

Reflection (2023.05.26)

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This reflection is written a week prior to the P4 presentation at which the thesis project would be discussed in terms of its design translation from its research elements. A go/ no-go would be given at the end of the presentation, and the project would continue to develop towards P5.

The thesis project began with my ruminations on the new subjectivity I found as a mobile body having moved to the Netherlands from Hong Kong since 2021. The body was away from home, away from a familiar place that the body is attached to. A sense of belonging was absent in my new life in the Netherlands. In the attempt to make sense of this loss, I was gravitated towards scholarships on diaspora study. These texts constructed a literary foundation for me to problematize my situation, prompting the thesis that my lived experience as a mobile body is indeed a shared condition by many similar bodies away from their home who also struggle to construct a new belonging in their new space. Rightfully, the quotidian life of home-making is foregrounded as a subject of spatial study.

Situating this study in the ongoing mass migration from Hong Kong to the UK since 2019, the thesis speculates the possibility of researching the diasporic condition of constructing belonging in space through the lens of hospitality. As a practice, hospitality has emerged as a significant way for the Hong Kong migrants to negotiate their loss of belonging. As a method, hospitality respects the feminist notion of situated knowledge and positions the researcher not simply as an outsider, but as an invited stranger who would make themselves accountable to the knowledge claimed. Acknowledging hospitality as a useful concept, the research proceeded with a developed ethnographic method, by which one would approach fieldworks researching the migrant subjects in the event of a meal. The series of happenings before, during, and after the meal were instrumentalized as sites of observations and conversations for the ethnographic research.

Prior to the visit, the interviewees were communicated to spend half a day for the visit around the event of having a meal together. A three-step method based around an event of hospitality was introduced, where the researcher and the interviewee would: 1. Walk together + 2. Cook together + 3. Eat together. (*fig. 1*) The walk, the cooking, and the meal were all documented on-site in the forms of photographs, film recording and voice recording. Upon return from the fieldworks, these materials were later synthesized into architectural line drawings and a food map, as well as a short 1-minute film montaging the ordinary event of a meal with the greater social background of the mass migration. (*fig. 2*)

As the research is situated in Reading, a town 30-minute train ride away from London in the UK, I would have to pre-arrange the fieldtrips with a limited period of stay. Two trips were made in late-September and late-November in 2022, each over a span of one week. In the first fieldtrip, connections with 17 household units were initially established. They were interviewed in-person or via call with a list of 10 questions relevant to their migrant condition. (*fig. 3+4*) These conversations were later transcribed and proven a useful background for the research. In the second fieldtrip, however, as the scope of the study was better clarified in the process, coupled with scheduling conflicts, 3 household units remained. 2 household units were successfully interviewed with the developed ethnographic method, while 1 household unit cancelled last-minute. It should be acknowledged that the limited sampling size could have hampered the liability of the result. If the method can be tested with more interviewees, a richer profile of the Hong Kong migrants can be claimed. Longitudinal study following up on the interviewees could also provide cross-examination of the stories told of themselves, e.g. planning to move to another UK city, find a new job. Indeed, two of the families kept in touch in both fieldtrips have already moved into a different phase of their new life, with new jobs and an expanded living radius e.g. borrowing cookbook from public library.

Despite all, given the limitation on time and resources of this research within the TU Delft MSc framework, the operation of this field research through the event of hospitality has proved to be successful. To an extent, this success should be credited to the generosity of the interviewed households who offer their stories and time to experiment with my ethnographic method. For those who wish to adopt this developed method, it should be noted that accessibility is key to this generosity, i.e. a shared language and cultural literacy. There was an important process of decoding in the fieldwork that allowed myself to prompt relevant questions, such as a reference to the term “diaspora” in Cantonese by the interviewees prompted a conversation over its antonym in

the language, that is “-to reunite”. Their stories of their everyday life, from the most banal details of doing grocery, to the most personal reflections on their outlook of life as a mobile body in the UK, however anecdotal, provide a rich profile of what Hong Kong migrants can be in the UK. They have proved to be not just a homogenous mass; rather, they all have their own diasporic subjectivities. This understanding of migrants constructively steered the project away from designing for a fabricated “mass”, and prompted alternative imaginations of a social space for a collectivity based on not nation-state but cultural encounters.

Also, serendipitous forms of encounters during the fieldtrips were acknowledged as a valid form of knowledge. Along the planned three-steps method, I was able to encounter other facets of life that are part of the lived experience of the Hong Kong migrants: I discovered a home-run Cantonese kitchen selling Hongkong-style barbecued meat; I discovered the ongoing city-bid application by the Reading municipal to be officiated as a city; I discovered a church in the suburb neighborhood where over 200 Hong Kong families would gather on a Sunday mass; I discovered a derelict English pub adjacent to the said church. These forms of encounters were only possible when the research method necessitates the researcher to embed themselves in the context of their study, such as long walks with the interviewees in their familiar environment. These delightful encounters provided a more multi-faceted impression of the site which is scoped within the municipal confine of Reading. The site, therefore, can also be understood as a collection of situations which do not otherwise fit into one vision. In fact, after some discussions with my supervisors over the serendipity of the research, I have intended to make intentional of this serendipity, and allowed the thesis project to be opportunistic in including the multiple anecdotes. For instance, the derelict English pub emerged as the key site for intervention, where a space dedicated to the making of food & identity would be designed for the arriving Hong Kong migrants, other migrants, and the local population of Reading. This becomes the design brief for the Open Kitchen.

