
An elaboration on the space-place-home (sph) matrix for exploring housing-related problem-situations

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Abstract:

The notions of space, place and home are vital analytical themes in the subject of Housing Imagination (HI). Using a critical systems thinking perspective, a theoretical framework called space-place-home (sph) matrix is proposed that synthesizes the diverse ideas in the HI literature on space, place and home. The matrix is then clarified with newspaper article extracts on the Wedding Card Street urban renewal project in Hong Kong from 2004-2008. The space-place-home matrix, like a few other HI models and frameworks, is argued to be useful for exploring housing-related problem-situations, including informing the conduct of rich-picture building exercises in the systems thinking field. As such, it is useful for supporting endeavours to address housing-related issues.

Key words: critical systems thinking; housing imagination; multi-perspective, systems-based research; rich-picture building; newspaper article study; problem-situation; space-place-home (sph) matrix; urban renewal; Wedding Card Street

Introduction

The subject of Housing Imagination (HI) draws a lot on the human geography literature about space, place and home (Ho,

2014a). Discussion on how the notions of space, place and home can be applied in an HI investigation can be found in Ho (2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2016). This paper makes another theoretical contribution to this discussion by proposing the space-place-home (sph) matrix to study housing-related problem-situations. This theoretical framework of the sph matrix is further clarified by means of an urban renewal case study of the Wedding Card Street in Hong Kong during the period of 2004 to 2008. The case study materials primarily come from the newspaper article extracts of the *South China Morning Post*. The next section explains the theoretical aspects of the space-place-home matrix.

The space-place-home (sph) matrix as a synthesizing framework in HI

For a start, Housing Imagination (HI) is an intellectual field of study in Housing Studies (Ho, 2014a; Facebook page on *Housing Imagination*). Its main objects of investigation are housing imaginations (hi's). A housing imagination (hi) is a way of thinking about the world with a major housing theme and comprehending the importance of places and social relation with places. It is fundamentally an intellectual process, linking the ideas informed by HI theories to housing policy formulation, evaluation and implementation. A typical HI investigation involves the following tasks (Ho, 2014a):

Task 1: Select an artefact, e.g. a photo, a newspaper article or a book, etc., and bring out the 'housing imaginaries' or 'housing imaginations (hi's)' from the artefact. [It is also acceptable to make use of multiple artefacts.]

Task 2: Discuss the various Housing Studies-related gi's (i.e. hi's) as associated to this artefact, based on the Geographical Imaginations (GI) lens.

Task 3: Examine these Housing Studies-related hi's in terms of the themes of space, place and home.

Task 4: Examine a few “socially produced discourses” as related to your discussion in Tasks 2 and 3.

Task 5: Come up with some Housing Studies-related viewpoints and findings that have actionable value for certain stakeholders, out of your study outcomes from Tasks 1 to 4.

Task 6: Make some Housing-related recommendations to specific stakeholders.

Regarding Task 3, the housing study-related theme can be examined using the following space-place-home matrix, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: The space-place-home (sph) matrix – the theoretical framework

	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Subjective</i>	<i>Conflictual</i>
<i>Weakly history sensitive</i>	I	II	III
<i>Strongly history sensitive</i>	IV	V	VI

Table 1 is made up of two dimensions, i.e., *the research philosophy* dimension (dimension 1) and *the history sensitivity* dimension (dimension 2).

Dimension 1 considers the three main research philosophy perspectives, namely, the objective, subjective and conflictual perspectives. Their associated notions are as follows (Jackson, 2000; 2003; Gill and Johnson, 2010):

- *The objective perspective:* positivism, hard systems thinking
- *The subjective perspective:* interpretivism, soft systems thinking
- *The conflictual perspective:* critical theory, emancipatory systems thinking and post-modern systems thinking

The high sensitivity to multiple perspectives of the sph matrix is encouraged by critical systems/ multi-perspective, systems-based thinking (Ho, 2015a). Also, the matrix itself can be taken as a multi-perspective, systems-based framework in the Multi-

perspective, Systems-based Research (Ho, 2015a; Facebook page on the *Multi-perspective, systems-based Research*).

