

## Indigenous Heterotopias: a Framework for Rural-Urban Regeneration in Hong Kong

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### Abstract

“Heterotopia,” a concept coined by Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional, and discursive spaces that are somehow “other” disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory, or transforming, exist in contrast to Utopias. Examples of heterotopia include gardens, cemeteries, theatres, libraries, theme parks, and villages – they exist in human environments, and their presence has opened up a new perspective of and discourse on otherwise vernacular and mundane spaces. As heterotopias always exist outside of the norms in some way and hence tend to be spatially isolated or alienated, their issues are often ignored and those “heterotopian” places are left to deteriorate or fall apart. This theory-driven design investigation aims to explore a framework with the notion of “heterotopias,” to not only present an effective design approach for regenerating and solving issues in those spaces, but also act as an interior mechanism to prepare for future challenges under the circumstance of being segregated. To better investigate the effects of the framework, a Hong Kong Indigenous village: Ho Sheung Heung as a Heterotopia is selected as the site to be regenerated.

### Keywords

Heterotopia, Urban Regeneration, Hong Kong Urban Village

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Heterotopias

The term “heterotopia” was discussed and elaborated by Michel Foucault in a lecture “Of Other Spaces” for a group of architectural students in 1967. Although it doesn’t belong to part of Foucault’s official corpus of work, the manuscript was recorded and published in the public domain in 1984 for an exhibition in Berlin. The script (Foucault, 1984) has increasingly aroused great attention of scholars from various fields related to different spatial issues and has opened up new visions for urban designers and architects to rethink the daily spaces that we often see in our real world.

**Space**, as Foucault posited, is always closely bound to our experience of **time** in society. He argues that we are no longer living in a world of time that would only move forward, but in a network of places opening onto one another, which further indicates that there is a shift from a space of binary oppositions such as open and closed, private and public, sacred and profane, to a society in which creates a heterogenous landscape.

The term “heterotopia” originally comes from medicine that refers to the displacement of an organ or part of the body from its normal position. Heterotopia is etymologically related to, in contrast, another term that might be more familiar: “utopia,” according to Foucault, Foucault metaphors “Utopias” as a mirror of “heterotopias”, acting as a theoretical counterpart. He describes “Utopias” are the emplacements

with no real place but have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. While heterotopias could reflect “a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements” (Foucault, 1984) that can be easily found in our real world within culture, civilization, and societies. In essence, “heterotopias”, by way of contrast to utopias, are real places, and “kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are localizable” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

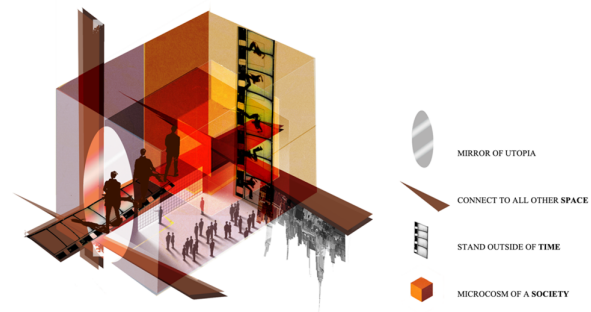


Figure 1. The collage of the notion of Heterotopias (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

The “outside” in heterotopias can also be replaced with “other places” that refer to “a world off-centre to normal or everyday spaces, possessing multiple, fragmented, or even incompatible meanings” (Dehaene & Cauter, 2008). They are certain cultural, institutional, and discursive spaces but somehow behave “other” disturbing, intense, contradictory, or transforming. In Foucault’s explanation, places like ships, cemeteries, bars, brothels, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs, festivals, or Muslim baths can all be seen as “heterotopias”.



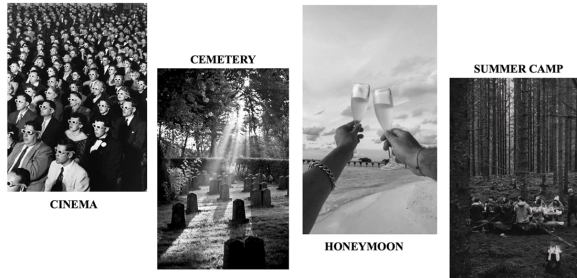


Figure 2. The examples of Heterotopias (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

## 1.2 Six Principles of Heterotopia in Urban Contexts

To better recognize spaces as “heterotopias” in our real world, Foucault then posited six principles. He systematically describes them as follows (Foucault, 1984):

- **The first principle:** There is not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute “heterotopias” and there is no certain universal “heterotopias” norm as well. But Foucault (1984) has defined two types of “heterotopias” in the lecture. First is the “Heterotopias of crisis” which are privileged, sacred, or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society, in a state of crisis. In modern societies, similar roles would be played by honeymoon, summer camp, boarding schools, old age homes, or military service for young man. Foucault (1984) claims that this type of “heterotopias” is disappearing nowadays as they are gradually replaced by the “Heterotopias of deviance” the second type, which could be found in places like rest homes, clinics, or prisons. They represent sites for individuals whose ac-

tions deviate from the norms in some way and hence need to be spatially isolated, such as the HK indigenous villages today which will be further explained in the following section.

- **The second principle:** A society, as its history unfolded, can make “heterotopias” function in a very different fashion over time. Foucault (1984) takes the cemetery as an example that it is the place where incompatible or contradictory kinds of space would converge.

- **The third principle:** Heterotopias are capable of juxtaposing in one real place several different spaces that are in themselves incompatible. Such as in theatre or cinema where a whole series of places alien to each other overlaying on the stage or the screen, have represented the ability of “heterotopias” to combine multiple spaces in one.

- **The fourth principle:** Heterotopias are often linked to “slice in time” where Foucault (1984) calls “Heterochronies” Places in the modern world like museums or libraries where “time never stops building up” and could be accumulated in an attempt to establish a general archive, represent “a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (Foucault, 1984). In opposition to these places are other “heterotopias” that appear in more fleeting, transitory, precarious spaces of time, which can be noted as festival sites, fairgrounds, vacations, or leisure villages.