Looking ahead, the final part of the graduation will be dedicated to the making of the Open Kitchen in spatial terms, with the continuous consultation from the Building Technology mentor, the Design mentor, and the Research mentor. Part of the effort will be dedicated to the making of a book that summarizes the thesis project from the research to the design, but also includes stories collected in the process as a form of knowledge. The final presentation is also intended to be an exhibition-presentation where food and music would be served to curate a situation of hospitality.

Appendix

Figure 1.

An architectural-ethnographical study_thesis_research_TU Delft

食物 X 空間

// 在英香港移民的宴客活動與社群網絡形成的關係
study of hospitality of HK migrants in the UK

本研究旨在從建築學角度探討移民與遷移城市(arrival city)的關係，重點著眼於新移民的宴客活動 (hospitality)作為另類的建構歸屬感(constructing belonging)的手段，進而了解其中獨特的移民社群網絡之形成。


本研究圍繞近年日趨的香港移民潮，希望更清楚地勾畫出這場大離散，同時在學術層面開闢以「香港移民」作為空間研究維度的新想像。故此，本研究著眼於移居雷丁(Reading@UK)的香港移民，希望借居民志學(ethnography)的田野考察方法，追蹤訪問多個香港移民個案，透過「食一餐飯」觀察他們在抵達城市的生活習慣與社交活動。有關觀察最終將製成獨特的食物地圖回饋予受訪者，同時以香港移民為本位叩問 - 「何以為家」的空間想像。


研究方法： 田野考察 - “食一餐飯”
地點： 雷丁 @英國
研究對象： 移居雷丁的香港移民
研究範圍： 3-4戶香港移民家庭
日期： 23-30th (Nov)

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田野考察內容：

地點： 雷丁 @英國
時辰： 1天 (大約中午12點-晚上8點)

1.  "walk together"
社區散步
[12-14]
研究者會隨受訪者準備晚餐，一百到社區裡面各地方買菜，進而繪製成獨特的食物地圖

2.  "cook together"
一齊煮飯
[16-18]
研究者會協助受訪者在家裡面準備晚餐，同時過程會記錄下來

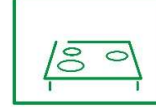
3.  "eat together"
一齊食飯
[18-20]
研究者會跟受訪者(和受訪者邀約的朋友)在飯裡面一齊食晚餐，同時過程會記錄下來

Figure 2.



Figure 3.

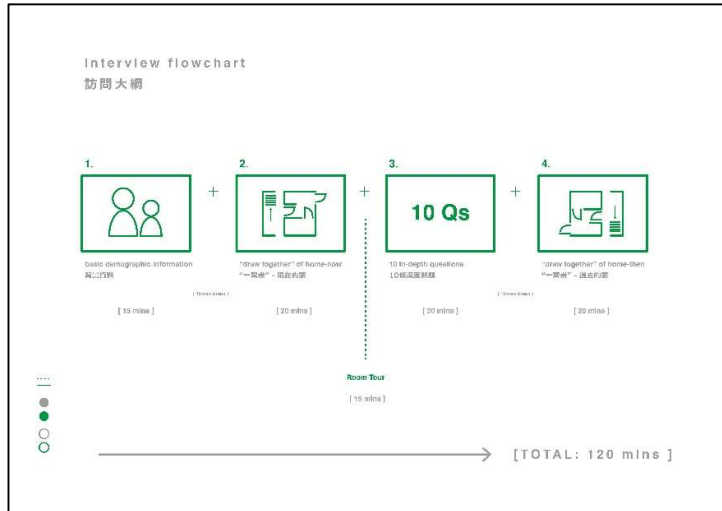


Figure 4.

- interview questions
訪問問題
1. What is the biggest motivation for choosing your chosen dwelling? 1. 有什麼最大的動機促使你選定這間屋?
 2. What is the most challenging aspect free of the boat? Who helped you the most, who the most support? In terms of opinion, by support, how would you describe your relationship with your neighbour(s) or family at home? 2. 屋外之挑戰/最難/最棘手係咩? 有咩人幫助你最多? 意見/支持/力能, 你如何描述你與鄰居/家人/親屬之關係?
 3. What surprises you, the most about making a home in the UK? 3. 你乜乜最驚訝, 最令你意外/唔係咁?
 4. What elements do you think constitute "home"? Could you put them in an order from the most important? 4. 你覺得「家」(屋/家)係由咩嘢組成? 呢啲可以按緊要程度排序?
 5. How many suitcases were there in the process of moving? And how many furniture is newly bought? 5. 搬屋嗰陣, 邊只只上邊係行李? 又有幾多件新嘢買?
 6. Spatially, do you think the way you furnish the dwelling you are in now is a copy/catch of your old home in Hong Kong? If not, what is different with the new dwelling? 6. 空間方面上, 你覺得香港屋嘢係咩係抄/承接你以前屋嘢咩係抄? 邊係抄, 你覺得嘢嘢不同你以前屋嘢?
 7. Could you share with us at least one minor word/innovation at the current dwelling? 7. 有咩「細細」嘢/少, 嘢係你目前屋嘢有/冇以前屋嘢嘢嘢?
 8. In comparison to now, how would you see yourself living in 6 years time? 8. 對比現在, 5年之後, 你會點樣生活/住屋嘢?
 9. (On a scale of 1-10, 1 = closest, could you describe the distance between you here & now and your "home"? Why? 9. 如果以 1-10 (1=最近) 之距離, 你點樣描述你與「家」嘢嘢嘢? 點解?
 10. Would you consider returning HongKong? Why or why not? 10. 你考慮回香港住屋? 點解呢?