

A Sustainable City renewed by “People”-Centered Approach?

Resistance and Identity in Lee Tung Street Renewal Project in Hong Kong

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1. Introduction

Urban renewalⁱ implementation in Hong Kong has been studied and critiqued in many literatures, however, still a terrain worthy of exploration for the process in which the “property-led urban renewal”(Ng, 2002a) has been renovated could reflect restructuring of the city in multiple aspects. Among criticisms in past decade, how the authority failed to address the to-be-relocated community is one of the most debatable issues, which ironically conflicted with the so-called “people-centered approach”ⁱⁱ highlighted by the SAR government. This ongoing inquiry attempts to gain better understanding of how “people” and “community” are perceived alternately in the discourses around these debates. In this regard, this paper will focus on how political economy and planning process mutually constituted each other and how the dynamics reconstructed the place and people surrounded by ongoing competitions of power and discourses.

To develop feasible analytical framework for a long-term study, this paper is a rudimentary effort by studying the controversial Lee Tung Street renewal case, in which those buildings on that particular street have been dismantled, yet leaving the process and influences to fiery discussion. The bottom-up Dumbbell proposal delivered by the community is analyzed and contextualized in regard to how and for what it was produced to correct gaps in the governmental project. Venturing out from the community collaboration process, another part of the study examines the production of subject/

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subjectivity by taking practice -based discourse analysis, leading the discussion to the inspiring identity transforming process. From there, the paper ends in reflecting on conceptualization of “people” in planning and suggesting possible directions in care ethics for planners to approach a more sustainable people-centered city.

Hong Kong as a disappearing city

Before being handed over to China, Hong Kong has changed from a struggling entrepot to one of the core global cities(Hamilton, 1999). Being dominated by three governments, each of whom has its own ideology and political statement, Hong Kong’s identity has continually been forged through shaping urban landscapes influenced by the governing power. Referring to Nicholas Dirks, planning is one of a variety of "cultural technologies" that could "made possible, and then sustained and strengthened colonialism" (qtd. in Smart, 2006, p. 24). The other critical aspect of the continuous colonial polity in Hong Kong is how the regime legitimizes itself by achieving ever growing economic development and thereby results in a public mentality, as Ng notes(2002), which is so used to embracing amazing economy operated in a democracy vacuum.

Abbas’s argument that Hong Kong is a city of “culture of disappearance” is very persuasive in this sense. As he suggests, “property speculation means that every building in Hong Kong, however new or monumental, faces imminent ruin, on the premise if here today, gone tomorrow- a logistics that, by contrasting time, dispenses even with the pathos of decay”(1997, p. 64). In this regard, razing or ruining of the past has been part of the seemingly impeccable discourse that Hong Kong has been always successfully reinvented itself. From that point we might consider the “social contract” at play a debatable one based on continuous economic growth. Thereof, the public should have not bothered to ask for more participation in politics if the economic keeps prospering as the polity will assume. As this logic has been questioned a lot, it is important to find

space where these issues could be concretely addressed and interrogated.

In 90s, however, especially after British's hand over in 1997, the political climate in Hong Kong has been getting vociferous. The most phenomenal call was asking for universal suffrage of Chief Executive (the head of SAR)ⁱⁱⁱ. At the same time, some people shifted their focus to discussion of substantial urban issues. This context has catalyzed growing preservation grassroots movements such as campaigning for the Star Ferry Terminal and Queen's pier, asking for more participation in the West Kowloon Cultural District planning, etc(Chow, 2007; Chu, 2007). But such changing mindset is conflicting with the prioritizing development mentality, which prefabricates coming unrest in urban politics.

2. Dislocated community in Urban Renewal Governmentality

The colonial legacy in politics remains active in urban governance today, which results in the city being planned without conceptual or local governance. The district councils, unlike local councils in Western cities, only play advisory roles not until the draft plan given top-down before it is gazetted(Ng, 2002b). Governed by such executive-led polity for more than a century, the notion of "community" is neither located legally nor taken by the local people adequately.

As mentioned, Hong Kong administrative structure has continuously earned its legitimacy by creating economic growth and efficacy of bureaucratic administration instead of representative democracy. It is in this context that Hong Kong reinforces itself as a "entrepreneurial city" (Huang, 2002, p. 177; Jessop & Ngai-Ling Sum, 2000), especially characterized by the well-built public-private partnership since 1990s. Given that city organizes it self as an economic engine driven mainly by real estate development, urban renewal with focus on redevelopment is thereby subjugated to the need of economic restructuring for growing accumulation of capital and economic capability. Land control in this sense, is quite opposite to the minimal governmental intervention in

economy as widely discussed (Adams & Hastings, 2001, pp. 246-247). Actually, the Government is regarded as important role that facilitated the redistribution of capital through appropriation of more valuable land in urban center area (Fong, 1985; Huang, 2002; Smart & Lee, 2003). On this note, the process of production of regime based on accumulation by land control through governmental urban renewal has been noticed and critiqued. The authority's practices have been considered conflicting with how it manifests itself, which is supposed to provide more housing units and improve the livability of the built environment for the people.

Transforming Authority in charge of Urban Renewal

With the contextual sense of political economy in mind then we might turn into tracing how urban renewal has been undertaken historically. Having small-scale “pencil redevelopment” for decades, it was not until 1960 did the government more actively initiated urban renewal schemes^{iv}. Among the discrete initiatives from 60s to 90s^v, the most conspicuous one was the Land Development Corporation (LDC) established in 1988, carrying out redevelopment projects through joint ventures with private developers, a model after Urban Development Corporations in the UK that worked well before financial crisis in 1997 (Ng, 2002a) During this period, renewal of private residential properties has been conducted as business taking focusing on profit making and physical environment enhancement as evidence of effective administration. Simultaneously, it was also implemented along with the underlying agenda that Hong Kong has to be reshaped with restructuring of global economy through planning strategies so that the city could turn into a global financial capital. Urban Renewal was one of the requisites in governmental purview.

