention to them. The particular ads of Royal Garden was simply not outstanding, as she considered all the ads about Mainland houses were the same to her at that time, giving her only the general impression that “there are many houses in the Mainland for Hong Kong people”. The lifestyle that those ad-magazines try to construct also has no effect on her, as we can see the interesting fact that Mrs. Lee described the clubhouse as a showroom in spite of the fact that she is aware of the tennis courts and the swimming pool there. Mrs. Lee ignores this because those amenities just mean nothing to her. Those ads have a meaning to her only after she got a house there, the ads become a means of giving her psychological pleasure. In fact they provide a way for her to appreciate the house she has when she is away from it; they are also *another* way for her to appreciate the house. Those ads also function as a souvenir of her ownership, through which she can remind her experience as well as sharing it with others. Her daughter, Ms. Lee, once complained to me that her mother *forced* them (she and her sister) to watch the ad of the house every time it is showing.

In the Mainland house the Lee couple do not purposely seek for a new community attached to the new house and its surroundings. First of all they do not know the neighbors there. Mrs. Lee said they would greet or say “good morning” when they saw them and then “That’s all”; they do not really know them personally. The only person

she knows in her building is her friend who is also from the same group. In fact this does not happen by coincidence. Mr. and Mrs. Lee's friends all have this kind of tendency of buying a house nearby their friends' houses. The Lees are a good example, as they would not even consider buying a house in the Mainland until some of their friends had done so. Others are also alike. Several friends of her are now having houses in the same building. Mrs. Lee told me that as they did not buy the houses at the same time, so not all of them could buy a house that was near their friends'. One of them could not find one below or above his/her friend, although she/he still managed to buy a unit in the building opposite to his/her friend.

So we can see that the Lees and their friends try to reproduce their community in Hong Kong instead. Besides the connection of the singing class, they are all living in the same district in Southern district back in Hong Kong. They already have the connectedness with land and house instead of just joining the same club, so the nature of their community is not even changed. The members of the community are not changed as well. Their whole community is then temporary displaced to Zhangmutau from time to time. Moreover, the activities they have in Zhangmutau are also an extension of their Hong Kong lifestyle. They would "yum cha", sing karaoke, or do voluntary performance; all these activities are in fact what they would do in Hong Kong. The community they have in Zhangmutau is in fact the extension of their community in Hong Kong.

Although house is often associated with family, we cannot see the strong presence of family in Mrs. Lee and her friends' cases. Sometimes their sons and daughters may go with them, but only occasionally. The others family members are seldom involved with

the house. When I asked Ms. Lee why she does not spend much time with her mother by going up with her, Mrs. Lee just answer for her daughter that, “just don’t need her to stay with me, I have so many things to do up there.” So the overwhelming presence of family with the house is not a must, especially in cases whereby the owners of the house are not genuinely living in it. The community-based situation defines the meaning of those houses and the activities around it more according to the peer group instead of family. Although the owners of those houses are married couples, the usages of them are not. As Mrs. Lee told me that they “very seldom” stay in the house, except for sleeping or when sometimes all the people go to their houses to sing karaoke.

### ***Conclusion***

The several cases above allow us to compare the differences and similarities of the meanings of the Mainland houses when attached to extended family and peer group. The extended family and peer group in Hong Kong are translated into another community up there; in which the ownerships are based on household unit, and the experiences are interacting between household and the group. But this is a new household-unit apart from the one in Hong Kong (although the categorizing of whom belongs to extended family and who is part of an immediate family is defined by the original household unit). The defining unit is not family, and not even nuclear family living in the same house, as we can see the minimal involvement of dependent children in these cases. Family is obviously not the main theme. The new household unit is actually couple-based.

Bloch presents in the study of marriage of the Zafimaniry in Madagascar that ‘Marriage actually forms the core of the unit, a unit which is identified with the material house (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 71)’ Critics have also discerned how a house acts as a mediator

between independence of couple, especially between the newlywed and the wider kin. For many young adults, getting away from the parental home helps to establish some kind of independence, and provides a public expression of the legitimacy of the couple's relationship (Mason 106). So in a sense we can say that the house makes the couple; and in the cases of the Mainland houses, 'the couple' is always the basic unit to have interaction with the wider group. Mr. and Mrs. Leung's case demonstrates the subtle tension between couple and extended family, and also how the space itself is constantly switching between the two. Mrs. Lee's group illustrates this very well, as all the household units are made up of couples. Of course this points to only one aspect of the house. When occasionally different family members are involved in the trip, the setting would be changed accordingly.