- **The fifth principle:** Heterotopias presupposes a system of opening and closing that simultaneously makes them isolated and pen-

etrable. These “heterotopias” are entered either by compulsory means like the prisons, or their entry relied on some events such as ritual purification ceremonies or hygienic cleansing in Moslems hammams or Scandinavian saunas.

- **The sixth principle:** Heterotopias have a function in relation to all spaces that remain “outside” and this function unfolds between two extreme poles, “heterotopias” of illusion and compensation. The first is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, while the other one is to create a real space of another. Foucault (1984) claims that “heterotopias” enable us to both confront our illusions and create new illusions of “Utopias” that don’t exist. He defines the gardens are the “heterotopias” of illusion and some 17th century Puritan societies in America are the “Heterotopias “of compensation.

After the establishment of the notion of “heterotopias” by Michel Foucault, it has arisen a heated discussion among scholars and practitioners in a variety of fields, especially urban studies, design, and architecture, and also persuade them to rethink our urban spaces in diverse dimensions such as time, space and society.

### 1.3 Application of “heterotopias”

In existing academic research and design practice with the notion of Foucault’s “heterotopias”, a few scholars have argued that “heterotopias” can be used to create more inclusive and diverse urban space, by challenging dominant power structures and promote inclusiveness for marginalized communities (Chapman, 2019).

Other applications have been taken on creating “third spaces” in the urban design field, inspired by the concept of “heterotopias”, that the “third spaces” are defined as the social spaces existing outside of the home or workplace like cafes, libraries, or parks and they could provide opportunities for various social interaction and community building, as well as to promote social inclusiveness and diversity (Oldenburg, 1989). Some other design projects like the High Line Park in New York City have also featured the concept of “heterotopias” to improve social interaction and spatial diversity in open spaces, public facilities, communal spaces, and even art installations (Hampton, 2011). Another example is the Serpentine Pavilion in London which was designed by Junya Ishigami in 2019, with the purpose of creating a “Heterotopic” space to encourage visitors to interact and engage in new and unexpected ways where it includes a large roof made of slate tiles floating above the ground which creates a sense of “otherness” (Alvarez, 2019).

Nonetheless, there appears to be emerging popularity in the notion of “heterotopias” among scholars and practitioners, which are mainly about taking the notion as a tool to create new spaces with improved inclusiveness, diversity, spatial flexibility, and social interaction. There are few research or practices that have ever focused on the effects of reimagining our common urban spaces as “heterotopias” and thereby challenging the traditional way of site observation, analysis, and design solutions, as Foucault has described, the “Heterotopias of deviance” are increasing these days whose actions deviate

from the norm and often under the risk of being segregated from mainstream, the ignorance of those spaces in our world would result in their decay and deterioration to fall apart

To save those spaces from being forgotten, deteriorated, and segregated, a new **framework** through reimagining them as “heterotopias” is extremely needed. This framework is planned to not only act as an effective approach to regenerate or solve current issues on site, but also stay as an ever-lasting, interior mechanism to help those “Heterotopias of deviance” to sustainably function and prepare the future changes.

### 1.4 The Heterotopias Framework

According to the notion of “heterotopias”, the framework is built with two perspectives: multi-dimension and multi-scale, in which the various dimensions include “time, space, society” while diverse scales consist of “line, surface, boundary”.



Figure 3. The framework in multi-dimension of “time, space, society” (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

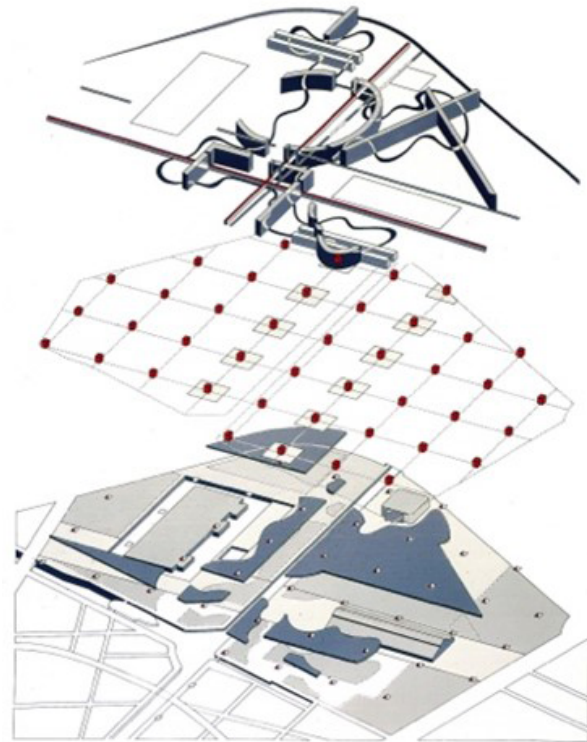


Figure 4. The image of ‘Point, Line, Surface’ (source: Bernard Tschumi, 2012).

In defining dimensions, as Foucault (1984) clarified, “heterotopias” constitute a complete society that reflects incompatible emplacement as Utopias but exist in the real world and they are capable of standing outside the time where time could be accumulated or frozen and in “heterotopias”, the spaces could juxtapose function differently. Therefore, three essential elements “time, space, society” from the notion of “heterotopias” are selected into the framework to act as diverse dimensions in urban design consideration.

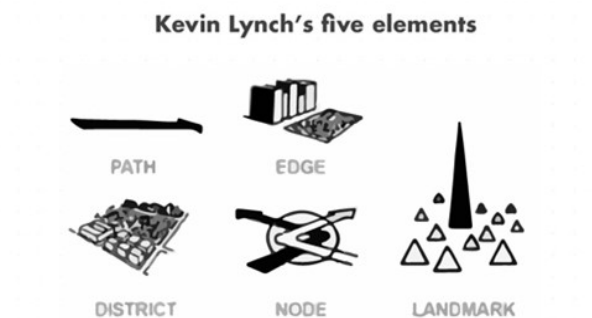


Figure 5. The image of 'Five urban elements'(source: Kevin Lynch, 1960).