Yet LDC did not achieve this goal successfully, as argued by scholars, due to lack of power, resource, effective mechanism to deal with sites and re-housing, and partially crushed by the market failure in 1997. It's “*project-centered approach*” rather than

“people-centered approach” or *“integrated-approach”* was also seriously critiqued(Ng, 2002a). With that experience, the establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority(URA) in tandem with the enactment of Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance in 2000 once shed light on the practice with its encouraging planning rhetoric such as “people-centered approach,” “environmentally-friendly design and planning, ” and “preserving social networks of the local community”(Planning and Land Branch, 2001). However, this new semi-public entity did not take on those goals well as being criticized that it still prioritized physical planning practices and financial success based on a model highly relying on the private sector in renewing targeted neighborhoods(Ng, Cook, & Chui, 2001b). It is regarded as a renewed redevelopment program without changing essential logic and philosophy. As pointed out, neither can it fulfill its own promises^{vi} nor can it approach urban renewal in a more integrated framework to deliver a sustainable urban regeneration strategy owing to compartmentalized governmental institutions and more inherent problems in the executive-led administration without mandate given to democracy and social wellbeing(Chui & Ng, 1998; Ng, 2002a; Ng et al., 2001b). Still, urban renewal in Hong Kong is highly serving the manipulated laissez faire economy contributed to well-deployed “creative destruction” or “destructive creation”(Henderson & Castells, 1987). There is hardly any reservation for the community, not to mention any considerate response to the drastically changing demographics^{vii}.

Implication of “4 Rs ” in Urban Renewal Strategy

Simultaneously with the economically restructuring of urban space, enhancing city image for creating exchange value over use value, also becomes an important task of urban renewal practices globally in regard to improving cultural consumption and financial development. Fainstein(1994) well proliferated our understanding of the political economy of urban redevelopment underlying such shift based on her study on cases in US and UK. In many cases, a hint of preservation contributes to projects as such

and Hong Kong is one of them. With preservation adding “local color^{viii}” to the city, however, people’s right to dwelling in place is often replaced in the redevelopment process, yet largely not addressed. The politic aspect of urban landscape is quite often glossed over by preservation of manipulative “sense of place” and leaves no room for displaced people to maintain their attachment with or participate in politics over place(Hayden, 1997; Jacobs, 1996).

A representational planning rhetoric of URA to the point is the 4Rs approach, supposed to enable “a holistic approach to unlock the full potential of urban renewal” (URA, 2005) including *Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, pReservation and Revitalisation*. Among them redevelopment of the project site is used as an anchor around which other are considered complementary modes of urban renewal as noted in the strategy. Clearly, the intent of development is dominating over other approaches.

In terms of *Rehabilitation or Revitalisation*, URA regarded itself adopting a “facilitator approach” working with the local community, providing few incentives to encourage engagement. To what degree is their goal or the resource and administrative energy given to these two approaches is not concretely specified.

Interestingly, URA has rather more say in “pReservation.” As noted, “Under its mandate to preserve buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural interest that forms part of its redevelopment projects, the URA is looking at the issue of conservation in a comprehensive, holistic and practical manner“(URA, 2005). While this ideal was ironically contrasting with how Lee Tung Street project was conducted^{ix} from the community’s perspective, how differently URA and the community valued and approached preservation remains a question to be explored in later part of this study.

In fact, establishing an advisory committee is suggested for bettering conservation in urban renewal project. It is supposed "to assess, review and recommend proposals for the conservation of buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural

interest" under URA(URA, 2005). Being positioned as the Antiquity Advisory Board, the institution in charge of heritage preservation, this advisory committee could hardly affect planning decision made by URA without possessing real institutional power, which is evidenced in several cases already. The other problem is that detaching preservation from other three dimensions (3Rs) of urban renewal resulted in a fragmented conception of the community's life quality and need if those were truly the main concern of the URA. The strategy and project of URA will soon be questioned in the following case study.

3. Urban renewal of Lee-Tung Street (2003-2006)

Lee Tung Street VS H15 Item

Lee Tung Street, nicknamed as "Wedding Card Street," is located in older part in Wan Chai (see fig. 1). For more than 40 years, the prosperous printing industry had rendered the street one of the symbolic urban landscape. These shops served production of wedding invitations, name cards, envelopes, Chinese calendar, etc. and became well-known in 1980s.

In 1999, it was slated as the urban renewal project by URA. All interests of the street have been resumed by URA since 1st November, 2005. The demolition for renewal was seen by many as an undemocratic process that challenged URA's mandate for improving residential area by people-centered approach. It was also seen as an irretrievable detriment to the vernacular heritage in Hong Kong. The media coverage of this project became notable since 2005. From April in 2005 until May in 2007, there have been at least 47 reports published in major newspapers in Hong Kong(Lee, Chau, & To, 2007). This project aroused unusual public attention on renewal projects at the time that campaigning for preserving the Star Ferry terminal was most flourishing as well. The phenomenal concern asking for reconsidering how people related themselves to the city could not be explained as an occasional resistance but has to do with the emerging possibilities for social activism and political actions(IP, 2007).

