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The Battle to Save 'Living Heritage' in Hong Kong: Stories of Urban Resistance in the Central District

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Abstract

This paper investigates what constitutes heritage in Hong Kong, focusing specifically on what I call the 'living heritage' of Graham Street market. Although street markets are primarily studied as sites for the exchange of economic goods and tradable products, they play a crucial role in the policies of urban regeneration, heritage, place making, healthy eating, sustainability, environmental impact, social and community. Based on the premise that street hawking and street markets are historically part of a wider socio-economic, political, and cultural system, this paper will concentrate on the stories of survival, resistance and metamorphosis of the 'vital living past' of Graham Street Market. This 150 years old market, remarkable example of 'living heritage', is currently under threat due to neo-liberal logic of redevelopment and gentrification. The paper analyzes the role of concerned civil society organisations (such as 'Savethemarket') in the battle against domicide: the destruction of home which also implies the destruction of memory. The analysis of this historical market will shed light on the entanglement between the condition of existential vulnerability of the street hawkers and the complex socio-economic and political mechanisms which might lead to the annihilation of this 'living heritage'. It will also demonstrate that this historical market has become the testing ground for bottom-up practices of democratization.

Biography

Dr Maurizio Marinelli came to Sussex in September 2013 as a Senior Lecturer in East Asian History. He is also a Visiting Professor in the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths University of London and a Visiting Fellow at the Australian Center on China in the World at the Australian National University. Before coming to Sussex, he taught in Italy, China, the United States, Australia and at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

He specialises in contemporary China's intellectual and urban history. His research investigates how China's relations with the rest of the world have influenced historical narratives and shaped ways of representing each other within their respective intellectual discourses. Maurizio is currently working on the socio-spatial transformation of the port city of Tianjin from the foreign concessions era (1860-1945) to the present.