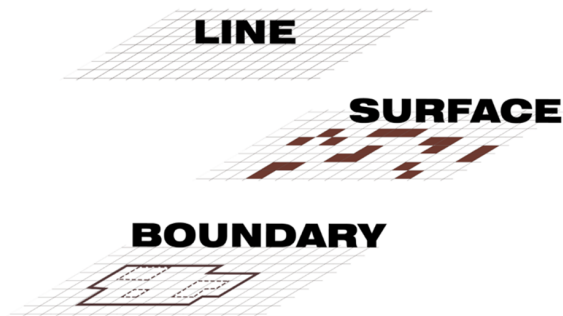


Figure 6. The framework in multi-scale of "line, surface, boundary" (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

To define the design sequence of scales in spaces, according to Foucault (1984), he mentioned today that emplacement has replaced "localization" which was opened by Galileo in the past and nowadays it is "defined by relations of proximity between points or elements" Furthermore, in his fifth principle, he (1984) declares that unlike the public spaces that are usually conceived of as more freely accessible, "heterotopias" presuppose a system of opening and closing, that simultaneously makes them

isolated and penetrable. Therefore, with extra inspiration from other great designers such as Kevin Lynch (1960) or Bernard Tschumi (2012) in defining spatial scales, three layers including "line, surface, boundary" are defined in the framework.

## 2. Ho Sheung Heung Village as "heterotopia"

Hong Kong Indigenous villages are "heterotopias". They have their own unique culture, history, and way of life which makes them distinct from the dominant culture of the city. They exist outside of the mainstream culture and social norms of the city with their own rules, and regulations. They could create a sense of illusion or fantasy as they often represent a nostalgic view of the past and have the ability to provide a glimpse into a traditional way of life that has been lost in the modern city. Besides, they are often under threat from urban development or gentrification. Such as Ho Sheung Heung village nowadays has been under the threat of Kwu Tung North New Town development with the challenge of preserving their cultural identity from modernization, but also avoiding being segregated from nearby new towns.

### 2.1 Time: Evolve

Most of the Indigenous villages appeared in the early 15th century with clans and Ho Sheung Heung constitutes one of the five great clans in Hong Kong-the Hau clan. Those indigenous villagers are one of the first settlers in this land. They witnessed the history of land exploitation, colonisation of the British government, lease of

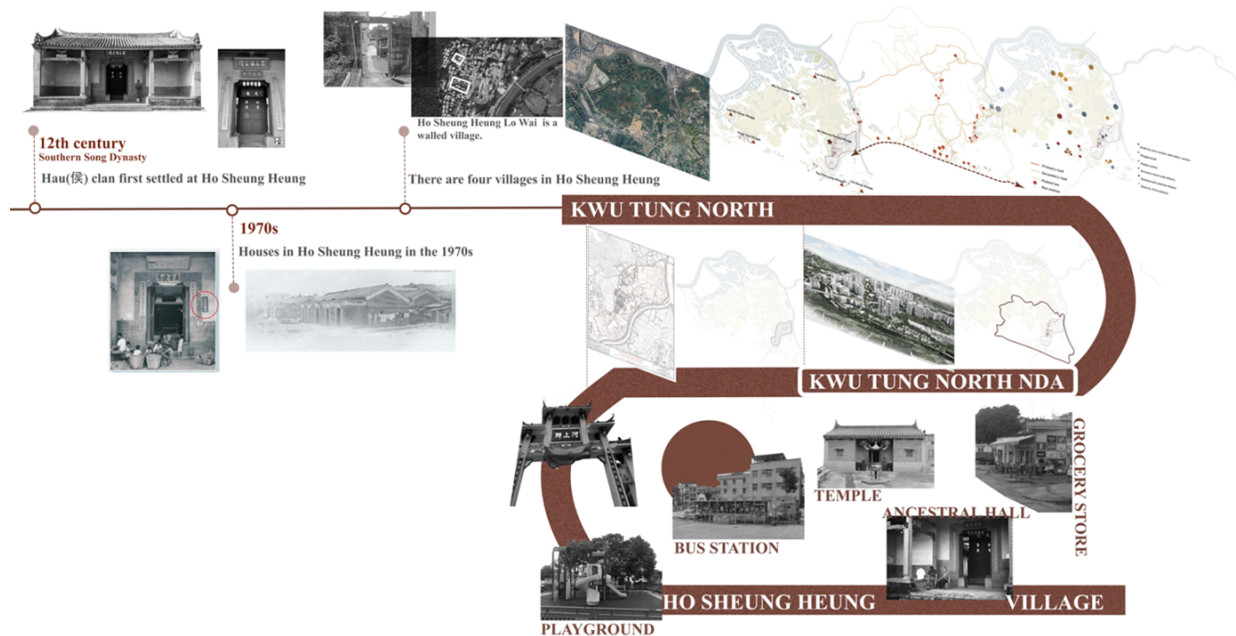


Figure 7. The background of Ho Sheung Heung village (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

New Territory, the New Town development, the establishment of the Small House Policy, and multiple large population movements (2021).

With their history unfolding and culture conserved, the “time” in indigenous villages seems to be accumulated and it can be seen from their spaces and societies. For example, the Ancestral Hall in Ho Sheung Heung village was built in the late Ming Dynasty to commemorate Hau Ku Shek, the 17th generation ancestor of the Hau clan. The rear hall was once used as a village school till the outbreak of the Second World War and then as the Ho Kai Kindergarten until 1970s. The hall functioned differently in time, and it remains with time accumulated inside.

Moreover, between the village houses, there are still some traditional walled houses that could be seen. Those spaces establish a general archive to demonstrate a nostalgic view of the past and a glimpse of a traditional way of life which has not disappeared over time.

