

Bicycling in Hong Kong

Place, Spatiality and Senses – by LEE Lok Yi

To most people, bicycling in Hong Kong seems impossible because of the busy traffic on motorways and lack of well-planned, convenient bicycling infrastructure. Nonetheless, a number of hobbyists and commuters eventually find their ways to adjust to the problem of ‘a lack of space’ and some evidence are very visible on the streets.

The first problem comes into one’s mind would be ‘How to store a bicycle?’ when most flats in Hong Kong offer very limited space. Some hobbyists would invest in mini storage, while some can mount their precious bicycles on the walls or ceiling at home. A popular alternative is to choose a foldable bicycle, which you can hide it at home, or simply park and lock it at railings surrounding the pedestrian’s footpaths. However, besides blending in with the background urban settings, some irresponsibly parked bicycles, namely shared bikes like *Ofo* and *Gobeebike*, are always discarded in planters along footpaths or in the middle of some pedestrian’s way. The care for bicycles range from keeping their expensive collection in the best conditions, arranging them orderly at places where bicycles are highly relied on as main means of commute, exposure to sunlight, dust and rain due to convenience, to not caring about them at all.

The second problem arises would be ‘Where to ride a bicycle?’. Meanwhile most parts of Hong Kong are not designed for bicyclists, commuters and hobbyists often decide and create their own routes depending on their skills, experiences and comfort. Bicycling is a constant recreation of spatiality, where every element at the moment affects your decision and confidence in riding through the road ahead. For example, commuters on Cheung Chau do not worry about the narrow roads and pedestrians, they do not slow down for turns and corners, nor do they get off from their bicycles when they meet a crowd. On the other hand, many hobbyists and leisure bicyclists stick to plotted cycleways to avoid collisions with other road users. Most commuters on Cheung Chau are brought up bicycling wherever they go, they set their minds on their destinations but are less sensitive to the momentum whilst being on the bicycle. While hobbyists enjoy the velocity and sense of success overcoming barriers and hardships like long, steep slopes. Commuters are less affected by spatiality because of their familiarity with riding bicycles and the routes. On the contrary, hobbyists can feel threatened by variables and irregularities more easily, such as rain, unexpected potholes, conditions of their bicycles, and other less experienced and careful bicyclists. Thus they are more cautious

about their surroundings, the senses and feelings added up contribute to their senses of danger or comfort.

To bicyclists, it is not solely a matter of 'Where's reserved for bicycling', but whether they feel safe riding bicycles at. A bicyclist usually only ride on places they are confident in handling possible variables and therefore is no universal rule defining a 'bicyclable place'. When there is limited space for bicycling, bicyclists create their own space and emplace themselves to form normical habits, notably the many urban bicyclists riding on motorways or footpaths sighted on busy streets at all districts.



Standard bicycleway near Tai Mei Tuk, Tai Po (top, left).

Commuting bicyclists on Cheung Chau riding at narrow alleys (top, right and bottom, right).

Commuting bicyclist spotted at Wan Chai, riding in the middle of the motorway (bottom, left).