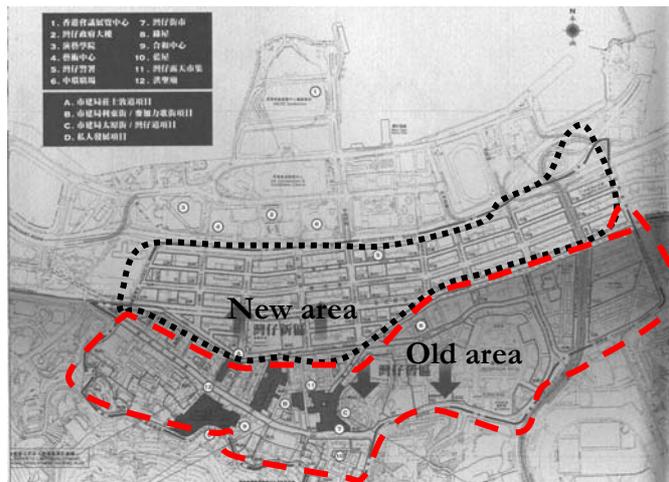


Fig 1 Old area and New area in Wan Chai

The two areas are different in terms of urban form, social and cultural dynamics, economic development, etc. The new area was relatively recent-developed for it was built on the reclaimed area.

Source: Street Paper of Wanchai(Wong, 2006)



Fig 2 Site Plan of H15 Project

Source: URA,

<http://www.ura.org.hk/html/c800000e23e.html>



Fig 3 Vision of the pedestrian street

Source: URA,

<http://www.ura.org.hk/html/c800000e23e.html>

The renewal project was labeled as “H15” by URA (see fig. 2). In 2003, URA announced that amount totaled as HK\$3.58 billion would be spent on to redevelop Lee Tung Street and McGregor Street, an area covering 8,900 square meters composed by 647 property interests (crossing 8 streets). Fifty-four buildings, which accommodated 930 households, would be torn down for new development project. The new project content will include 1400 residential units, 100m shopping pedestrian street and four shopping malls in the middle (see fig 3).

Contrasting with the abstract naming “H15,” the residents and business owners on the street regarded the place “a complete street”(Chow, 2005; Lee et al., 2007) nurtured by invaluable social networks. Some residents have most of their family members living around the street, involving in relevant business, mostly wedding card business. For them, among those shops is a well-maintained dynamics enabling different kinds of business in the same pool. They were specializing in different kinds of printing, which required different size of investment, apparatus and skills. As the printing business evolved over time, many of them reciprocally complemented and passed business to each other. However, based on a unit-by-unit and compensation relocation process^x, residents were required to find new shops or apartments by themselves. Many residents were concerned about having to leave Wan Chai because it was very hard for them to relocate themselves in the same neighborhood due to drastically rocketing price and lack of affordable provision in reality. On this note, it is nearly impossible to maintain such well-established social network completely after the relocation. The community were displaced and dispossessed in regard to their loss of relational situatedness and accessibility to a local network of suppliers and customers at the same time(Lawrence Wai Chung Lai, 2002).

Restless Critiques: what does “public interest” mean?

With problematic enforcement as largely critiqued (Huang, 2002; Lawrence Wai Chung Lai, 2002; Ng, 2002a; Ng, Cook, & Chui, 2001a), here I would like to point out a

few rather controversial points that influentially contributed to the discourse and countering discourse at play. First, there is no alternative other than monetary compensation. More controversially, URA asked the residents to keep silent on the compensation deal from their neighbors, which resulted in a doubtful air over the neighborhood. Second, there was only six months since URA started closing their household registering (10/2003) to the time that residents had to turn in their agreement on the compensation (3/2004). During the process, a lot of residents were confused at the resumption and meanwhile worried about their future. Last but no less problematic, the enforcement of the “Land Resumption Ordinance^{xi}” could allow URA to resume land by forced purchase regardless of the land lessee/ property owner’s will under the name of “public interest.” Nevertheless, as Lai and others (Chui & Ng, 1998; Lawrence Wai Chung Lai, 2002) argued, it is paradoxical to attain a clear notion of “public interest” in Hong Kong politically since the planning legislation was not justified by representative democracy and thus failed to attain the kind of social contract politics in which general will of popular support could be addressed. In this regard, “public interest” is a relatively abstract construction that is more effectively meaning “government purpose” than any idea understood by the people (Lawrence Wai Chung Lai, 2002, p. 216). In fact, according to a survey collecting responses from more than a hundred planners in Hong Kong (Chui & Ng, 1998), “public interest” was not fully understood not to mention consensus.

Taking Lai’s argument that “public interest” is essentially “government purpose” of SAR and then we could try to contextualize such governmental project politically and economically. As Huang (2002, p. 178) put it well, the underlying assumption driving this project is that the deployment for globalizing economy as the major social project. In this sense, everybody in Hong Kong should fully support this common project and voluntarily join a process in which the city is restructured physically, symbolically and institutionally. As noted a lot, no place for community implicitly signaled the problematic

that there is no space for democracy.

My goal here is not to craft the political economy analysis further but to examine the process in a Foucauldian sense, to shed light on the subject who is produced in the process. In the relocation and redevelopment process prioritizing speculative land capitalization, people as outdated, bearable subjects were created, blamed and displaced. The plight that the blamed subject encountered could be evidenced by the permeating peer pressure over the community on Lee Tung Street. Those who rejected to sign the inquisition agreement were regarded as stubborn and greedy people longing for higher compensation. There is also the long existing public view that people who rejected to move just “those who want to stop the earth to turn.” The tension was especially notable especially in the end of June in 2005, when URA announced that more than 85 percent of the 647 affected homeowners on Lee Tung Street had agreed to accept compensation offers of HK\$4,079 (USD 525) per square foot. Both implicitly and explicitly, URA kept emphasizing the need to complete the purchase of the property as soon as possible so that the investment would not be delayed. One point that warrants special concern is the degree that the society got used to the way the regime maintains itself by achieving efficacy economically. It is such naturalized view that would mislead debates on H15 into discussion about rational of payment and relocation method without critically recognizing how the community has subjugated into certain stereotyped subject. Power and ideology hid well behind compartmentalized planning undertaking in which the community, the society, and even the bureaucratic system hardly detect while they performed and usually reinforced the logic unconsciously. In the next section, how grassroots efforts bring possibility to confront this subjugation process will be discussed.

