LSE-PKU Summer School 2020

LPS- GY201 | The Political Economy of Urbanisation in China and Asia: Globalisation and Uneven Development

Course Outline

INSTRUCTOR

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Professor Hyun Bang Shin is a specialist in urban Asia and teaches in the Department of Geography and Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His research centres on the critical analysis of the political economic dynamics of speculative urbanisation, the politics of redevelopment and displacement, gentrification, housing, the right to the city, and mega-events as urban spectacles, with particular attention to Asian cities.

He has published an edited volume Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development (Policy Press, 2015) and a monograph Planetary Gentrification (Polity Press, 2016), all part of collaboration with Loretta Lees (University of Leicester) and Ernesto López-Morales (University of Chile). The publication of these books emanated from a series of workshops Towards an Emerging Geography of Gentrification in the
Global South in 2012, funded by the Urban Studies Foundation. A new volume in Korean has been published in November 2017 entitled Anti Gentrification: What is to be Done (Dongnyok, 2017), which brought together activists, artists, professionals and academics, who have been at the forefront of fighting gentrification in South Korea in recent years. Chapters visit key issues that are pertinent to the understanding of how gentrification unfolds in South Korea’s uneven geography, and what measures can be envisaged to fight gentrification at both micro and macro scales.

For more information on his research and publications, see his personal web (http://urbancommune.net), his department profile or his entry on the LSE Experts directory.

COURSE OVERVIEW

The course explores the contemporary dynamics of urbanisation in Asia, with special emphasis on cities in China and other East and Southeast Asian economies, which share the experiences of rapid urban development with strong state intervention in the context of condensed industrialisation. The course will benefit from the geographical advantage of taking place in Beijing and make use of a number of China case studies to examine the differences as well as similarities of urban development between Chinese and other Asian cities.

Applying interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives, the course encourages students to develop critical knowledge and comparative understanding of how urban space is transformed in different social, economic and political settings, and what socio-spatial implications are made in a differentiated way upon local populations.

Throughout the course, we ask whether the concepts and theories born out of the (post-)industrial Western urban experiences can be applicable to the understanding of urban Asia. We also ask what are the challenges that cities in East and Southeast Asia face, given its current development trajectory.

We do this by examining a set of carefully selected themes that address (a) the integration of Asian cities with the global economy, (2) the distinctive characteristics of Asia’s urban development, (3) the place-specificities of state intervention in forming urban growth strategies, and (4) socio-political implications of urbanisation processes in the region.

Day 1: Introduction: Urbanisation and Asian Cities - A Comparative Perspective
Day 2: Urbanisation, Capitalism and the State
Day 3: Urbanisation, (Post-)Socialism and the State
Day 4: Financialisation and Indebted Citizens
Day 5: Field trip to central Beijing Day 6: The Politics of Land
Day 7: The Politics of Displacement
Day 8: Planetary Gentrification
Day 9: The Olympic Cities: Urban Spectacles and Mega-events Day
10: Contesting Cities

**Recommended General Readings**


**Prerequisites**

None
Assessment

Essay Outline: 20%  Final Essay: 80%

Students are required to produce an essay outline by the end of week 1 counting for 20% of the final mark and submit a final essay at the end of Week 2 counting for the remaining 80%.

Daily Session Themes and Readings

Note: * (asterisk) denotes key readings for each session. Readings for each daily session are listed in the alphabetical order of the first author. The course actively makes use of visual resources including documentary screening in some sessions.

Day 1. Introduction: Urbanisation and Asian Cities - A Comparative Perspective

The first session includes an overview of the course contents and the key perspectives that will be used throughout the course. The session is also to allow a space for participating students to get to know each other and with the instructor.