However, as centuries passed, more new residents and new towns appeared around those old indigenous villages, and due to the Small House Policy which their land was under protection and the male villagers had the grant to build new houses, those villages became “out of control” Houses are increasing, the issues in the village such as parking, flooding, littering, aging are being neglected. The majority of those





Figure 8&9. The images of the Ancestral Hall and the traditional village house (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

indigenous villages are facing deteriorating and decaying, especially under the phenomenon of consistent New Town Development, they are under the crisis of serious segregation from new towns or even being abandoned in the future.

## 2.2 Space

Ho Sheung Heung village is situated in the west of Sheung Shui of New Territories. According to the official outline zoning map from HK Town



Figure 10&11. The ariel map (source: Google Earth, 2024) and zoning map (source: Town Planning Board, 2024) of Ho Sheung Heung Village.

Planning Board (figure 11), the dark green color represents the actual boundary of the village area which is not governed by official institutions or allocated as agricultural use. According to the two maps below (figure 10 & 11), the village is adjacent to the farmland on the north, a large area of woodland on the west, a messy warehouse site on the south which would be

rebuilt into new residences under the plan of Kwu Tung North New Town Development area (2019), and a river on the east.

Inside the Ho Sheung Heung village, apart from a large group of village houses, few public facilities and open spaces are offering basic or entertainment services for the villagers. For the daily basic needs, there is only one small convenience store that sells snacks and drinks, one restaurant which is used to be the community centre, and one café that only offers Tofu desserts. For entertainment needs, the playground is the only public open space for villagers to

interact. As for the two temples and the ancestral hall in the village, although they are open to the public, there are few people to visit in a day. Same with those spaces above, as shown in figure 12, in addition to the lack of variety in public spaces, it is hard to spot any villagers while using existing open spaces.

Between the village houses, there are diverse appearances in spaces which include some semi-private spaces in front of the houses and different widths between the houses with different paving on the ground. However, as those spaces are always forgotten and have not been

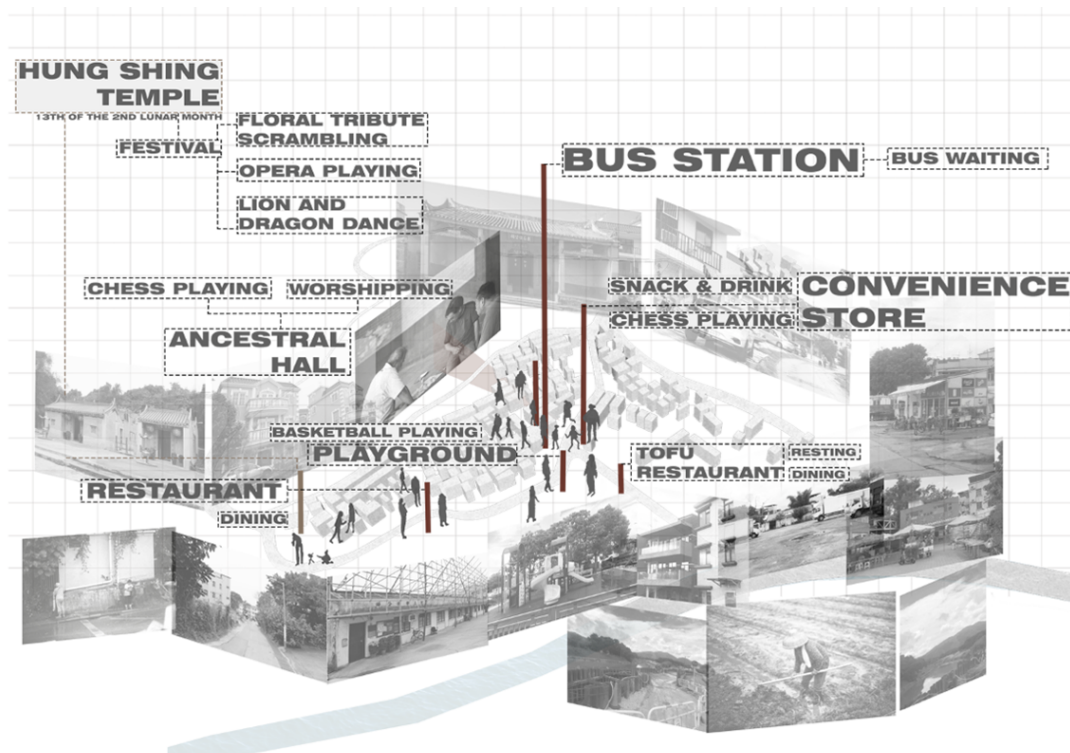


Figure 12. The map of village open spaces with images (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

well taken care of, they are underutilized and left in an unsatisfying condition. Villagers will not spend time here and often pass through as quickly as they can.

### 2.3 Society

In demographics, according to recent data, Ho Sheung Heung has approximately 1,800 residents, with projections indicating population increases to 2,030 and 2,240 in the future (Ove Arup & Partners Hong Kong Ltd, 2013). The demographic breakdown includes various age groups, with a notable percentage of residents under 15 years old and a significant portion be-

tween the ages of 15 and 39 (Centamap, 2021).

However, as indicated before, there is not much social interaction that could be found in the village, no matter in public spaces or semi-private spaces inside. Villagers seldom spend time in the Ho Sheung Heung village, instead, they prefer visiting the spaces outside of the village with their cars or the minibus. The reasons that have been analysed through personal observation are because the variety of open spaces is very limited and the existing spaces have not provided satisfying experiences such as lack of shade, green infrastructure, old equipment, or improper utilization of parking.



Figure 13. The images of spaces between village houses (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).



Figure 14. The images of the playground, parking space, bus station (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).



As the land in the south nearby is allocated as Kwu Tung North New Town Development area (2019), the Ho Sheung Heung village is under the challenge of balancing the new town housing development with increasing new arrivals, employment, investment, and the existing village need through awareness of cultural conservation, avoiding decay and segregation and improving social vibrancy.