Mobilization Process: The H15 Concern Group and the Dumbbell proposal

Since 2004 onward, H15 Concern Group has been an active community group playing irreplaceable role in the bottom-up community mobilizing process. With about

twenty people as core members, H15 Concern Group organized a series of community meetings, planning workshops, public hearings and street exhibition on alternative proposal, extensive group meetings and interviews with the affected households.^{xii} With unprecedentedly voluntary community participation, H15 Concern Group has been not only a campaign group but also a planning entity that involved diverse individuals beyond the community countering the unitary governmental project.

The establishment of H15 Concern Group was associated with a primary survey in tandem with the compulsory purchasing process. Those social workers surprisingly found that most of the community did not understand their right and position at all. Some of them tried to take on the responsibility of translating the planning document and related legislation into accessible language especially those with regard to their entitlement, which should have been taken care by URA. With better understanding of how urban renewal works and what was actually imposed onto the community, the neighbors gradually realized how URA failed to follow their strategy and promises and then created this exclusive outlet for the community to accept. URA's forgoing the people-centered approach was especially interrogated.

Accordingly, some of those who then still hesitated to sign the acquisition agreement was gradually mobilized and then formed the group. It might be fair to credit several social workers who zealously envisioned the possibility to change so that encouraged the community to participate. With growing residents involving in meetings and workshops, people have been more confidently expressing their comments on H15 project and attachment with the street. Clearly, it was not at all these people have not thought about crying out but they never imagined any room for such hope to take place(Lee et al., 2007). Based on increasing membership, H15 Concern Group decided to take further step. Much more than voicing suggestions and un-satisfaction, the group tried hard to concretize their experiences in and vision of the neighborhood into an

alternative proposal,^{xiii} hoping to intervene with the renewal process via Town Planning Board (TPB)^{xiv}. In the later phase, they engaged professionals like architects and planners for crediting the proposal so that it will be more seriously taken into account.

The alternative proposal did result from an unusual collaborating process among the community, H15 Concern Group, assistant professionals and scholars. A “Dumbbell project”^{xv}(see fig4) was proposed to balance the interest of all parties, with features like providing multiple choices for relocation and better design based on more comprehensive concern and local knowledge from the residents. Most importantly, the original residents could stay on a unit-for-unit basis and those who preferred monetary compensation could also be satisfied adequately^{xvi}. It is inclusive and leaves the residents with options, responding to the community’s call for “Condo for condo, store for store.” Being the first bottom-up exhaustive planning proposal, it even got Silver award in Hong Kong Institute of Planners^{xvii}. However, the proposal submitted to TPB was turned down due to the application’s not being able to collect environmental impact assessment and traffic impact assessment as required.

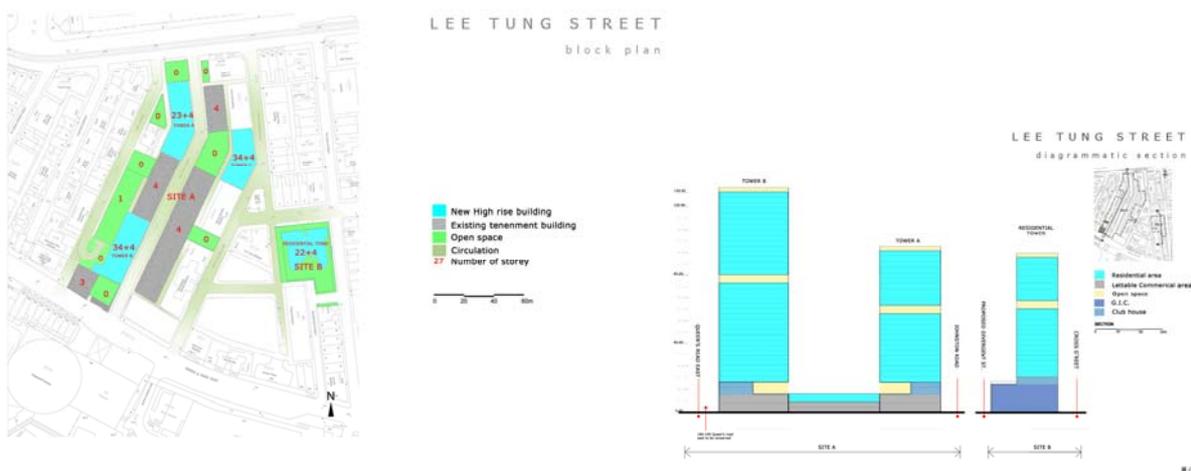


Fig 4 *Dumbbell proposal*

Site place on the left and sectional view on the right.

Source: H15 Concern Group

In August, 2005, the community sued TPB for violation of planning procedures and asked for review but failed. In this context, the Wan Chai District Council hosted the first planning brief workshop in Hong Kong in Feb, 2006, trying to channel the ideas from the Dumbbell proposal to TPB via another statement^{xviii}. A set of principles were suggested under category of questions toward URA's strategy (see the table below). Both TPB and URA did not accept the statement officially since they were not required to do so legally. Ironically, some suggestions addressing "human-oriented" or "preserving community network" and the dumbbell envelope were taken in to the revised planning brief. Nevertheless, the idea that provides unit-based priority to reside in the same area was never incorporated and the residents fail to stay.

