

A Cultural Geography of Themed Spaces: Custody, Care and Consumption

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Date/Time: Friday, 13 November 2015, 3.30pm – 5.00pm

Place: Earth Lab (AS2 02-03), Department of Geography, NUS

Abstract

From prison hotels to animal-enclosures, spaces are increasingly staged and themed for a variety of purposes concerning custody, care and consumption. In this discussion, I consider the potential role of cultural geography, as a consolidating sub-discipline and as a 'method'/approach, in the study of themed spaces both established and emerging. In particular, I argue that a power-related approach from cultural geography better attends to issues of social and environmental justice in such spaces of custody, care and consumption. Such a power-based approach also has the potential to draw in and consolidate more fragmentary efforts on such themed spaces in carceral geography, tourism geography, urban geography and the geography of heritage. Using examples from work on a series of themed spaces including a marine-mammal based theme park, a theme park inspired by a historical painting and a ceramic heritage town in China, light festivals in Europe, a migrant hotel in the Netherlands and a disused mental institution in Singapore, I will discuss (and hope to stimulate a lively dialogue with the audience on) the workings of power in such themed spaces via notions of custody, care and consumption and the subjectification of actants from refugees, patients, prisoners, tourists, performers and workers at such spaces and animals in captivity.

About the Speaker



Dr ONG Chin Ee is a cultural geographer working on the dynamic interface between heritage, tourism and urban governance. Prior to joining NUS Geography, Chin Ee was based in the Cultural Geography Chair Group, Wageningen University and Research Centre in the Netherlands and the Institute for Tourism Studies in Macao and The University of Hong Kong. Chin Ee was also part of a team that developed and delivered a pioneering heritage management undergraduate course in Macao and specialised courses for tour guides and site managers at UNESCO World Heritage sites and cultural places in Asia for UNESCO and UNESCAP. Chin Ee's current research centres on the post-socialist aspects of Chinese outbound tourism, themed spaces, carceral geography, tourism labour and critical theory. Professionally, he serves as a member of ICOMOS Singapore.

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