Different groups would also generate different meanings associated and connected with the land. Members of the Leung family all make connection with the house and homeland, Shunde. Some of them explicitly point out the original land of the kinship as the reason beside all these. This even affected the story that they told. The contradiction between the 'reason-story' of the 5<sup>th</sup> sister and that of others already reveals that; the stories do not reveal the true reason behind the decision to buy, but rather the group's conception of the whole event. So the Leung family tends to construct this as a need of the family. An interesting point is that for the Leung family, although the extended family is the setting, none of them explicitly elevates the new form of community to the level of family. They generally put it as "sisters and brothers gathering together and having fun." Another interesting point is that none of them has the house next to each other, and each of them has a distinct type of house among the group. There may be

many reasons for it, such as individual preferences or affordability, as in these housing estates, different types of house are allocated in different places. It can also be because of the time lag of purchasing—so the nearby houses are all sold out and the other members have to choose from other phases. In spite of all these reason, this still points to the fact that matching the individual household's need with ability is more important than building up a new spatially reconnected family. Another possibility is that this is a deliberate execution of theirs, and the untold reason behind may be that they want a level of independence and privacy of the household, in which the physical location can help them to control the level of this. In this sense other extended family members are in a way viewed as the public, in which we can find some other parallel facts.

The daughter of Mrs. Lee told me that she found it strange as in Hong Kong her parents are reluctant to invite friends to their home despite that they have a house in Hong Kong which is decent in size and not at all embarrassing. Once in the Mainland, they become so generous in inviting others to their house. One of their friends, Mr. Wong, told me that he would often lend his keys to his friends to go up on their own.

The major event for the Lees' group of friends (singing karaoke) happens mainly inside one of their houses. The same house is constantly switching between a site for group gathering and a private shelter. So the private space provided by the house is only valid at a certain time, but not strictly defined by the physical house. When they are discussing about whose house they should go, instead of using the word "home", they would say "Let's go to my *house* this time", From this we can say that they treat the Mainland house as merely a house that they own instead of their "home/house".

Previous discussion has already shown that using home/house to define the public and

the private is problematic, as the actual situation always reminds us that they are not that mutually exclusive. However, this remains significant analytically as we can see that people's treatment and understanding of house are still based on the dichotomy of the private/public. This is especially true when we compare and contrast their treatment between their Mainland house and their house/home in Hong Kong. The conception of the Hong Kong house as home makes them tend to carefully keep the private boundary, so as to limit and control others' access. For the Mainland house, many of the informants invite me to "take a look" without hesitation. This is also due to their conception of the Mainland house as part of a public site, and as a part of group activities.

Many of the informants show the incentive to wait for other people to buy it first, or in a way they see the purchasing of a Mainland house as a group activity. This shows that the discourse of portraying Mainland house consumption as an individual struggle for social position is insufficient. For both the Leung family and Mrs. Lee's group, this new geography of their group is in fact an extension of Hong Kong community. The buying of the Mainland house can be seen as the extension of group activities of the family and peer group, in which the core members of the group do not change. Mrs. Lee's group even has the same activity that they have in Hong Kong up there. Not surprisingly, they both use the houses and the environment to tackle the problem they are not able to fix in Hong Kong, or to make it better. For such a big group, the main problem is on the physical space. Moreover, the new house in a new place does not bring about a new community. Many of the owners do not know their neighbors, unless the neighbor is one's friend (Mrs. Lee's group). The Mainland house is never considered as having this

function, for it is thought as a means to bring changes to the original community.