Table 1 Suggestion for revising Planning Brief that was submitted to TPB in 2.2006^{xix}

<p><u>What is urban renewal based on people-centered approach?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -community participation -multiple choices -preserving social network -relocation in-situ -rational compensation -fully understanding the need of the residents <p><u>How to preserve social network?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -substantial directions in planning brief to guide the preservation of social network. Ex. Phasing urban renewal projects -Allowing affected residents with priority to reside in the renewed area -Guarantee for providing financially affordable housing in the renewed area <p><u>How to preserve streetscape?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no "faked antiques" -understanding the values of the street and then setting substantial guidelines based on the recognition 	<p><u>Is it feasible to transform Lee-Tung street into full-time pedestrian street?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -"Yes" on condition that alternative transportation plan should be in place or part-time pedestrian street should be readopted -too detailed to be included into the planning brief <p><u>How to better utilize recreational space?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -with connectivity and accessibility -designed for multiple age groups <p><u>How to understand development density of H15 project?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -incorporating substantial limitation on density and building heights; excluding the street area into the calculation of Floor Area Ratio ratio -With necessary flexibility
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4. Resistance in Transforming Identity

The fighting residents as the blamed subjects

As mentioned in the second session, we could read how the renewal process created the blamed subject if carefully taking the underlying logic of urban renewal and development taken into account. On that note, the discussion will turn to reviewing the collaborating process from another perspective, tying analysis to the production and reproduction of identity.

In discourse analysis, how discourses (both discursive and non-discursive) construct subject and meanwhile instigate the process of subjugation is important in terms of better understanding how people situated in the geometrics of power relations. A practice-based analysis with special attention on those embodied practices shaping identities or enabling resistance could help revealing the dynamics around the subjects and de-essentializing the affected subjects (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 6).

Another important clue is the role of spatiality in discourses. As Wilson and Bauder argued, not only discourse guides and directs in the place of force but spatiality actually serves as powerful ingredient in discourse. Space, as noted, “bonds subjects to imagined landscapes of cultural and moral illegitimacy, roots imagined landscapes of civility against which these people are compared, and makes these people transgressive as spatially violating beings” (Wilson & Bauder, 2001). While subjects is produced in the complicity between the making of space and discourse, the urgent task facing the blamed subjects, activists and scholars is to interrogate this process and to shed light on the internal divisive, conflicting, unstable vulnerabilities of the discourse. In this light, it might be safe to regard what H15 Concern Group has achieved as a process of resistance taking place over the instability of the governmental planning discourse. Then how “community” was discursively created, charged and assigned to certain “place” in

this case? Given limited space and time for an extensive study, here the goal is not to fully reveal the rhetoric but to suggest a direction for further study by selected practice. By doing so, the intent is to read the unjust and uncaring logic embedded in certain practices that are usually normalized and naturalized.

The targeted subject was discursively constructed in various ways depends on how and whom they are referenced to for achieving specific goals. When URA emphasized that only 15% community left yet to sign the acquisition agreement in 2005, those people were constructed as stubborn residents as opposed to citizens who are willing to move for “public interest,” understanding the subtext that the city has to keep renovating itself. Despite the fact that such renewal process reinforced a polarized society in which the people in the to-be-developed neighborhood (as conceived) are actually dispossessed and kicked out for the land to be capitalized again, they are blamed as if becoming hindrances in the city’s way. Most importantly, how such poverty is produced by the transforming city is usually ignored but interpreted as caused by dilapidated physical environment or as people’s responsibility to catch up with the city. It is also debatable that by what and whose criteria the place labeled as H15 is discoursed and imagined. In this light, we might be able to say that the dual making of the subject and the place reinforced each other and thereby concealed the most exploitative aspect of the whole process.

Getting closer to the dynamics within the buildings on the street, some internal conflicts among those shop keepers on the ground and the residents living above also presented us another strategy deployed by URA and thus resulted in growing mistrust and misunderstandings within the community^{xx}. When the only possibility to enhance the neighborhood was discoursed as demolition and then redevelopment, the choice given to the people seem to be an extreme binary: moving away with compensation or staying in the same old building. However, a lot of neighbors easily overlooked the fact that URA

will force them out anyway through the Land Resumption Ordinance. Immersed in growing rumors and repeating planning rhetoric, those neighbors unconsciously took on the sub-identity imposed onto them and participated in the whole place and subject making process, in which the “neighbor power,” if there possibly is as Diers (2004) suggested, was diminished in growing dissension.

With two examples showing how the subject has been produced in imagined place, the next part points to seeing how the resistance against the imposed identity was cultivated by the formation of H15 Concern Group.