Dimension 2 covers the historical, including the cultural heritage, perspective. It asks whether the space, place and home notions are sensitive to the history and cultural heritage aspects in their conceptual frames. In this sense, history sensitivity is also about time-frame coverage, i.e., long or short, in an evaluation endeavour.

Having introduced the 2 dimensions of the matrix, it is now feasible to categorize space, place and home notions from four main HI articles, namely, Kitchin (2009), Elden (2009), Easthope (2004) and Creswell (2009) into the sph matrix. This makes up a synthesizing exercise on this literature with the matrix. The literature findings are now presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The space-place-home (sph) matrix and relevant notions and viewpoints from the HI literature

<i>Cells in the space-place-home matrix (re: Table 1)</i>	<i>Relevant notions and viewpoints from the HI literature for illustration</i>
I (Objective-weakly history sensitive)	<p>1.1. "Space was simply understood as a container which things happened." (Kitchin, 2009: 269).</p> <p>1.2. "Spatial processes... could be measured objectively and scientifically, then analyzed using quantitative techniques and spatial statistics..." (Kitchin, 2009: 269).</p> <p>1.3. "...freezing of time in order to look at things in terms of their relations and structures... Spatial rather than temporal relations became important in the framing of these structures..." (Elden, 2009: 263).</p> <p>1.4. "places can be seen as "location of particular sets of intersecting social relations [and] intersecting activity spaces"..." (Easthope, 2004: 129).</p>
II (Subjective-weakly history sensitive)	<p>2.1. "...space... was conceived as relational, contingent, and active, as something that is produced or constructed by people through social relations and practices..." (Kitchin, 2009: 270).</p>

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	<p>2.2. "...to be able to operate in the world, to undertake complex spatial choices and decisions, people rely on spatial understanding of places, their ability to remember, and think about spatial relations..." (Kitchin, 2009: 269).</p> <p>2.3. "... "...habitus is intrinsically connected to the concept of 'rootedness': being at home in a particular place in an unselfconscious way..." (Easthope, 2004: 133).</p> <p>2.4. "Meanings can be personal an connected to individuals and their personal biographies.... meanings are also shared..." (Cresswell, 2009: 169).</p> <p>2.5. "...places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined..." (Easthope, 2004: 129).</p> <p>2.6. "A person's sense of place can provide them with a sense of belonging and of comfort..." (Easthope, 2004: 131).</p> <p>2.7. "...the spaces we inhabit..., and the spatial relations they engender, are produced – made, shaped, managed, and given meaning by people; they are the products of diverse material and discursive practices that in turn actively shape social relations..." (Kitchin, 2009: 270).</p> <p>2.8. "Home has been seen as a socio-spatial entity, a psycho-spatial entity and an emotional 'warehouse'..." (Easthope, 2004: 134).</p>
<p>III (Conflictual-weakly history sensitive)</p>	<p>3.1. "The more clearly the world is ordered into discrete places the more people and things that exist outside of these places are likely to be labelled as disorder – as out of place..." (Cresswell, 2009: 176).</p> <p>3.2. "... geography of otherness... reinforces existing and spatial divisions, promote reactionary and exclusionary territorial identities and legitimizes the status quo..." Easthope, 2004: 131).</p> <p>3.3. "The material structure of a place...is often the result of decisions made by the very powerful to serve their ends..." (Creswell, 2009: 173).</p> <p>3.4. "...place as produced through process but in a way which is at least partly structured by social relations that are systematically asymmetrical..." (Creswell, 2009: 176).</p>