This extension of Hong Kong community has two meanings: it includes both the empirical community as well as the imagined community. The later one is supported by the prerequisite of thinking that “Hong Kong” as one’s own community, which involves both everyday life and more importantly imagination of cultural community. This underpins the sense of extension of the imagined community of the Mainland house. So no matter how exotic the design theme is, it will always be branded as “Designed for Hong Kong people” and the presence of many Hong Kong people can give the owners a sense of security, for this is one of the fundamental promises that a community offers. This meaning is further reinforced by having the similar Hong Kong lifestyle, as “yum char (drinking tea)”, watching DVD at home/house and playing Mahjong are still the most favorite activities of the owners.

de Certeau (1984) introduces the consumer’s “make do”, emphasis on its creativity in dealing with the obstacles of physical and social realities. The appropriation of space is always the means for consumer to resist the indifferently provided space. The housing estates in the PRD are also such a space, with all the details calculated and controlled. They emphasize on the selling of a holistic system of living in which everything is prepared, and convenient is the keyword for this experience. But the house owners often find this standardized and systematic environment contradicts their rhythms and needs. Housework service is a big selling point of the Mainland house, but many informants think that the fixed schedule of cleaning does not suit their need. They are also annoyed by the time wasted on the time lag. So many of them drop the service and make private



deal with the home servants at a lower or similar price, so they can have the service any time they want. However, from another angle we can see that the owners of Mainland houses do not have a straight political agenda toward the system.

The “make do” concerns not only about the retuning of the system to suit the personal rhythm of life, it is also about the making of meaning. The decoration of the house/home is an important way for the owner to put personal marks on it; the strategy of providing the house with interior fix up is hindering this. Many of the informants accept the interior generally, what they usually do is to fix the parts which they think may have problems in future (water tape, wall paints). They would at most choose their own furniture, and as a matter of fact many of them are quite satisfied with the provided interior of the house. Hence, the constraint of standardization of the house holds no meaning for the owner, unless when they feel uncomfortable and also the necessity to make it the way they want.

The contradiction between space and practice does not have to be conscious. The everyday living would itself disclose the discontent between life and provided environment. Clubhouse together with the environment is another main selling point of many Mainland houses. There is a difference between the presentations of the two, as clubhouse usually hints a lifestyle with a connotation of social status. Many of the ads come with the implication that buying the physical house, and with it the membership, equals to buying the lifestyle. Unfortunately, the clubhouse does not appeal to most of the informants.

One of the main reasons is that the clubhouses are all in bad form. The quality and maintenance of the amenities are unsatisfactory, which resembles many informants’

preoccupation of “Mainland’s stuff”. This first of all discourages the house owner from having confidence or incentive in enjoying those amenities. Many informants also complain about the bad service at the clubhouses. The physical quality of the clubhouse as a whole is also a big problem: many of them are not very big for a main building, but they would have a strange combination of all sorts of things. A clubhouse would at the same time have the basic shops such as restaurants, but would also have a showroom of the housing estate, occupying a large area near the entrance; it would also have furniture shops. The dim lighting and the messed up display of some the shops both fail to associate them with anything about social status.

But what is more important is that most of the informants told me that those clubhouses just do not suit them. Although many of them have tried to enjoy them that way, soon they find that swimming in the pool or playing golf all day is just not their cup of tea. Some of the informants find that the idea of relaxation is also contradictory to their philosophy, as they prefer to have fun and have a tight schedule. Through spending the time there they discover the discrepancy between buying and having the life. This strongly deduces the production of pleasure through *visiting* the house.

The clubhouse and the surrounding environment was originally attractive to the informants, it is the “play” vis-à-vis the boring quotidian in Hong Kong. But the informants soon lost their interest in these new things soon, as they found difficulty in enjoying them regularly. The trip to the Mainland house became less exciting too. Many informants liked to add the phrase “every time is just like that” at the end of their description of the activities up there. Some of them said, “we have already seen all the places around” in order to explain why they do not go out to the nearby city centers now.

For some of them the time at the Mainland house has its own routine, and there is not that much fun after all. This is the reason for certain informants to go up less and less.

Some of them, especially the 4<sup>th</sup> sister, found that the house demanded much ongoing participation on her part. The Mainland house was originally a new means to transform the leisure life as a compensation for work, but the 4<sup>th</sup> sister and her husband cannot manage the timing between their holidays and works, and sometimes the holidays of their relatives. The 5<sup>th</sup> sister's decision to continue her education made it hard for her to find time to go up, and she also could not leave her beloved dogs behind. From their words we can sense how much they regret not being able to enjoy the house as much as they want. The houses have now become a burden for them. The houses also have their own agency toward the owners, and soon become the "trouble stuff" in some of the informants' words. The most extreme case would be like the one of the 5<sup>th</sup> sister, who has completely given up the project and avoided the existence of the Mainland house.