### 3. Heterotopian Urban Design Interventions

In this design project, Ho Sheung Heung village is chosen as a representative for those over 600 indigenous villages in Hong Kong (Development Bureau, 2013), to explore a better solution in response to the threat of new urban development like the ongoing New Town Development as well as to mitigate interior issues that resulting in decay and segregation as “Heterotopias of deviance”

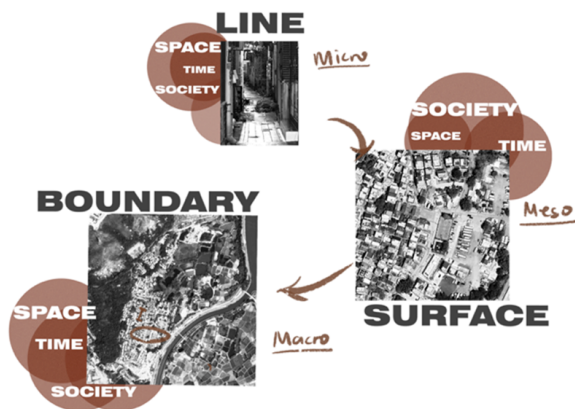


Figure 15. The image of applying the framework on site (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

In terms of applying this framework on site, in scale, “line” has been identified as the “spaces between the village houses” which might include the lane with different widths and paving or the semi-private open spaces in front of the houses. While “surface” refers to the “public open spaces” in the village which now have been inappropriately used for parking or the existing open spaces like a playground but are underutilized due to their unsatisfying condition. “Boundary” represents the “links between the Ho Sheung Heung village with surrounding woodland, river, farmland or other villages”

With the participation of multi-dimension in “time, space, society” it is found out in each layer of scales, there exist different issues that need to be regenerated. For example, in “line” there are few villagers who could be spotted using the spaces between the village houses and there are some issues can be found such as flooding, lack of green infrastructure, waste of land in semi-private spaces etc. In terms of “surface,” it is noticed that the most frequently used space in a day is the bus station area in front of the Ancestral Hall where people often take the only public transport to leave the village. Apart from that, the social activities on the “surface” in a day are hard to catch, only it is spotted that some elders are playing chess inside the convenience store and a few children are playing basketball for a while after lunchtime. However, it is concluded that in “Surface” most of the open spaces are underutilized, and the daily social activities are limited in the village. As for “boundary” there is no access to the adjacent woodland area and the riverside is observed with insufficient seat-

ing area, pedestrians, and shade.

## 4. Village Regeneration

According to the definition of multi-scale in the village and the awareness of multi-dimension in site analysis, the village regeneration will keep following the framework in multi-scale of “line, surface, boundary” and multi-dimension in “time, space, society” with consideration of the village issues above.

### 4.1 Line

“Line” refers to the “spaces between the village houses” which include the lanes with different widths, paving, and also the semi-private spaces in front of the modern village houses or traditional walled houses. In the “line” regeneration,

according to the current issues, for example, the flooding problem could be alleviated with a wider utilization of an improved drainage system, and the rainwater can be collected and recycled for other uses. During the rainy season in Hong Kong, after rainwater is collected from the rooftop to the collector pond in the semi-private space in “line” the saved water could not only be reused, but also provide a lovely blue infrastructure with biodiversity for villagers and wildlife to enjoy. On sunny days, the solar panels that have been regenerated on the rooftop generate energy for individual houses to utilize. Moreover, instead of vacant open spaces, the appearance of community gardens in the semi-private space of “line” could not only enhance social interaction, and engagement in the village, but also through growing own organic

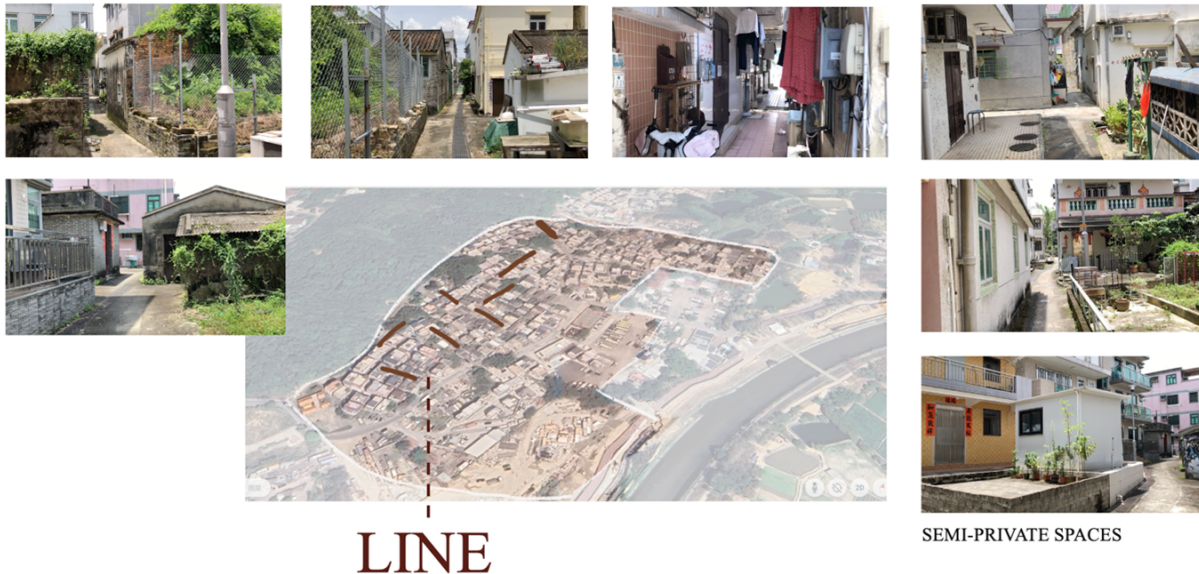


Figure 16. The image of the “line” in the village (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).



Figure 17. The sketch of regenerating the “line” as an example (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

food, to achieve self-sufficiency and food sustainability. Additionally, those spaces could be used for providing other small-scale services for the villagers in a short distance such as cutting hair, buying pills, playing chess, or exercising.