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	<p>3.5. "...home frequently features as a site of patriarchal authority often associated with extremes of abuse, boredom, and backbreaking labor..." (Cresswell, 2009: 173).</p> <p>3.6. "...home is a crucial 'locale' because it is where "basic" social relations and institutions are constituted and reproduced...." (Easthope, 2004: 134).</p>
IV (Objective-strongly history sensitive)	4.1. "... it was important to place spatial changes into a temporal context in order to map how patterns had evolved..." (Kitchin, 2009: 271).
V (Subjective-strongly history sensitive)	<p>5.1. "Space... in a practice, a doing, an event, a becoming – a material and social reality forever (re)created in the moment..." (Kitchin, 2009: 272).</p> <p>5.2. "...the meanings associated with spaces shift, ever changing with mood, action, memory, events, and so on..." (Kitchin, 2009: 274).</p> <p>5.3. "...in defining "the essential nature" of a place, individuals and groups can claim that the 'essential nature' of a place has historical validity and can claim that 'it's always been this way' and hence that it should stay this way..." (Easthope, 2004: 131).</p> <p>5.4. "...the home is "a key element in the development of people's sense of themselves as belonging to a place"...." (Easthope, 2004: 135).</p>
VI (Conflictual-strongly history sensitive)	<p>6.1. "...space is multidimensional, shifting and contingent..." (Kitchin, 2009: 270).</p> <p>6.2. "...space itself, and thus its production, is brought into being through performativity – through the unfolding actions of people.....this produces a 'radically unstable notion of spatiality' that allows for a critical analysis of space as "extraordinarily convoluted, multiply overlaid, paradoxical, pleated, folded, broken and, perhaps, sometimes, absent"..." (Kitchin, 2009: 273).</p> <p>6.3. "...time-space compression was uneven (across the globe, class, race, etc), contradictory (just as some things speeded up, others slowed down), worked at different rhythms...." (Kitchin, 2009: 272).</p>

The exercise of categorizing space, place and home notions (re: Table 2) is essentially impressionistic in nature; the main aim is to clarify the theoretical nature of the sph matrix. At the

same time, it is recognized that many of the ideas from the original writers have been employed to develop into more sophisticated and coherent HI approaches and schools of thinking. Thus, there are theoretical limitations on treating the notions and viewpoints noted in Table 2 as isolated ideas.

For Easthope (2004), when employed in housing studies, space, place and home analysis informs analysts in the following ways: (i) it provides a “framework for addressing connections between people’s home-places and their psychological well-being”; (ii) it reminds housing researches to “look beyond the house” in home-related investigations; (iii) it provides “a basis for understanding the dynamics of conflicts surrounding home-places”, and (iv) it reminds housing researchers that “people often make economic decisions not as purely rational actors, but rather based on their ideas of the nature of ‘place’. Beyond that, based on critical systems thinking perspective, Ho (2014b; 2014c) incorporates the notions of space, place and home into a few systems thinking models, notably the Process for Meanings model (Housing Imagination) and the System Complexity model (Ho, 2014c; 2014d), for exploring housing-related problems situations. Specifically:

- a. with the *Process for Meanings model (Housing Imagination)*, the structural, processual and perceptual components of a housing-related problem-situation are studied in the systemic HI way (Ho, 2014c; 2014d).
- b. with the *System Complexity model*, the components of:
 - (i) “real world situation”, (ii) “the analyst’s/ decision-maker’s ability to cope with complexity”, (iii) “the analyst(s)/ decision-maker(s) with specific objectives and resources, as well as constraints from real world situation”, (iv) “ability to observe and intervene”, (v) “a particular system under consideration” and (vi) “the nature of the system under consideration” of a housing-

related problem-situation are reviewed via the systemic HI lens (Ho, 2014c; 2014d).

By employing these systemic HI models of Ho (2014c; 2014d), HI analysts are then able to more readily employ various strands of systems methodologies (Jackson, 2000; 2003) to tackle housing-related concerns, e.g., housing policy formulation and evaluation. This is further aided by the encompassing *systems-based Housing Imagination evaluation framework* of Ho (2014d). Additionally, the space-place-home matrix proposed in this paper offers an analytical Housing Imagination (HI) tool for examining housing-related problem-situations. Compared with the typical HI investigation (e.g., the six-task method mentioned in the previous section of this paper), these systems thinking-based HI models for coping with housing concerns are methodologically more sophisticated and clearly formulated. The matrix is further made clear in the next section with the illustrative Wedding Card Street case in Hong Kong.