Many of the informants have the incentive to keep the magnitude of their own "Mainland house projects" to a certain degree, i.e. to prevent them from turning into their "trouble stuff". This can be seen from the attitude towards the refurbishment and furniture of their houses.

The activities those informants up there are regular enough to be called routine. There are not two everyday lives we are talking about, of which one is up there while another is in Hong Kong. Everyday life encompasses them both, as everyday life *is* the connection between two spaces. Lefebvre has already defined the property of everyday life as follows,

'everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their

differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place [...]’ (Lefebvre 1991a: 97)

This means that we can only make sense of some of the behavior related to the life in Hong Kong. This also explains why the informants tend not to resist the system up there, this is because those owners view their target to refute are the constraints in Hong Kong but not up there. Some of the usages of the Mainland house are specifically targeted toward the owners’ Hong Kong life; such as the search for a space to do karaoke, enjoy relaxing home life, or to gather the extended family together. All of them provide catalyst for the Mainland house to be a creatively tactic to escape from the constraints of Hong Kong.

## **Conclusion**

### **I**

As stated at the very beginning, this thesis is an attempt to fill the gap between the economic and social discourses of Hong Kong—PRD merging with a cultural content. The discourses of the economic and social perspectives are quite parallel and working in tandem to support an official city imagination of Hong Kong—PRD. In this vein, the merging of the region is mentioned only in terms of its economic function. This is in fact a version of the representations of space, which leads to the design of the materialized infrastructure that connects Hong Kong and the PRD to structure around this function. The Mainland house shows how people/users deny this conceptualization of the new geography, and construct their meanings in a completely different way. This meaning production can only be done spatially.

It is through the practice in space, that different cultural elements like cultural identity, mainstream discourse, lifestyle and conception of lifestyle, conception of house, and conception of the new geography can meet together and interact. Moreover, through examining this meaning construction within the multiplicity of social space, it also helps us to see how meanings are produced and reproduced in different ways, and how different layers of them interact with each other.

One of the difficulties in studying the Mainland house is that its situation is ever changing, and any attempt to conclude the meanings at anytime would always seem to be too ambitious. From the first wave to the emergence of numerous unfinished projects, and then to the boom in the early and mid-1990s, till it reaches the more saturated

situation now; the scene is changing every several years. This is at the same time a response to the surrounding environment including the reunification of Hong Kong with the Mainland, the merging of the PRD and the Hong Kong economy, but also the emerging new property markets of the Mainland, such as Beijing and Shanghai. Back in 1983, as much as 80% of the houses that Hong Kong people purchased in the Mainland were in Guangdong; but this has dropped to 40% in 1993 (but there is a big difference concerning the usage of those in the PRD area and those in the upper part of China, and the Hong Kong people's ownership of house in China is still the highest within the PRD). The way of promotion to the Hong Kong market is also changing, as a response to the change in market environment and the culture in Hong Kong as well.

Besides that the behavior connected with the market is changing, the behavior in terms of usage is also changing collectively and individually. Many Hong Kong people now elongate their intervals of going up, thereby creating the scene of desertion in Mainland houses during weekends and holidays. Although this is a collective scene, in this research, I find out that the reasons vary between different individuals. So, the more interesting point is how a single individual changes his/her usage through time. So the very difficulty of this research is a significant challenge as it demonstrates how the Mainland house is a process and site for the owners and people involved to negotiate between different changing realities.

## II

In conducting this study on the phenomenon of the Hong Kong people buying houses in the PRD, I have never seen it as an objective fact for analysis, as I am always aware that I am cutting in from the perspective of a Hong Kong person. First of all I strongly doubt

that if there is an objective and social-meaning-free space ever exists. The more important reason is, as far as I see it, that I believe the whole phenomenon of the Mainland house is a *conceived* and *conceptualized* space by Hong Kong people.

