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Film-induced pilgrimage and contested heritage space in Taipei City

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects of film-induced pilgrimages on a specific, often contested aspect of urban place production — the designation of heritage space, a process rooted in the local landscape, architecture, people, artifacts, traditions and stories that render a location culturally and historically significant. In particular, this article examines how film-induced pilgrimages create destination places which, in turn, influence and alter longstanding political struggles over heritage meaning among local residents, preservationists and government agencies. The effect of unanticipated cultural forces, such as film-induced pilgrimages, is rarely politically impartial; rather, a place's destination status may be used and responded to strategically by local stakeholders in support of their conflicting claims over heritage production.

Urban studies scholars have devoted considerable attention on the role of the arts in urban redevelopment (Gibson & Stevenson, 2004; Miles & Paddison, 2005; Sacco & Blessi, 2009; Zukin, 1995). In postindustrial cities, cultural representations figure prominently in the political economic production of place (Gottdiener, 2001; Jensen, 2007; Miles, 2005; Zukin, 2009). Among the sources of cultural representations, film and television play a substantial role in the generation and circulation of popular place images and representations (Kavaratzis, 2004; Mathews, 2010; Roberts, 2010; Shiel & Fitzmaurice, 2011). Depending on their level of popularity, films may spread certain ideas about places that can potentially influence urban policies regarding heritage, branding and place identities (Hahm & Wang, 2011).

Increasingly, popular films and television series have generated considerable public interest in visiting the places featured as locations or settings for the film or series (Roesch, 2011). Film-induced tourism is a growing research field of interdisciplinary scholarship that examines the transformation of places into tourist destinations or visitor attractions as a direct result of their being featured in films or television series (Beeton, 2005; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Film-induced tourism studies the effects film has on shaping perceptions of place, the set of expectations visitors have of places, and public and private efforts, such as destination branding, designed to promote regenerated spaces (Beeton, 2005; Connell, 2012; Jewell & McKinnon, 2008; Macionis & Sparks, 2009; O'Connor, Flanagan, & Gilbert, 2008; Riley, Baker & van Doren, 1998). The storyline or plot, the casting of celebrities as featured characters and the representation of the film locations themselves have prompted increased tourist visits to sites (and have been used to encourage visits by additional tourists) (Beeton, 2005:8).

In this article, we examine the effects of film-based tourism on a specific, often contested aspect of urban development — the social production of heritage space, defined as a place identity formed from architecture, artifacts, traditions and stories that render a particular place culturally and historically unique (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012; Graham, 2002; Graham, John Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). Our specific research goal is understanding how film-induced pilgrimage may act as a contingent and unanticipated cultural force that influences the political struggles over the public meaning of heritage in an officially-designated historic neighborhood. Our effort is to show how the cultural status of a place as a film-induced popular destination may be manipulated and used by local stakeholders to strategically promote contested claims over heritage place identity.

1. Film-induced pilgrimages and the significance of place

Scholarly interest in film-induced tourism spans across many

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fields of study, including tourism studies, cultural studies, and urban political economy. It is widely accepted that film influences destination choices of various types of tourists, from those with a passing or casual interest to the more curious and most dedicated fans. Early scholarship focused primarily upon the characteristics of tourists and the reasons for visiting locations depicted in film (Riley et al., 1998; Schofield, 1996). Kim and Richardson (2003) examined how filmic representations of place influence viewers' perceptions of a tourist destination. Busby and Haines (2013: 107–108) developed a typology of characteristics based on motivations behind tourist visits to film-related destinations. These include visits motivated by a unique interest in a place as depicted in a film, such as interest in Ireland after the release of the popular 1970 film, *Ryan's Daughter* (O'Connor, 2011); interest in visiting places where filming is only believed to have taken place, such as increased tourism to Scotland generated by *Braveheart* (although filmed in Ireland) (Beeton, 2005: 10; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2003), and; film tourism for pilgrimage, nostalgia and escape, in which visits are expressly taken to pay homage to the film (Kim, 2012).