The space-place-home matrix and illustrative examples from the Wedding Card Street case in Hong Kong

The Wedding Card Street called by the locals in Hong Kong is officially named as Lee Tung Street. In 2007, the street was demolished as an Urban Renewal Authority (URA) project so as to be redeveloped for luxury shopping and housing. *Exhibit 1* is a recent photograph taken by the writer on Lee Tung Street in January, 2016 (also see the *Literature on Wedding Card Street* Facebook page):

Exhibit 1: Lee Tung Street, Wanchai (January 2016; photo taken by the writer)



As reported by Lai (2004a), “The street, home to about 20 shops specialising in printing wedding invitations, will be swept away by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) as part of its slum clearance plans...” and “... it would be unrealistic to get the shops to move back to the area after all the redevelopment works were completed in 2009..” (Lai, 2004a). There had been vehement opposition by the residents and shop owners there, among others at that time. One objection to the project was its irreversible damage to cultural heritage of the street. Using the newspaper articles from the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong published in the period of 2004-2008, the writer conducted a newspaper article study¹ to identify reported facts, observations and viewpoints as illustrative examples to clarify the space-place-home matrix. The findings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The space-place-home (sph) matrix and the illustrative case of the Wedding Card Street

<i>Cells in the space-place-home matrix (re: Table 1)</i>	<i>Related factual information and concerns on the Wedding Card Street case (re: Newspaper article references)</i>
I (Objective-weakly history sensitive)	1.1. “Citing the high cost of restoration, the Urban Renewal Authority has decided to demolish most of the buildings and build new ones. It also promised an area for a social enterprise with the theme ‘Wedding City’ (But, 2007).

¹ Also refer to the Facebook page on *Literature on newspaper article study*.

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<p>II (Subjective-weakly history sensitive)</p>	<p>2.1. “Wan Chai residents and merchants have submitted a redevelopment plan for Wedding Card Street to the Town Planning Board in an attempt to keep the relocation of businesses and residents to a minimum and retain part of the street intact.... Under the residents’ plan, about half of the buildings would be kept, with ageing six-storey buildings cut down to four storeys....” (Lai and Wu, 2005).</p> <p>2.2. “... the tenement buildings in Lee Tung Street are unremarkable, being typical of flats in Wan Chai and elsewhere and have no significant architectural or heritage value...” (Tang, 2007a).</p> <p>2.3. “...the Urban Renewal Authority adopts a very proactive community engagement policy with respect to all of our projects....” (Tang, 2007b).</p> <p>2.4. “URA tempts business operators with more cash if they move out.... In addition, owners of flats being redeveloped will be offered first pick of new units; space will be designated for social enterprises in future projects;.... Commentators said the new policies may reduce resistance to redevelopment but were too fragmented to revive social networks...” (Wong and Wu, 2007).</p> <p>2.5. “The Urban Renewal Authority has changed its master layout for its Lee Tung Street redevelopment in Wan Chai to address the worries of residents living in Amoy Street. Lee Tung Street will become a pedestrian area while dead-end Amoy Street will be turned into a two-lane road. Residents there were worried about traffic disturbances...” (Wong, 2008).</p>
<p>III (Conflictual-weakly history sensitive)</p>	<p>3.1. “Disgruntled Wedding Card Street homeowners whose properties are earmarked for demolition have accused the government of ignoring private valuations of their properties, with some discrepancies as high as \$3 million...” (Hui, 2004).</p> <p>3.2. “Urban Renewal Authority says it will combine elements of five designs for the revamp of Wedding Card Street..... Wan Chan district councillor Mary Ann King Pui-wai said: ‘I don’t know how they’re going to combine the five because my understanding is two of them are going to preserve part of the street and the rest [involve] total demolition. They’re contradictory approaches.’....” (Lai, 2004b).</p>

