Relational Heritage Sovereignty: Authorization, Territorialization and the Making of the Silk Roads

Abstract:
The gaze towards the Silk Roads was first initiated by UNESCO’s heritage project in tandem with its new category of cultural routes. The idea of a cultural route as a form of heritage, as well as the associated procedures of nomination, registration and conservation, entails rulemaking by international organizations. A route that transcends national boundaries triggers concerns about state sovereignty and international knowledge. Drawing insights from critical heritage studies and political geography, this study proposes a relational heritage sovereignty measured by two axes: the power of an expert apparatus of rulemaking and territorialization. By examining the heritage nomination process of ‘Silk Roads: Chang’an-Tianshan Section’, the paper interrogates the politics of assemblage, knowledge and territory. In particular, it explores how a cultural route offers space for international and local experts as well as political and economic organizations to collect, compare, categorize and reassemble sites/places, historical episodes, and technical knowledge to legitimize an imaginary territory with new power relations in the present. The relationality of heritage sovereignty pushes for more serious attention to be paid to the politics of assemblage and the ongoing process of power-territorialization reconfiguration.

About the Speaker:
June Wang is Assistant Professor of Urban Geography in the Department of Public Policy at City University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include cultural/creative cities and culture-led urban transformation, such as gentrification and recently, territorialization of creative cities through assemblage of land and population, and the consequently precarious geography of cultural workforce. She has co-edited the book Making Cultural Cities in Asia: Mobility, Assemblage, and the Politics of Aspirational Urbanism (Routledge, 2016), and has authored published papers in various journals, such as Cities, Geoforum, Territory, Politics, Governance and Urban Geography.

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~All are Welcome~

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