Reworking the renewal project/Turning Identity in flux

Having the mobilizing process in translation introduced, here the focal point is how people rebuilt their identity by involving in the community-driven planning process. This is neither the imposed to-be-dislocated community identity as the public bemoaned or the government conceived nor the place identity that is rendered by nostalgic sense of place. This identity reforming process, as Gupta and Ferguson noted, is the Foucauldian sense of resistance. As they interpreted, “Rather than conceptualize resistance in a disembodied duel with power, we would like to emphasize a little-noted aspect of it, which clarifies the connection with place making and identity. That is, we find it useful to think of resistance as an experience that constructs and reconstructs the identity of subjects. As a form of experience, resistance’s effects on the identity of subjects may be profoundly transformative” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 19). Taking this note, we could better read their resistance as experience in which the participants collectively reframed the plight threatening the street. Countering such top-down planning process, in which well-developed terminology and planning ordinance covered the historical and political process of favoring speculative property development,^{xxi} they gradually gained alternative knowledge by reworking the renewal project. It was in the resisting process the H15 Concern Group learned, digested, then reframed the planning agenda and even

questioned the essential inconsistency embedded in URA's project. The Dumbbell proposal and "*Eight Lessons for the Planning Head*^{xxii}" project rewrote the way they used to conceive themselves: as people who never understand and have the power to participate in urban politics. Their people-centered ethic and epistemology based on everyday experience and pluralistic conception of knowledge challenged current pro-rationality/efficiency planning system, which is heavily predominated by a strong "*corporate-cum-bureaucratic structure*" (Chui & Ng, 1998). In this regard, the significance of their resistance is much more than fighting for representation in planning decision or collecting memories. What has been probed in the discourse building process is not only the absence of people in planning but also the problematic conception of "people" in planning legal system. Moreover, their resistance brought up an important question: how much of need of these "people" should be government's responsibility in this neoliberal society?

There is a need to single this reformed identity out although it is built in relation to other most easily perceived community identities as noted indeed. Understanding construction of such identity around movements could shed light on the trajectories of the agencies and how they opened up the space for transforming the society, or to be more explicit, for expecting a working civil society. Only with such recognition could the significance of their agency in the movements be fully addressed.

As Huang (2002) points out, there is rather weak identity politics in Hong Kong^{xxiii} and thus the long-existing identity "with freedom no democracy" still largely influenced local people's detachment with public affairs and the change of the city in general. Nevertheless, resistance in Lee Tung Street experience presented us how the community uncovered the problematic nature of current urban planning by reconstructing their identity despite the demolition of the street.

From Lee-Tung street case, I would like to reflect the community's resistance

experience in dialogues with Robin's discussion on post-modern ethics and care ethics(1999, pp. 113-115). In this light, I saw the displaced people related the idea of resistance as "individual self-creation" to the formation of "community" in their actions. Regarding their empowering process, the "discursive mix"^{xxiv} was a collaborative project based on existing neighboring relations indeed. Apparently, those whose life was threatened by urban renewal had limited identity choices as Hanna Papanek and Fiona Robinson noted. However, it was through the "relational identity building process" these dispossessed individuals lent each other capability to build identity, gain knowledge, and then share neighbor power to counter the monopolized urban renewal process. In this sense, I would argue that their resistance in changing identity was not vulnerable as Foucauldian ethic's to those critiques arguing its retreat to an amoral aesthetics of existence.^{xxv}

Some of Robinson's critiques on postmodern ethics warrant more attention in empowering process of the community as such. As noted, it is problematic to embrace creativity of self regardless of the self "as embedded in and formed through types of social interaction"; moreover, it is imperative to keep in mind that "the scope or intensity of the structural and psychological obstacles which prevent individuals from taking on the responsibility to create and re-create themselves." (Robinson, 1999, p. 123) Only with such understanding can the efforts of this case being truly appreciated and from there next political space could possibly be opened and thus allow more collaborative reworking on oppression and exclusion in rewriting identity.

5. Towards a Conclusion: Reverberations and Possible Directions

Forthcoming new governmental strategies

The political space that is created in Lee Tung street case does not close after the demolition. H15 Concern Group remains an active organization pursuing urban renewal reform.^{xxvi} We could also learn its reverberations by seeing how planning system has

strategically transformed itself to respond growing consciousness of the nexus between people and the city. “Conservation” as one of 4Rs strategy is getting more official presence in following urban renewal projects such as those in Prince Edward Road West and Yuen Ngai Street. In March, 2008, URA announced a new initiative that is going to expand its conservation strategy to preserve some 48 pre-war shop houses of Cantonese verandah-type^{xxvii}. However, URA still failed to address “people” properly in place. As Mr. Barry Cheung, Chairman of the URA then stated, "Since the primary objective of the whole project is for heritage preservation rather than for the urgent improvement of living and environmental conditions, a strategy that encourages a voluntary or market approach in general would be more appropriate than one of compulsory resumption" (URA, 2008). It might be fair to suggest that the underlying subtext of such saying is that objective significance of the built environment remains detached from people and their wellbeing. In this regard, their “People-Centered approach” is fairly a vague idea.

Possible Direction: Advocacy planning, Full democracy, or Civil Society?

What about ethic?

Facing upcoming 200 more renewal projects, a lot of questions are yet to be approached from multiple perspectives. How can urban renewal be reformed? Scholars in public policy or urban politics might speculate a different outcome if the concern group has spent more efforts on reforming legal framework instead of throwing most of their energy into developing the alternative proposal within the problematic framework as Lai has well pointed out(2002) before the case happened. To what degree and to which direction the reform should go is open to contest since it could be more mandates for legal participation (for improving democracy) or be fundamental reform on securing property right. Those who are in planning school suggested transforming planning profession into advocacy planning as a promising way to instigate changes in the way the city is conceptualized and managed. As for absence of active cultural politics in place, a

cry for a civil society that could better enable popular mobilization is heavily expected for activists since it is one of the necessary spheres in need for activating social actions after change (Douglass & Friedmann, 1998; Ngok, 2008).

All of aforementioned possibilities could make some changes, yet none of them could perfect the urban renewal entirely without momentum from one another. In reality, there is no guarantee that full democracy will actually protect people from being disposed and disfranchised. Pluralism embraced by proactive planners also face the ultimate challenges that who has the say to make the choice since “The right course of action is always a matter of choice, never of fact” even though progressive planners could try to politicize the planning process and engage diverse people as much as possible (Davidoff, 1965).