	<p>3.3. "... 'A study by the University of Hong Kong found only 4 per cent of residents objected to renewal, while more than 70 per cent were in favour of it. But the recent voice of opposition has been so loud that it seems 80 per cent are opposed to the idea,' he said [Eric Choi Yansang, Urban Renewal Authority's head of community development]...." (Cheng, 2005).</p> <p>3.4. "The Urban Renewal Authority is in deadlock with the last remaining residential landlord in the Wedding Card Street redevelopment area, with the owner accusing officers of intruding on his privacy.... Henry Kuang Jingxiang 57, said five officers entered his home in the Lee Tung Street Development Scheme in Wan Chai without invitation on August 4, rummaged through his flat and asked pointed questions about his mental health..." (Asprey, 2006).</p> <p>3.5. "About 20 protesters, each holding candles, sat silently in the middle of Lee Tung Street... to express their discontent at the government's decision to bulldoze the old area of Wan Chai...." (Wu and Lo, 2007).</p> <p>3.6. "A group of town planners and architects lambasted the authority for rushing to demolish buildings in the street before required documents justifying its redevelopment proposal were submitted.." (Wu and Lo, 2007).</p> <p>3.7. "Kam Fok Lai-ching, a member of the group [H15 Concern Group] said the authority had consulted neither the residents nor shop owners about the idea of a Wedding City..." (But, 2007).</p> <p>3.8. "A meeting between the Urban Renewal Authority chairman and hunger strikers in Wan Chai's "Wedding Card Street" ended in chaos yesterday as demonstrators chased him and blocked his departure.." (Wong, 2007).</p> <p>3.9. "May Yip Mee-yung, H15 Concern Group, which comprises former Lee Tung Street residents and business operators, said she could not....afford the rents for the new development. The group hoped that the developer for Lee Tung Street would offer discounted rent to residents and operators so the 'community' in the street would not be separated..." (Chiang, 2007).</p> <p>3.10. "The Planning Department rejected proposal to keep the tenement buildings in 'Wedding Card Street' yesterday</p>
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	<p>because it failed to include a detailed structural assessment of the buildings..” (Wu, 2008).</p>
<p>IV (Objective-strongly history sensitive)</p>	<p>4.1. “Wedding Card Street not only attracts local couples – many expatriates and overseas Chinese also pay a visit before their big day...In the 1970s, the street’s trade mainly came from printing calendars. However, the shops also printed wedding invitations for restaurants, which would offer them as part of their banquet packages... the flourishing of the street was inseparable from Hong Kong’s economic boom in the 1980s.....” (Lai, 2004c).</p>
<p>V (Subjective-strongly history sensitive)</p>	<p>5.1. “This old area of Wan Chai to the south of Johnston Road and along both sides of Queen’s Road East is thriving with a vibrant sense of community, and is popular with locals, expatriates and tourists.....the degree of dilapidation does not appear to warrant mass demolition, but demands revitalisation or rehabilitation by the Urban Renewal Authority” (Ho, 2004).</p> <p>5.2. “Saving this street is not the same as saving the wedding card industry. Industries come and go, but that part of our city, with its own particular urban fabric and intimacy of scale, belongs to our collective heritage and deserves a new lease of life” (Wong, 2004).</p> <p>5.3. “District politicians and architects said they did not understand why the area had to be redeveloped, saying the street was not run down and was part of Hong Kong’s living history..” (Lai, 2004a).</p> <p>5.4. “.... Tourism and cultural development officials have lately been playing up the city’s unique heritage. It would be ironic if, at the same time, our urban redevelopment agency was contributing to the destruction of those very features that are said to be our biggest drawing cards...” (SCMP, 2004).</p> <p>5.5. “A group is organizing activities to raise young people’s interest in preserving local culture... The group organises exhibitions and public programmes, often within a specific community, to promote personal experiences and history forgotten by the masses.... An exhibition onWedding Card Street, is being held at CC Wu Building in the district...” (Hui, 2005).</p> <p>5.6. “.... Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai ... will be a test case for how well redevelopment can be balanced with preservation..... Renovation, selective preservation</p>

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	<p>and a more sensitive approach to existing social and commercial networks are sure to figure more prominently in future URA projects...” (SCMP, 2005).</p> <p>5.7. “The planning board [Town Planning Board] ...asked the authority [Urban Renewal Authority] to study whether tenement buildings in the area could be preserved. Residents had argued they formed part of the cultural heritage, but the authority said they had little historical import...” (Ng, 2006).</p> <p>5.8. “The URA [Urban Renewal Authority] should be reminded that constructing similar buildings after knocking down the old one will never return the unique character of the original flavour..... It is the uniqueness of the local culture it once represented and the historical value that comes with it that are worth preserving...” (Bee, 2007).</p> <p>5.9. “If the government cannot preserve Hong Kong’s history and identity, what will distinguish our city from any other cities around the world?.....” (Chen and Mak, 2007).</p>
<p>VI (Conflictual-strongly history sensitive)</p>	<p>6.1. “...Residents have been fighting to keep the character of the street since the government announced a plan to tear down the half-century old flats and built a modern retail and residential area... the residents wanted to keep 34 old flats, stay in the neighbourhood after the project and be able to have a say in the planning process.” (Zhuang, 2005).</p> <p>6.2. “A proposal to save a section of the celebrated Wedding Card Street from demolition was rejected by the Town Planning Board yesterday... The board recognised the importance of retaining the well-established community, which had heritage value, but thought it could be achieved without preserving many buildings.....” (Lai, 2005).</p> <p>6.3. “Preserving our urban heritage is one of the professed missions of the URA, yet its approach to heritage is to demolish and recreate, rather than preserve and revitalise...” (Chan, 2007).</p>