In chapter 4 I have shown how the emergence of suburban gated residential communities is a part of the modernization and urbanization process of China in general and in the PRD in particular. Hong Kong people later on enter the market and then conceptualize and translate the whole situation as a “Hong Kong thing”, albeit with the collaboration the Mainland developers. Some of the owners live their Hong Kong lifestyle up there, but remixed, with the addition of the desirables of Mainland China (such as cuisine, natural environment, air quality etc.); and many seek for the extension of the imagined Hong Kong community up there. This translation and execution have to be put in the context of the Hong Kong—PRD relationship in order for it to make sense, and the meaning of this is threefold. First, it is based on the understanding of the relationship between Hong Kong and China, and also the PRD; then it changes this relationship individually and regionally; and third, it is itself a new relationship that the owners are experiencing. Only under this framework that Hong Kong people would develop certain attitudes and usages towards their houses. But this relationship, or understanding of the relationship, is always specifically done. This conception is mediated by another set of conception, that of house/home. The specific social meaning of house/home in the Hong Kong context to a certain extent determines this conception process. This set of conception is supported and reinforced by the material space, and shapes a unique conception and understanding of Mainland places. It becomes obvious when compared to the experience and social conception on the Shenzhen and nearby

area (dangerous, illegal and obscene—in every sense of the word).

### III

In this case of Mainland house, the material space does not have this meaning or potential of being a “Hong Kong thing”, it is the lived experience that links up and translates the space this way; and through different perspectives (Mainland local/Hong Kong people) it has different meanings.

One of the main target groups for advertising is potential buyers, especially for the product such as soft drink that people would consume it again and again. The ads of this kind of product have the intention to construct and keep the image and symbolic meaning of the product. House ads seem to have nothing to do with the people who have already bought it. But as the ads are being aired on TV day and night, they certainly take part in the field of cultural products, and address everybody regardless of whether one wants to buy the house or not. It enters the cultural reference list of everyday life seamlessly. In previous parts I have discussed that the receiver would creatively reproduce the meaning provided by the ads. Yet we also see that through entering the lived space, it is not only the meaning of the contents that is changed, but the meaning of the form as well. Mrs. Lee appropriates the ads and finds a new meaning of the function of the ads. She now sees the ads of her housing estate as a souvenir of ownership, and also a gadget to share her experience with others.

The ads of Mainland house has a dual quality that touches different moments of space (spatial practice/perceived, representations of space/conceived and representational space/lived). It is on the one hand containing the representations of space, the content of the ad and the space that it “creates” is of course conceived. It is the concept about the



space (near/far, homeland—home/house connection etc); it also has the dominating quality as it represents a common knowledge about the space (of living culture and life). Yet on the other hand, it is also representational and lived, as it is a symbolic reconstruction of the materialized/physical space. Moreover, in the case of Mrs. Lee we can see how the ad becomes a component of everyday life conversation and so is being appropriated in the lived space. Although the meaning of the space provided by the ad is not resisted, the Lees may still agree with the life portrayed in the ad as legitimate and good; the logic of the functioning of the ad is subverted anyway.

#### IV

At this point, a vast picture of how different moments of space interact specifically in the case of the Mainland house emerges. But it is somehow complicated as every one of them is having multiple dynamics with each other, together with other elements like social process. The general picture is like this:

The representations of space directly determine the production of the materialized spatial practice and cultural product (ads). The materialized spatial practice remains the only possible form for the representation of space to reproduce and operate; and the cultural products are aiming at the content of cultural realm (e.g. cultural identity), in which itself is within the cultural field. There are different representations of space, one is that of the planners and (social) architects, outlining the production of dominating space; another is of the owners/users, in which it directs the secondary production of the dominated space. The contents of these different representations of space may overlap occasionally.

The social change directly influences the representation of space and the regional

geography; and the representation of space (such as city imagination) in turn would determine how the social change is undertaken spatially.

On the other hand, the cultural products have impact on owners/users and thus the lived space. The owners/users would receive totally or partially, reject, or creatively reproduce the meaning produced in the cultural product (ads). Through practice in the lived space, owners/users creatively changed the usage of the cultural products as well.

The materialized spatial practice produced under the framework of representation of space directly constrains the possibility of lived experience. But the lived experience remains the only possible form for the *meanings* for both perceived and conceived space to reproduce and operates, as it is the meeting point of the logics/concepts of production and reproduction of space. Through everyday life practice, the owners/users give meanings and reproduce another layer of meaning subversively on the spatial form. This meaning reproduction varies individually and collectively.

Again I want to reiterate the particularity of this interaction process. I am not proposing a general operation process between different moments of space. This is just the process concerning the Mainland house and the Hong Kong—PRD case, as spatial interaction and meaning production are always specific.

