The Making of Graham Street Market:
Culture and Politics in Spatial Production

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Abstract

In late 2006, the HK Government launched the “Old Shop Street” redevelopment project (H18) which claimed to “conserve” a historic district by uprooting the vibrant Graham Street Market that is as old as the city, and erecting giant towers on the site. The underlying logic of H18 reflects the conventional perception and narrative of Hong Kong history: one that ends when it unfolds, erasing the traces of lives once lived.

This thesis attempts to delineate and analyse the space lived by three particular subjects in Graham Street Market through an event-space perspective, inspired by French philosopher Alain Badiou’s theory of the subject. This framework assumes that space, instead of an external pre-given, is the product of event(s) carried out by the subject and is thus critical to their existence. These three subjects, among many, construct their own spaces in the street market through different events. The structure and insight of their spaces will shed light on the discussion on a few problems of space.

The first chapter concerns Graham Street Market itself as a subject. Its historical space in which a conservation campaign takes place signifies a paradigm shift in the conventional narrative of Hong Kong history. The second chapter examines the space of self-making with Yee Kee Vegetable Company as an example to show how hawking is institutionalized and loses it subjectivity in the course of time, which signifies a threat to the right to the city in David Harvey’s sense. The last chapter focuses on the feline space in Graham Street Market. The cat represents the Other in Badiou’s sense and the analysis suggests that the space of Other is the precondition for the emergence of public subject and consequently a political public space.
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