It is intended that, by going through the newspaper article extracts as categorized with the sph matrix, a reader will become more capable to comprehend the soft complexity

exhibited in the housing-related problem-situation of the Wedding Card Street case from multiple perspectives and with heightened space-place-home sensitivity. In particular, these newspaper article extracts have identified: (i) “the processes”, e.g. negotiation activities, (ii) “the tangible and intangible structures”, e.g., resident groups, government bodies and buildings, and (iii) “the conflicting concerns/ viewpoints from different stakeholder groups” which, together, constitute a rich picture of the Wedding Card Street problem situation, see **Appendix 1** for the rich picture diagram². As a whole, Table 3, by relating the different categories of space, place and home notions to the illustrative examples from the Wedding Card Street case, serves two academic purposes:

Purpose 1: to use real-life examples to clarify the space-place-home matrix.

Purpose 2: to demonstrate that the space-place-home matrix can be employed as an intellectual tool to explore a housing-related problem-situation, such as the urban renewal project of the Wedding Card Street. Thus, the matrix is shown to be able to complement the Process for Meanings model (Housing Imagination) and System Complexity mode (Ho, 2014c; 2014d). At this point, the elaboration on the space-place-home (sph) matrix, as summarized in Tables 1, 2 and 3, as an analytical tool to explore housing-related problems-situations, is now completed. Even though the literature on space, place and home has existed in the human geography literature for more than 30 years, a critical systems perspective to consider them for exploring problem-situations is novel.

Concluding remarks

The space-place-home matrix underlines the analytical value of the Housing Imagination literature on space, place and home

² Also refer to the Facebook page on *Literature on rich picture building* for further information on this technique.

for exploring housing-related problem-situations. The matrix, together with other HI tools, can be applied to support an HI-inspired rich-picture building exercise as expounded by Ho (2015b; 2015c). A rich picture so constructed unravels the soft complexity typically exhibited in a housing-related problem-situation. Moreover, in this case, the rich picture is space-place-home aware. In turn, such an HI-inspired rich-picture building exercise, as argued in the rich-picture building exercise literature, is capable of supporting various systems methodologies to address complex concerns in diverse individual, organizational and social settings. Naturally, the settings of its application can be ones with a housing-theme. The theoretical foundation for doing so is critical systems thinking and the Multi-perspective, Systems-based Research. Since this paper is a pioneering piece of work on the space-place-home matrix for housing-related problem-situation exploration, additional research works need to be done to develop the matrix further. Lastly, interested readers are also referred to the *Internet resources section* in the *bibliography* for additional information on the topics of the Wedding Card Street, Housing Imagination, Newspaper article study and the Multi-perspective, Systems-based Research.

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- *Literature on newspaper article study* Facebook page, maintained by Joseph, K.K. Ho (url address: <https://www.facebook.com/literature.newspaper.article.study/timeline>).
- *Literature on rich picture building* Facebook page, maintained by Joseph, K.K. Ho (url address: <https://www.facebook.com/literature.rich.picture.building/timeline>).
- *Literature on 喜帖街 (Wedding Card Street)* Facebook page, maintained by Joseph, K.K. Ho (url address: <https://www.facebook.com/literature.leetungstreet/timeline>).
- *Multi-perspective, systems-based Research* Facebook page, maintained by Joseph, K.K. Ho (url address: https://www.facebook.com/multiperspective.systemsbased.research/info/?tab=page_info).

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: A rich picture diagram on the Wedding Card Street urban renewal project