Moment for critical care ethics

Having seen possibilities and limitations of addressing urban renewal, however, to work out a perfect solution for the long-existing issue is beyond the scope of a brief paper. It is even doubtful to assume that there is an exact answer. The way we could possibly approach the complexity of the issue, as I would like to argue, depends on our roles, epistemology and the critical but easily ignored one, ethic. To be more specific, the ethic in need is the feminist “care ethic” that could respond to the careful relations valued by the neighbors and call for a people-centered approach (for epistemology and practice of planning) discussed in this paper. With primary understanding of recent studies of critical care ethics (Held, 2006; Robinson, 1999; Staeheli & Brown, 2003; Tronto, 2002), I see great possibility to borrow its inspiring thoughts to theorize the particularities and shifts in this case study and even to provoke values and planning logics that have been internalized or legitimized in the realm of urban planning and studies. Critical care ethics or other form of care ethics is absolutely too involved a subject to be treated here in detail. However, I would like to briefly point out several points that

warrant further exploration in reflecting planning process as follows.

As Tronto(2002) convincingly noted, “The distribution of care work reflects power”. Care should not be left to private sphere whereas it has been largely feminized, domesticated and devalued. Moreover, recognition of care, including needs of care and care relations, should encourage us to further challenge current binary concept of private and public spheres, which is extremely important for planners to reflect how care is situated, discoursed, and how that process relates to the drawing of responsibilities.

With growing calls for a more inclusive community based planning paradigm, current prevailing participation model still largely emphasizes a “neutral” framework for decision making and privileges rational discourse over conflict and difference (Hou & Rios, 2003, p. 20) However, inclusiveness in this sense is only addressed in a formally inclusive process that might bring in more participants, however, failing to fundamentally revising planning and development logics by inclusively caring about ignored and blamed subjects, their needs and relational differences. As noted, “A feminist ethic of care begins with an understanding of political subjects who are shaped by myriad social relationships that are in turn contextualized in space and time”(Staeheli & Brown, 2003, p. 773). More importantly, as Brown argued, “a norm of inclusion also requires that actions and relationships in the private sphere constitute political subjects.” (1999, qtd in Staeheli & Brown, 2003, p. 773) It is such expanded understanding of “inclusion,” which has to be addressed on epistemology, ontology and practice, that can suggest an innovative way to question the conceptualization of public interests and governmental responsibilities (in terms of planning) and how the metaphorical location of community is located and could be reinterpreted. From there we might truly open spaces for a more inclusive community politics. As Lawson(2007) points out, “Care ethics suggests that we build spatially extensive connections of interdependence and mutuality, that we attend to the ways in which historical and

institutional relationships produce the need for care and that we take up social responsibility in our professional practices.” With Care ethics as such we might better understand relational construction of how people live in this society. Further, we could expect building more positive relationships to make a more resilient city.

From a planner’s perspective, it is important to socially and politically catch the ongoing urban transformations by engaging multiple groups, especially recognizing the community in Hong Kong’s case in response to the great cry for “*People-Centered Approach*.” Furthermore, given the discussion on discourse and subject based on Lee Tung Street case, I would like to suggest that it is no less important to critically examine what kind of “people” as subject are perceived and conceived in planning process. And we need critical care ethics to fully politicize this re-conceptualizing process and then reworking a better planning paradigm. To sum up, it is crucial to be continuously interrogating the question that for what kind of “people” we are really working for as the city is changing. A city for citizens is longed; where those are not counted as citizens but blamed is where we should start the journey of interrogation.

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Notes

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- ⁱ In Hong Kong, "Urban Renewal" has been used by the Government to refer to generally urban renewal, urban redevelopment, urban regeneration and urban renaissance. In practice, urban redevelopment by demolition and reconstruction of buildings has been the main part of urban renewal implementation in Hong Kong. See more in Adams and Hastings(2001)
- ⁱⁱ Written in Urban Renewal Strategy (Introduction #3), the "people-centred" approach is highlighted "to be used to carry out urban renewal. The purpose of urban renewal is to improve the quality of life of residents in the urban area. The Government has to balance the interests and needs of all sectors of the community without sacrificing the lawful rights of any particular group. The aim is to reduce the number of inadequately housed people." Undertaking this approach, a set of principles (Introduction #4)and objectives (Introduction #5)are suggested(URA, 2001).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Since 1 July 1997, Hong Kong people have kept appealing to have universal suffrage, resulting in the first protest on July 1st in 2003. People not only feared the loss of political freedom, but also the freedom of speech. The actual number participated in the protest ranged from 350,000 (as quoted by the police) to 700,000 (as quoted by protesters) and even 1,000,000 (quoted from a pro-Falun Gong agency), but the generally accepted figure is 500,000. Since then, the protest and relevant issue have been kept going on.
- ^{iv} Before 90s, urban redevelopment in Hong Kong has mainly taken shape in sporadic high-rise projects on small sites, the so-called "pencil development" type of redevelopment. See more in (Adams & Hastings, 2001)
- ^v These experimental projects included the Pilot Scheme Area, the Urban Improvement Scheme, Environmental Improvement Areas and Comprehensive Redevelopment areas. See more in (Adams & Hastings, 2001; Yeh, 1990) The urban renewal changing process could be examined from political economic perspective arguing that the public sector resumed urban land for redevelopment for facilitating industrial development in 60s and economic development in urban center business area by emphasizing on providing more office buildings and commercial space in 70s. See more in Huang (2002).
- ^{vi} The main objectives of urban renewal including restructuring and re-planning designated target areas; designing more effective and environmentally-friendly local transport and road networks; rationalizing land uses; redeveloping dilapidated buildings into new buildings of modern standard and environmentally-friendly design; preserving buildings, sites and structures of