Similarly, the study of locational effects of film-induced tourism vary. The depiction of places in film may provide short-term tourism revenue or prompt specific urban branding policies to strengthen prospects of a long-term film-induced tourism industry (Beeton, 2010). Another useful typology of film-induced tourism pivots on the intentionality of either the filmmaker or local officials (e.g., chambers of commerce, tourism boards) or both to connect a specific location to a film or series for the purpose of increasing tourism (Croy, 2010; Mathews, 2010; O'Connor et al., 2008). Prior to recent official efforts at city branding, most touristic interest in a location featured in a film was unintentional, often sparked by the popularity of the film itself. The 2003 film *Lost in Translation* showcased Tokyo's urban landscape as an integral part of its storyline. The film's depiction of a dense, futuristic urban landscape, arcades and karaoke parlors prompted a renewed but inadvertent interest in the city, particularly the Shinjuku and Shibuya entertainment districts. Increasingly, local and national governments encourage film-induced tourism though policies, subsidies to filmmakers, and promotions from tourism boards. The Tunisian government's active promotion of tourism related to the 1996 film, *The English Patient*, marks one of the earlier ventures in state-promoted film tourism (Hazbun, 2007). An extreme version of film tourism intentionally induced by a film production company involved the 2012 Taiwanese action-adventure film, *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*. The film's temporary set was constructed in an empty expanse in New Taipei City. Upon the release of the film and its immediate popularity, the filmmaker opened the set for admission of the movie's fans. The set quickly became a tourist attraction, prompting the director to petition local authorities to assist in the development of a permanent *Seediq Bale* theme park; the request was denied due to land-use regulations (Taipei Times, 2012, 2012a). Conversely, residents of film and television series locations, particularly smaller towns and villages, object to the prospect of throngs of visitors and automobiles disrupting their everyday routines (Chiou & Lopez, 2010).

The particular focus in this article is film-induced pilgrimage, defined as a visit to a given place prominently featured in a film, with the clear intention of paying some form of homage to the characters and storyline. The core premise of film-induced pilgrimage is that an individual's meaningful connection to the storyline and characters is best accomplished by visiting and experiencing that film's location. For Macionis and Sparks (2009) pilgrims comprise a dedicated subgroup of tourists whose inspiration for traveling to a site is solely film-based. Pilgrim differ from other types of film-induced tourists in that they typically define themselves by their emotional connection to the film and seek like-

minded others out through 'word of mouth' (or, electronically, through the Internet and social media posts). Such pilgrims are serious devotees of a film or television series; they are not commercially motivated or orchestrated, at least initially. The emergence and early development of pilgrimages, therefore, differ significantly from other forms of film-induced tourism, in which media publicity around the film and its location is intended prior to production (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Eventually, however, as pilgrimage attendance increases, advertised travel packages and guided tours of locations follow and the prospect of commodification of the location as a tourist site increases (see Chan, 2007).

In Asia, examples of film-induced pilgrimages include trips by Japanese *anime* enthusiasts to an iconic Tasmanian bakery (Norris, 2012) and fan visits to different locations featured in Korean television soap operas (Chan, 2007; Oh, 2014). Pilgrimages are also popular among enthusiasts of period pieces that elicit feelings of nostalgia, such as visits to Highclere Castle for the avid followers of the British serial, *Downton Abbey*. Issues of locational accuracy and historical authenticity are attenuated by such filmic representations of a storied past, which characteristically rely more on fiction than historical accuracy. As discussed below, filmic representations of historic places may stand in sharp contrast to the heritage representations put forth by preservationists and other stakeholders.

A film-induced pilgrimage involves far more than a casual visit, a passive gazing, or a formal docent-led tour. As Bolan and Williams (2008: 387) explain, "tourists visiting a destination may wish to recapture in some way what they saw on screen or experienced while viewing a film."

Both implicitly and consciously, pilgrims seek to deepen their personal or shared connections with the film's message and meaning (Roesch, 2011). Pilgrims are not scene re-enactors nor do they expect the 'reality' of the actual location to conform to the setting as depicted in the film. Instead, a pilgrimage entails a process of actively and imaginatively situating, recreating and (re) experiencing favorite scenes, character roles, and memorable parts of a storyline made possible by visiting the location featured in the film or series. This personal reconstruction-in-place is how tribute or homage is paid to the film. Film-induced pilgrims "attach personal meanings to such places and authenticity thus becomes a subjective experience" (Tzanelli & Yar, 2014: 8). The authenticity of a place is a product of a subjective assembling of select aspects of a location with meaningful elements of a film's storyline, scenes and action. Although personally fulfilling, a pilgrimage is also a social occasion; visitors encounter other devotees and share their experiences with others on-site and face-to-face or, increasingly, electronically, through social media. Sharing smartphone photographs and "selfies" conveys in-group status and serve as meaningful souvenirs or "badges of achievement" of one's devotion (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997: 14).

Film-induced pilgrimage is carefully researched and planned; it reflects a desire to viscerally experience and emotionally connect to the plot and characters featured in the film. Location, therefore, is crucial, as pilgrims expect to be transformed, if only momentarily, from passive viewers and aficionados of a film to active participants in the recreation of storyline. Unlike other forms of place-based tourism, film-induced pilgrimages do not simply involve the touristic consumption of celebrated or 'official' place identities, as found in guidebooks or travel websites. Indeed, few pilgrims are interested in a location's documented or 'official' social history or the past or present relevance or meaning of a place, outside of its importance to a film or televised series. Pilgrimages, therefore, construct place identity and notions of film-depicted authenticity, albeit subjectively and, initially, at the scale of a small number of devoted individuals. But if pilgrimages become increasingly popular, local stakeholders may see the link between a film and