Streets as a Contested Venue of Power
A Case Study of High Density Hong Kong
by
Chan Vi Vian
HD972002Y

Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate the different levels of relations of power that share an unrelieved coexistence within the boundaries of the street in Hong Kong. This paper adopts the premise that the street as public space is a highly prized commodity in the urban construction and configuration of a city. The street assumes even greater prominence in situations where land is scarce and at a high premium, leading to both internal and external congestion levels of extremities. Hence, the street becomes an outlet for public lives; assuming the roles of both the battlefield and object of struggle for spatial controls between antagonistic forces; ceaselessly appropriated and negotiated. As a result, in Hong Kong, the stereotypical image of public space manifested in the street becomes a negotiated concept, requiring further probing and inquiry.

Hong Kong represents the epitome of a city embracing concepts of extremities; city living in hyper proximity, which appears at first glance disorganized and violent, straddling a host of contradictions and antagonistic relations of power. Its streets-a theatrical stage of seemingly aggressive players interlocked in a drama of tension and attrition. Hence, embracing many concepts appropriate for the research of power relations.

As proclaimed by the architectural critic Adolf Behne: "What the street creates is a mighty community-a new model of man" Hence, through the exploration of power relations coexisting in the street, it is hoped that both legal and extra-legal subversive mechanisms of space reclamation and retaliation of power of the people would be brought to light.
In Chapter One, we will first establish a theoretical framework necessary for the analysis of power relations in the streets, borrowed from Foucault's *The Subject and Power*. Following that, in Chapter Two, we will go beyond the stereotypical image of street; providing a critique and inquiry into the different meanings and values embodied by the streets (in context), as shaped by the local community, building tradition and conditions of hyper density. In Chapter Three, we will plunge into the investigation proper regarding the different relations of power, strategies of antagonisms, mechanisms of retaliations and exercise of power as projected on the streets. We will analyze the above by way of a case study of the hawking community in Hong Kong.

There are several limitations to this research namely that of having focused on only selected interfaces of power relations and neglecting many others. Research has also been approached with regards to space as the main impetus of power and counter-power. However, in-depth investigations into the separate case studies are preferred over that of a general and superficial study of power relations within the street of Hong Kong. Hence, it is hoped that this research paper could be a springboard for further and investigations of the encompassing meaning of power relations within the street, from an inter-disciplinary approach, ranging from economics to sociology.

Dissertation Supervisor: Mr T K Sabapathy

(total word count: 11 837)