## 4.2 Surface

In the regeneration of “surface” which is defined as the “public open spaces now have been left vacant, inappropriately used or need improvement” the bus station area as the essential node of the village is first to be considered. As it is the most frequently visited space which is majorly used for bus-waiting, more seating areas, sufficient shade, better ventilation in summer, and more diverse nearby facilities need to be taken into practice. For other open spaces most

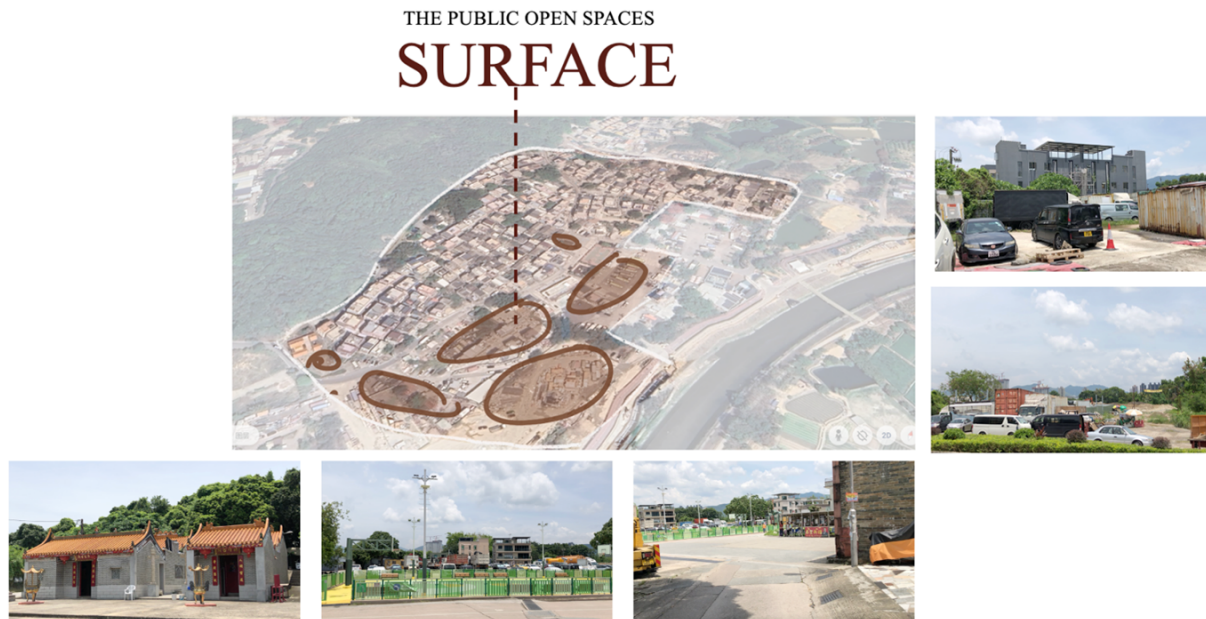


Figure 18. The image of the “surface” in the village (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

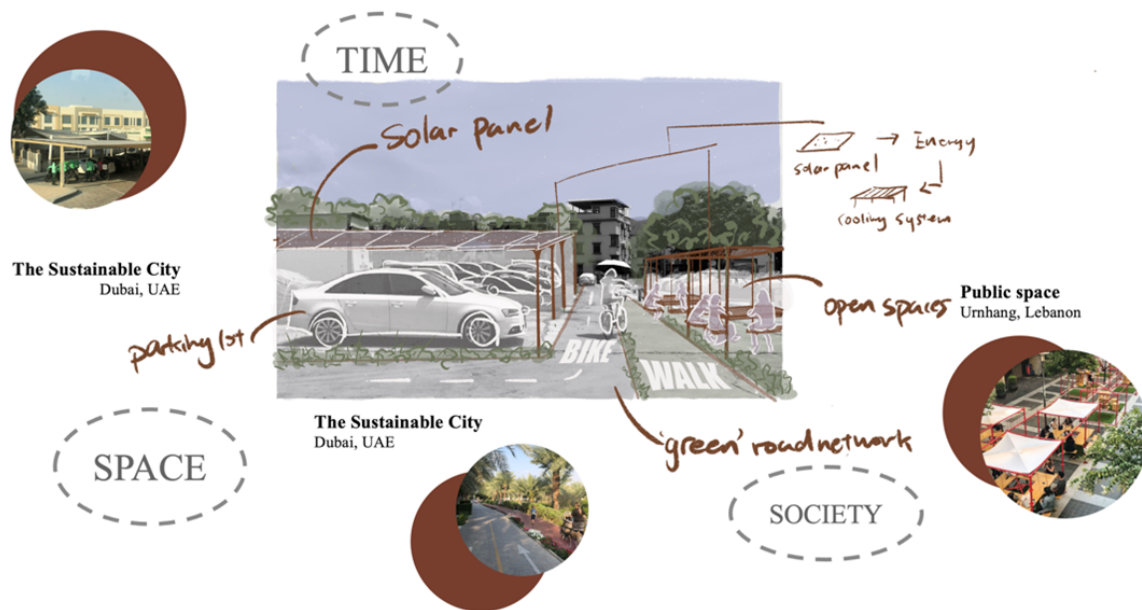


Figure 19. The sketch of regenerating the “surface” as an example (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

of them have been occupied by car parking, a well-planned parking lots for cars, bikes, and scooters would be placed with the solar panel on top of the “surface” to reorganize the car parking issue and free up additional spaces to create diverse services for the villagers including education, entertainment or safety assurance like a fire station.

#### 4.3 Boundary

As for the regeneration of “boundary” which includes different types of surrounding areas of the village, it mainly aims to foster better links with them, expanding the potential of utilisation for social interaction but also offering access for people to approach as well as pass through. For

instance, to allow the villagers to enjoy outdoor activities on weekends such as hiking, cycling, or picnicking, a more environmentally friendly road with bike lanes, pedestrian walkways, and open spaces for resting should be planned away from vehicles in the main road. For the river-side, more aesthetically pleasing open spaces that offer a range of places for playing, chatting, and socializing need to be developed. For the connection with new towns, an improved appealing rural lifestyle with community gardens, and local markets are necessary.