This particularity in turns could shed light on the generality of theory. As mentioned in the beginning chapter, the direct application of Lefebvre's model would be inappropriate. This is because the social structure of Hong Kong is very different from the French society that Lefebvre was trying to explain.

I have argued that in Hong Kong the representation of space (conceived space) has

never worked as the philosophical guiding principle. But in Hong Kong the general public's conception of the content of conceived space is always mediated by some other domain. They are the mainstream discourse and the mass media, which are both not covered in the Lefebvre's model. Many people get familiar with the languages of conceived (professionals planners) through the media.

Like what I have stated in Chapter 2, these two mediators cut across the conceived and perceived spaces. They are both translating the ideas and languages of conceived space to the public, as well as being representational at the same time. Moreover, on the one hand they are dominant (but not imperatively authoritative) and serve as a main reference for action, yet on the other hand the people could or at least would have the feeling that they could participate in the negotiation of their contents (especially for the case of mainstream discourse). This appending of the mediators could illustrate better the relationship between different moments of space generally; it is also more suitable to the situation of Hong Kong and the PRD.

## V

The meanings of those Mainland houses are group specific; I have already shown the difference between the context of extended family and peer group. Different groups, and therefore different social relations, tend to determine different meaning connections and associations. This is in fact the fundamental understanding of the space per se; it determines the meaning of the space such as the connection within kinship and space for fun, for individual household group or collective event. This is a new set of concepts applying upon the new found space; but this representation of space controls not the production of space, but the reproduction of space (the usage of the space). It refines the

representations of space represented in the materialized space, provided by the designers, architects and planners (Although Lefebvre categorizes the representation of space as the space of those “professional”, it is true that common people would still constantly absorb it into their understanding of space).

The nature and meaning of the space are not stable or fixed. Although the group context set the backdrop for the actions involved, a subtle interplay between the group and individual is also found. I have pointed out that the nature of the trip would change with the progression of time, but it is also switching from time to time. It is switching between individual household/couple and the wider group. Within the same day, it can be the gathering place for siblings in the afternoon and haven for the couple at night.

As the housing estates are well organized and planned, it is a dominated space that the owners are facing. But only through the dominated space, the possibility of resistance is revealed. They choose and adjust the way of life they are going to have up there. For some owners, the house is a grounded site to negotiate with the mainstream discourse, whether they are aware or unaware. It is also a site to reconcile with different urban realities in Hong Kong, as the house provides them with a new possibility for a new spatial differentiation of activities and time; it is also a refinement in lieu of the ordinary home life/experience.

## VI

The contradiction between the stories provided by the Lee family’s members on the one hand shows the signification of the event. But another more important point that it shows is just as obvious but easily neglected: *informant always has a story to tell*. By this I do not mean that every informant can provide meaningful information to me; on

the contrary, it is important to note that informants all tended to reply me with a story when I asked them for straightforward facts or reasons. Generally there are three kinds of story: first is a background story that happened in a specific period of time (the Father Lee's story); second is not really a story but a description of the overall situation (the one of the eldest sister's husband); third, is a specific scene within the everyday life, the point that the urge of consumption arose (those of the 5<sup>th</sup> sister's and sister Wai's as told by Mr. and Mrs. Lee). One of the common characteristics is that they are constructed and unfold in time.

This is in fact a meeting between two logics of space: the social space and the abstract space of science. Bourdieu (1990) in his work *Logic of Practice* has once criticized the intemporal time of science. In a passage he shows his skepticism toward the common methodology of diagram widely adopted by anthropologist, as he thinks this neglects the dynamics and uncertainties between different "units", for which the "unit" itself is functionally constructed. But what is more important is that the logic of scientific discourse neglects the time, tempo and rhythm within the practical sense. Using diagram as a form of representation is only one of the examples, and the scientific discourse often has this intention of spatialization, and a story is often deconstructed into different attributes, in/dependent variables, or functional units, and being reconstructed into another logic. The off-topics, ruses and surprises are reduced together with time.

To take a close look at the story hence envision the temporal side of the analysis, as well as the practical logic—i.e. how the informant connects different experiences and spheres in their narrations. Of course, the practical logic does not only exist within their narrations, but also *is* their usages and the practice itself. The meaning of the timed

space is only meaningful through practice, when it is temporary fixed and produced.

