

Planning Chinatown

Vocabulary, space, and technopolitics of historic preservation

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My current research is a book manuscript based on my doctoral research entitled '*Planning Chinatown: vocabulary, space, and technopolitics of historic preservation*'. The research investigates the role of technical expertise in the preservation planning of the Chinese settlements, the 'Chinatown', in three cities in Southeast Asia: Bangkok (Thailand), Penang (Malaysia), and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam). Grounded in governmentality and spatial regulation literature, my research is interested in the role of government tools, programs, and regulations used in the planning of Chinatown, particularly historic preservation planning. I argue that historic preservation is not simply a policy intervention, but a way of seeing and knowing the past. In particular, I pay close attention to the role of knowledge that informs these governmental programs and the politics surrounding these programs.

The theoretical framework is the intimate connection between planning knowledge and planning action. To tease out this connection, the research poses three related questions. First, what kind of knowledge or expertise, particularly preservation planning vocabularies, is used in the preservation planning? Second, how does such knowledge circulate as 'truths' to enable planning action? Alternatively, through what means is such knowledge used to justify or inform planning interventions. Third, if the knowledge-action may be viewed as selections, what then is omitted from the vision of the preservation planning scheme? To explore the contested experience of preservation planning, my research closely attends to the conflicts and resistance against what is formulated as technical knowledge, challenging the very legality and legitimacy of the planning interventions.