

## **Place-making: An Interdisciplinary and Comparative Inquiry, with Nearby Cases**

Friday 2:30-5:15PM  
LSK LT2 (Lee Shau Kee Building)

### **Instructor: Dr. Shan Huang**

Postdoctoral Fellow at Centre for Cultural Studies, CUHK (2025-)

PhD in Anthropology, Stanford University (2024)

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*\*This is a preliminary course outline, and the specific content may be modified as needed.*

### **Course Overview**

This course explores place-making as a deeply innovative yet inevitably contested process. While “place-making” often evokes images of vibrant cultural districts, heritage sites, or art-led revitalization projects, it also raises critical questions about power, exclusion, and ecological trade-offs. As a locus of analysis, it offers a tangible way to examine how meanings and feelings are generated, negotiated, and sometimes erased in tandem with the transformation of specific places. We begin by mapping conceptual spectrums—space, place, environment, territory—before exploring why place-making is best understood as an open-ended, relational process of *making*, rather than simply planning or building. We then investigate how place-making becomes entangled with issues such as gentrification, spatial justice, and the politics of “authenticity,” while also opening possibilities for community resilience, multi-species relations, and creative agency. The course also incorporates short film screenings and discussions on media and mediation, examining how visual and narrative practices themselves participate in shaping places. Throughout the course, students engage both classic cases and emerging phenomena, moving from global debates to situated examples, with particular attention to East Asia. Local cases in Hong Kong, explored through guided field visits, further ground these discussions. A substantial portion of work involves group projects and dialogue, mirroring how place-making often unfolds collaboratively in real world contexts. Students are accordingly expected to be open to working across disciplinary, methodological, and sociocultural boundaries, and to collaborate closely with peers from diverse backgrounds. By the end of the course, students will develop capacities to critically analyze and thoughtfully participate in place-making initiatives, alongside sensibilities attuned to ethical concerns and to the diverse effects such processes may produce.

### **About the Instructor**

Dr. Shan Huang is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he works within the university’s new public humanities initiative. He is a cultural anthropologist whose research explores urban and

environmental politics, social activism, and affect studies in sub/urban Hong Kong and mainland China. His doctoral dissertation (Stanford, 2024) is an ethnographic study of Hong Kong's post-Handover political culture, examined through land politics, urban movements, and grassroots community-building. He is the co-author of *Reappearing Mui Wo* (in Chinese, Typesetter, 2024), a public-facing book on the socio-agricultural history of a seaside town on Lantau Island, written with community partners during and in response to its developmental controversies.

## Requirement and Assessment

1. Class participation (20%)

2. Position papers (20%)

Students will write two position papers (600-800 words) on the week's reading. First paper due Week 4, second paper due Week 7

3. Midterm exam (10%)

Keywords on place-making (Week 7 in class)

4. Group/individual project (50%)

Analyze a place-making project/case from different perspectives and/or using multiple methods. Approval from the instructor is needed. Proposal due Week 10 (20%), Group presentation on Week 13 (10%), Paper/report/write-up due one week after last class (20%)

*Alternatively, and only in exceptional cases, you may choose to submit a single-authored term paper of 8–10 pages. This paper may either analyze a place-making project of your choice, or offer a thematic review that engages a selected topic from the course by drawing on an expanded body of readings.*

## Course Plan

This course begins in Week 1 by asking: *What is place and place-making, and how might we approach it across different contexts?* Alongside introducing core questions, we will discuss the course's pedagogical approach, which encourages experimenting with diverse ways of learning—including exploring how AI strategies might support research and analysis.

Weeks 2 to 6 establish the theoretical and interdisciplinary foundations for studying place-making, drawing from anthropology, geography, cultural studies, and critical urban theory. We will also closely read Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* to explore how meanings of place are tied to memory, language, and lived experience.

From Weeks 7 to 10, the course turns to comparative inquiries of place-making practices, considering how projects such as community-based art, heritage initiatives, rural revitalization, and environmental engagements unfold within different cultural and historical contexts across

mainland China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. This part of the course is partly open-ended, allowing students to propose additional cases or topics they wish to explore collaboratively.

Weeks 11 and 12 focus on two cases in Hong Kong. This section also includes a field visit to Mui Wo on Lantau Island, guided by the instructor, where students will examine how an agricultural community in suburban Hong Kong has been established and sustained through the efforts of local residents as well as various other stakeholders.

## Required Books

Cresswell, Tim. *Place: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Basso, Keith H. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

## Screening (in class)

Selected short films from Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, and others (TBA)

## Readings and Class Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction

- This opening week introduces the key questions and scope of the course: What turns a space into a place? What does it mean to make or sustain a place, and who gets to participate in this process? We will also discuss the pedagogical approach of the course, which emphasizes interdisciplinary perspectives, collaborative exploration across diverse student backgrounds, and experimenting with various methods

### Week 2 — Theoretical Foundations: Place, Space, Environment

- Cresswell, Tim. *Place: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.

### Week 3 — Why “Making”?

- Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Strathern, Marilyn. *Partial Connections*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1991.

### Week 4 — Place-making as Creative and Contested

- Harvey, David. “The Right to the City.” *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23–40.
- Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

### Week 5 — Place-making through Memory, Language, Morality

- Basso, Keith H. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

(selected chapters)

- Screening in class

### Week 6 — Place, Race, Gender, and Belonging

- hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

(selected chapters)

- Screening in class

### Weeks 7–10 — Place-making in Practice: Contemporary Cases from East Asia

In these weeks, we will explore how place-making unfolds through cultural, environmental, and creative projects across mainland China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, attending to local histories, social fabrics, and emerging challenges. This part of the course will also be partly co-constructed with students, who are encouraged to propose

additional cases or readings that align with their interests and backgrounds. A guest lecture will also be scheduled.

### Weeks 11–12 — Nearby Cases: Place-making in Hong Kong

In the final two weeks of the course, we turn to local examples to examine how place-making processes unfold in Hong Kong. A guided field trip to Mui Wo on Lantau Island is included. Students will explore how an agricultural community in suburban Hong Kong has been established and sustained through the efforts of local residents and various stakeholders.

### Week 13 – Symposium: Group/Individual Projects Presentation