## VII

The Mainland house shows a particular reality of the Hong Kong-PRD experience. This pilot study also opens up many possibilities for future works.

This project takes the perspective of Hong Kong people, but I think it would definitely be significant to investigate the perspective from the other side. These housing estates as “Mainland houses” could only be significant to Hong Kong people, but they are the genuine home/dwellings for local people, and they represent another unique experience in this new geography. Although this is somehow touched elsewhere in this thesis, a more systematic and full investigation is required; particularly on their stories. This can help us to see how the same physical space is perceived and used differently by different users. Even with the same perspective, there are still some other particular experiences that can be further studied individually. Due to the specific setting and scope of this research, some of the Hong Kong people who have Mainland houses are not covered. For example the retired people who moved up to settle in the housing estates there. All this provides new possibilities to understand the space of the Mainland house.

For the given time frame and the purpose of a focused study, the parameters of this study are set up specifically for pinpointing on a concentrated area. I choose extended family as the intercepting point for the most dominant mythology concerning house and Mainland house. The extended family as well as a contrasting case becomes the population of studying. This approach helps the researcher to be able to have enough time to spend to gain the trust of the informants; the discussion of some of the theoretical issues could also gain depth. But this setting is also a limitation. Different

conclusions about the Mainland houses might result if the choice of cases was altered.

First of all the experiences that Hong Kong people are having with this new geography of Hong Kong—PRD are also multiple. The Mainland house phenomenon shows the new spatial arrangement of the different spheres of work and leisure; but this does not mean that the conception of the geography separated by the border is straightly and simply defined as such. There are also many other Hong Kong people who have their sphere of work spatially encompassed on both sides of the border. Another case is that, although also a new spatial means of arrangement between leisure and work as well as between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Shenzhen experience is a totally different case. The corresponding cultural need with reference to Hong Kong culture is completely different. Moreover, it is also overlapping the cross-border working experience mentioned above.

All these different topics of analysis are providing new interception point of investigation. They provide opportunities to view different realities that happen in this new transformation of urban space, but are not datum to be generalized and translated into one big picture or plan.

For the future continuation of the study, there is also another approach which could widen its scope. The case of Mainland house could be further put on the ground to compare with the second house phenomena exist in other places in the world. Although the meaning of space is context specific, this perspective could answer the question of whether the condition of second house contains any general issues. The result of the comparison could put the particularity investigated in this research into a wider context to be comprehended.

Yet, the new perspectives arising from these new topics of analysis can in turn help us to retune and radicalize the understanding of the larger urban scale. The Mainland house has already rendered some of the analytical terms problematic and proven that there is a need for other frameworks (such as network city/megacities, cf. Castells 1996). Like the concept of the suburban, the old understanding is that it is stretched out from an urban centre, and mainly solving the problems of the urban core. But the Mainland house case shows that the “suburbia” has dual function; it is first of all the suburban for several urban hubs, which is disconnectedly located in relation to any one of those hubs; it is also quasi-suburbia for the regional center (Hong Kong). The Mainland house thus can be put into the context of the new urban fabric of the PRD to understand.

There is also other creative yet critical way to study the Mainland house, such as the recent discussion of tourism. Although many of these housing estates are now tourist spots for local or nearby residents, to put it under the examination of this discussion is more than this. First of all there are some basic parallels between Mainland house and traveling/tourism. Traveling is also a status marker of the modern society (Feifer 1985), and considered an inverted experience of everyday life (Gottlieb quoted in Urry 2002). In fact some of the description of tourism is perfectly matched if applied to the Mainland house experience of Hong Kong people: It is a leisure activity which presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organized work. It is movement of people to, and staying in destination. It is also a temporary time outside the normal places of residence and work (with reference to the minimal characteristic of tourism of Urry 2-3). Feifer’s (1985) concept of “post-tourist” that gives up the authenticity of the experience and enjoys the multiplicity of tourist games definitely would shed light on an



understanding of the Mainland house. The connection of this experience with the analysis of tourism has been made previously in the chapters, but a more systematical comparison and analysis is significant and should be done in the future.

So this study of the Mainland house should not be a closure, but should be seen as an opening; an opening that opens up many different possibilities. Just as the meaning of the space of Mainland house is fixed temporary through usage, and the situation of the phenomenon is changing everyday; so as the path of this investigation.

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