In addition, the dimension of “time” will also be considered in a longer timeline including festivals, seasons, and decades. For example,



# THE VILLAGE BOUNDARY BOUNDARY



Figure 20. The image of the “boundary” in the village (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

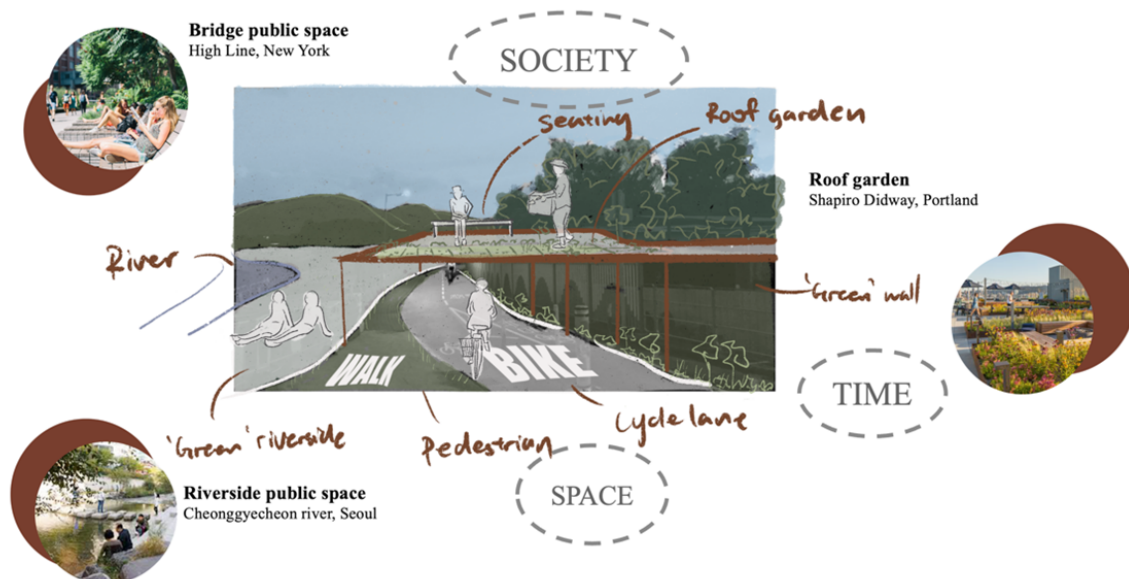


Figure 21. The sketch of regenerating the “boundary” as an example (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

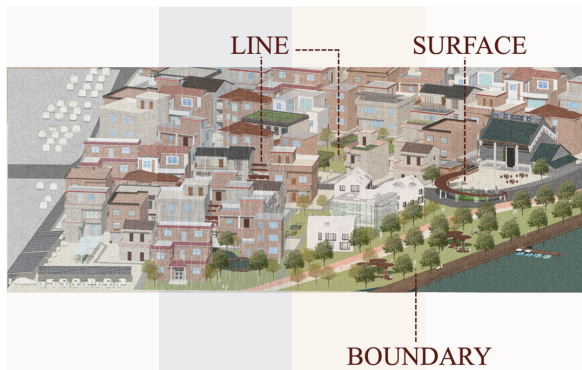


Figure 22. The rendered photo of village regeneration in "time" (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

in "line" when the rainwater has not been collected in the pond, the pond could act as a public space for entertainment activities like skateboarding, children playing, or a seating area for chatting and resting. In "surface" the energy generated from the solar panel on the parking lot by time could be used for the cooling system in the nearby open spaces to provide a comfortable area for social activities in summer and the panels could be adjusted or extended according to the users' need in different period. In "boundary" like the facilities on the riverside, it could also be changed horizontally or vertically for diverse uses like gardening, seating, chatting, viewing or even passing the river. Since those spaces in "line, surface, boundary" is flexible and could be altered by the users' need for creating various social activities, the scales in "line, surface, boundary" will likewise change over time, creating an interior mechanism that is adaptable to any changes in the village.

#### 4.4 The Heterotopias Masterplan

Following the "heterotopias" Framework in the multi-dimension of "time, space, society" and multi-scale of "line, surface, boundary" the masterplan has been created in consideration of existing issues and demands in "time, space, society" as well as the current urban fabric of the village in "line, surface, boundary"

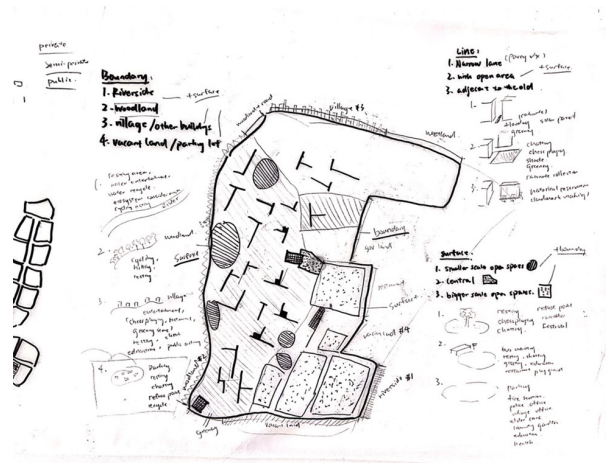


Figure 23. The sketch of regenerating the village under the Framework (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

According to the masterplan below (figure 24), the dark red colour represents the spaces that have been categorized as "line" and regenerated under the multi-dimensions of "time, space, society" in the framework. "Line" in this design project is highlighted into three types that according to the sketch above (figure 23), include the regeneration of lateral lanes between village houses, the semi-private spaces in front of the houses, and the spaces between the modern vil-