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- historical, cultural or architectural interest; preserving as far as practicable local characteristics; preserving the social networks of the local community, just to name a few relevant ones(URA, 2001).
- vii In Hong Kong, the population has been increased sharply throughout the 1990s due to a flood of immigrant works from the mainland in 90s. It reached over 7 million in 2008 according to HK Census statistics.
- viii See more in Urban Renewal Strategy #16(URA, 2001)
- ix URA has been involved in the management, conservation and adaptive re-use of several projects including the Western Market, a Declared Monument in Central and Western District, as well as several pre-war shop houses at No.18 Ship Street, No.60-66 Johnston Road(Johnston Road redevelopment project) and No.186-190 Queen's Road East (Lee Tung Street / McGregor Street redevelopment project) respectively in WanChai District.
- x URA's acquisition policy mostly takes care of compensation and allowance based on ownership. An owner-occupier of domestic property will be provided the market value (valued on vacant possession basis) of his property plus an ex-gratia allowance, namely Home Purchase Allowance (HPA), for purchase of the property. The assessment of HPA is based on the value of a notional flat, which is defined as a seven-year-old flat in a comparable quality building, situated in a similar locality in terms of characteristics and accessibility, and located at the middle floor with average orientation. The HPA is the difference between the value of the notional replacement flat and the market value of the property being acquired. See more in Principles adopted by URA in property acquisition [Online available]<http://www.ura.org.hk/html/c906000e1e.html>
- xi The process of land resumption is listed in the Urban Renewal Strategy as follows: #19 Under the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance, the URA may apply to the Secretary for Planning and Lands (SPL) requesting him to recommend to the Chief Executive in Council the resumption of land required for urban renewal. See more about resumption time limitation(#20) and acquisition agreement (#21) in Urban Renewal Strategy(URA, 2001).
- xii H15 Concern Group have organized 12 rounds of community meetings joined by more than 400 neighbors, 5 community planning workshops, seven public hearings, a series of street exhibition averaging on for 10 days, more than 170 group meetings and interviewing more than 150 households and shops. See more on H15 Concern Group webpage [Online available]http://h15.hk/h15_page_1.htm.
- xiii H15 Concern Group also proposed a series of “lessons for the head of Development Bureau” workshop, which presented clear profile of the community’s perception and expectation of urban renewal but failed to invite the Head to join or react.
- xiv According to Urban Renewal Ordinance and City Planning Ordinance, TPB come into play once the renewal project involves change of land use. In that case, TPB should conduct planning brief to specify principles and relevant regulations to advise TPB. However, before Lee Tung Street case, TPB is not required to consult the public until URA submit master layout plan in the next phase, which was contentious and then revised after this case.
- xv The proposal got this name because of the readjusted envelope is similar to dumbbell so that the screen effect of original design could be mitigated.
- xvi Adequate monetary compensation, to purchase a flat of 7 years old; for those who preferred to stay in Lee Tung Street, they could choose to purchase a new flat by paying the price difference, or they could choose to move back to the renovated old building.
- xvii The association actually never awarded Gold medal.
- xviii The Statement toward “Renewal in Wan Chai”by Wan Chai District Council(灣

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- 仔區議會「更新灣仔」立場書)[Online available]<http://pfs.wanchaiinfo.hk/index.php?op=ViewArticle&articleId=355&blogId=11>
- ^{xix} The content of the table is translated from Chinese into English by the author and sources from Street Paper of Wanchai(灣仔街紙)(Wong, 2006).
- ^{xx} This kind of conflicts happened in several urban renewal cases in Hong Kong, see more in (Lee et al., 2007). In fact, there are quite a few people lived above and ran business on the ground at the same time, which reminded us of the complexity of the dynamics that should not be easily put into confronting dichotomy.
- ^{xxi} For example, a host of literature (L. W. Lai, Ho, & Leung, 2005; L. W. C. Lai, 1993; 2002) has problematized how “property right” is defined in both planning legislation and Hong Kong Basic Law as one of the fundamental issues regarding urban renewal.
- ^{xxii} See note xiii for this “*Eight Lessons for the Planning Head*.”
- ^{xxiii} As Huang (2002)noted, even though around hand over there was a current of discussion on cultural identity an collective memory, hardly was it linked to collective actions for transforming polity. They also failed to articulate the issue of identity politics with the construction of citizenship. It might be fair to say that debates and movements around Lee Tung street has challenged that analysis.
- ^{xxiv} “‘Discursive mix’the act of self-creation is likened to the writing of a ‘script’ of life”...the creation of identity is not only an aesthetic practice but, potentially, an act of resistance.”(Susan Hekman, qtd in Robinson, 121)
- ^{xxv} Both Hekman and Connolly relies on Foucault’s recognition of “the contingency of identity”Robinson further pointed out that “It is this idea of resistance which links the idea of self-creativity to power, domination, and responsibility(Robinson, 1999, p. 122).
- ^{xxvi} H15 Concern Group keeps campaigning for reforming renewal legal process. They just publish a green book on recommendation for urban renewal revision. Their efforts also take shape in publishing, documentary, and out reach like planning education through out community overshadowed by urban renewal.
- ^{xxvii} "This is perhaps the most ambitious initiative of the URA to preserve the heritage of our city," said Mr. Barry Cheung, Chairman of the URA(Cheung, 2008).