Key readings


Further readings


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In post-industrial cities of the West, property development has gained an increasing degree of significance in urban renewal. In East Asian cities where real estate investment has been one of the main drivers behind their rapid economic growth, urban renewal involving demolition and reconstruction of existing buildings has been at the centre of urban policy-making processes for many years. Underlying these processes is the government-developer nexus that brings together property-based interests that aim to maximise gains from property development. In particular, the issue of land ownership and property rights is critical to our understanding of the differences between cities in the global East/South and those in other capitalist countries.

**Key readings**


**Further readings**

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**Day 3. Urbanisation, (Post-)Socialism and the State**

The session focuses on the role of the Chinese state in times of China’s condensed urbanisation and economic transition during the period of China’s integration with the global economy. The session examines the role of the Chinese central and local states, and examines the ways in which the Chinese state has intervened in the making of Chinese market economy.
Key readings


Further readings


This session examines the prominence of financialisation and its impact on daily life, focusing on the ways in which contemporary urban accumulation hinges on creating indebted citizens. A particular attention is paid to the rise of asset-based welfarism, and its counterpart in East Asian productivist welfarism that places a heavy emphasis on the roles of families and individuals as well as on property investment and homeownership.

**Key readings**


**Further readings**


**Day 5. Field trip to central Beijing**

This session involves a field visit (a walking tour) to Beijing’s inner city space, exploring the relationship between urbanisation, infrastructure, gentrification, heritage conservation and urban land. The day will start with an introduction to the theme and the site of visit, followed by field walk. We will stop for a brief while at each site for short discussions around key questions as follows:

(a) Can you find themes we’ve discussed so far reflected in the city’s built form? (b) What traces of history remain visible in the present configuration of central Beijing? (c) What processes of urbanisation are evident in the physical spaces of the city?

**Day 6. The Politics of Land**

This session examines the practice of compulsory purchase (or eminent domain) to understand how the state plays an important role in contemporary cities, increasingly in support of enhancing private interests. Furthermore, this session considers the experience of China’s urbanisation to discuss how the state posed as de facto landlord influences the way in which urbanisation is experienced.

*This session includes the screening of a short film Moving House (20 minutes)*

**Key readings**


Further readings


Day 7: The Politics of Displacement

This session examines the socio-spatial consequences of spatial restructuring propelled by various investments in the built environment (e.g. urban regeneration, infrastructure
development). What are the experiences of local residents who can be grouped in a number of ways based on their level of income, tenure or ownership of property rights? To what extent are the benefits of property (re)development disproportionately shared among local residents? One issue that may come to mind readily is the displacement of poor residents. What happens to the displacees? How do their experiences vary across countries?

Screening of Documentary: Meishi Street (on Beijing)

Key readings


Further readings


Day 8. Planetary Gentrification

Gentrification is first coined by Ruth Glass in the early 1960s, referring to the displacement of poor tenants in inner-city London. Born out of the experiences of post-industrial cities in the West, it is also a term that has been heavily contested over the years, its definition and applicability to various emerging urban phenomena challenged. This session aims to review key arguments in the gentrification literature, and explore the extent to which the concept can be applicable to urban processes in the global South and the global East.

Key readings


Further readings


With the rise of local entrepreneurialism, cities have come to employ various strategies in order to compete for increasingly footloose capital and people, reconstructing their image to raise city profile and reputation. Event-led development as part of hosting sporting events such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup is one of the various policy tools that have been increasingly adopted in this respect. This session examines the pros and cons of this strategy, and also explores its socio-spatial footprints.

**Key readings**


**Further readings**


**Day 10. Contesting Cities**

In previous sessions, we have focused on how market agents and governments with vested interests in real estate development come about to promote property-based, profit-led urban spatial changes. This process inevitably threatens (some of) those existing residents whose ‘legitimate’ rights to their housing and land are violated. While many people would agree on building ‘cities for people, not for profit’, how to realise this in different urban contexts is hard to be defined.

**Key readings**


Marcuse, P. (2009) From critical urban theory to the right to the city. City 13(2-3): 185-197


**Further readings**


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