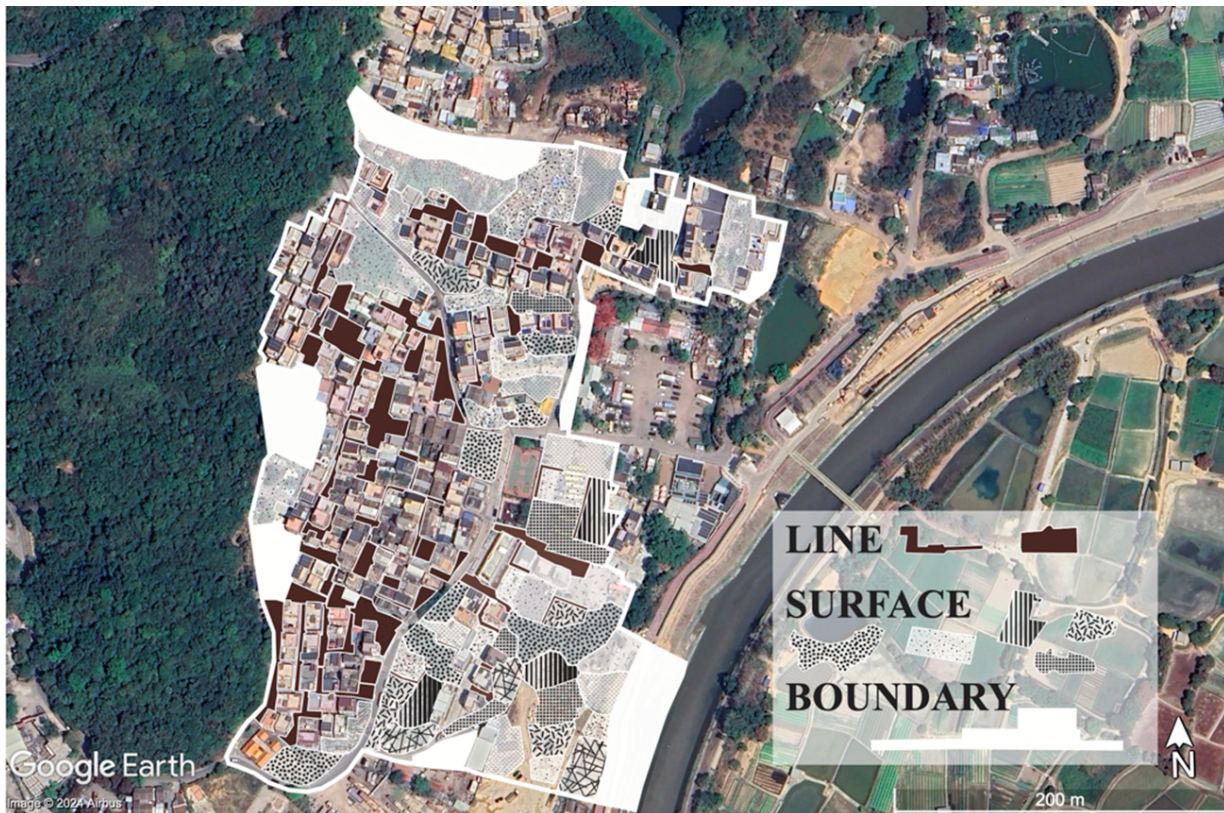


Figure 24. The masterplan of the village regeneration in multi-scale (source: Ruiqi Tao, 2024).

lage houses and the traditional walled houses which has not been used anymore as well as their renewal. “Surface” also consists of three categories including smaller-scale open spaces that are normally covered with trees, the central spaces in the village that are considered as the bus station in front of the ancestral hall, and other open public spaces including an existing playground, vacant lands, and lands have been improperly utilized for parking. For regenerating “boundary” according to the surrounding

environment, they concluded with three types of riverside, woodlands, and other villages with farmlands.

## 5. Conclusion

The application of the “heterotopias” framework helps to establish a new perspective in the multi-dimension of “time, space, society” and a multi-layer in the scale of “line, surface, boundary” according to the site urban fabric throughout the whole urban design process.

Leveraging multi-dimension, under the participation of “time” in “space and society” helps to make the design approach more diverse, flexible, dynamic, and sustainable. As for multi-scale in “line, surface, boundary” on the village site, the systematic, new way of defining different layers on an urban scale could cultivate a more efficient approach for finding the site issues and giving the best solutions. For example, the “line” in the village which has been defined as the spaces between the village houses used to be often ignored in design, but they are acting as an essential bond for connecting different types of open spaces in the village. With the definition of “line,” these spaces can be re-paid attention to and re-think their value in improving social interaction.

The Heterotopias Framework could effectively address theoretical and implementation gaps in the practice of urban or rural regeneration?. As “heterotopias” are immersed in our lives and often appear in urban design practice, but due to the lack of a systematic approach to alleviate their issues as well as an interior mechanism to react to constantly emerging changes, most of those “heterotopias” are left to deteriorate and eventually disappear. Those “heterotopias” are the common places that we could easily find in our real world, but we often neglect their significance and potential to be regenerated. Michel Foucault has used the term of “heterotopias” to reveal the certain value of those common spaces by reimaging them in diverse dimensions of “time, space, society”.

In essence, these three dimensions, together

with scales in “line, surface, boundary,” could interact when forming the physical framework for rural or urban regeneration in Heterotopias spaces. Not only implementable for the current decaying site – this framework could also act as an interior mechanism in response to long-term challenges and constantly emerging changes. Previous works have demonstrated that applying Foucault’s Heterotopias on urban design would provide a brand-new perspective in dimension of ‘time, space, society’ and an on-site scale from line to boundary to more effectively solve the issues on Heterotopian sites of deviance, under the threat of “top-down” urban developments. The multi-dimension and scale from the notion of “heterotopias” in this framework are expected to be not only applied to regeneration practice, but also have a chance to be considered in other urban design practices on Heterotopian sites such as urban gentrification, transit-oriented development, or policy-driven developments such as New Towns in the future.



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