

# LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY: PLACEMAKING ACROSS WORLD CULTURES

Prof. Shenglin Elijah Chang, <larc471@gmail.com> (office hour by appointment)  
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An Arabic market in Old City Jerusalem, Israel



Chinese Fung-shui fountain in suburban Asian shopping mall in Silicon Valley, USA.



The vendor sells "One duck, Two dishes" in Taiwan.



A scooter driver in a neighborhood market in Taipei, Taiwan.

## Course Introduction

Most of the time, when we think about landscape we think about *it* as an object that is separate from *us*. In this course we will compare and contrast the Eurocentric view of landscape as an object separate from the self *with* various other cultural perspectives that offer alternative narratives in which landscape and identity are understood as connected rather than separate. The examination of cultural perspectives that challenge the Eurocentric view of landscape's relationship to self will run parallel to an ongoing exploration of how landscape can inform questions about the personal and social implications of living within an era of globalization.

In an era in which the Internet, CNN, and jet airplanes have enabled us to experience the world as a global village, seeing the relationship between landscape and identity through various cultural/geographic lenses challenges us to question and perhaps rethink our own relationship to the natural and built environments that we experience in our everyday lives. In this seminar we will move back and forth *between* how landscape affects our view of our self *and* our view of who we are within places of various scales: home, community, public space, sacred space, and virtual global space.

We will begin by engaging in explorations of landscape as intimately connected to our individual selves and collective sense of community. Within our explorations of landscape and identity, in addition to observing *it*, we will interact with *it*, manipulate *it*, and reflect upon our life-long relationship with *it*. Our initial investigations of how our experiences within various landscapes throughout our lives have transformed our view of our self, will in turn, lead to explorations of how our set of personal transformations empower us as advocates of significant social change at local, regional as well as global levels.

Different cultures have different histories and different sets of narratives that set the framework for the perception, understanding and experience of the landscape and surroundings. For example, American landscape is the reflection of the American formulation of self based on individualism. In, *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, Charles Moore and Kent Bloomer use the American single detached houses as an example that reflects American individualism. "It's [a single detached house] power, surely, comes from its being the one piece of the world around us which still speaks directly of our bodies and the center and the measure of the world."

In contrast to the American individualism, Asian identity is constructed based on the intimate connection of self and family/community. The prototype of Chinese dwellings is the extended family based courtyard house. All the relatives of the same family live in different rooms of the courtyard home and, together, form a family based community. In ways similar to the Asian construction of identity, the Latino self is rooted in community. In a Latino context, diverse community activities happen within a variety of public spaces and places. The public plaza and market places are always the heart of people's daily life and Latino identity is therefore built upon public interaction.

In the era of globalization, our daily lives have already been exposed to various cultural influences where we encountered people with various cultural heritages. Our travels to, or migrations to, different societies result in our having experienced different customs, attitudes, histories and environments. Various cultural voices emerge at many scales of landscapes. In a global scale, the mixture of socio-cultural systems within our daily spaces, indeed, impacts our socio-behavior patterns and how we shape our built environments. This course investigates these phenomena theoretically and analytically through readings, lectures, film watching, discussions, and presentations. After an introduction phase, we will focus on three sections. The three sections list below:

**(1). Self and Environment [Personal Sustainability: Claiming ownership for my sustainable identity] (home and garden)** It focuses on the time and place to be with self (our individual identities), and the time and place to be with our family (our home identities). You will choose a sustainable place representing your self and re-interpret your feeling of this place through artistic and creative processes and products.

**(2). Friends of Landscape, Friends of Life (family, community, cross-cultural living)** It focuses on the time and place to be with self (our individual identities), and the time and place to be with our family (our home identities). You will schematically design a coop home with your partners in a foreign country.

**(3). Transcultural Taiwan (public/neighborhood places and local/global networks).** It addresses the time and place to communicate with others in our neighborhoods while many new comers around the world move into our local areas (community identities). During this phase, you will work with a urban community, rural town or village in Taiwan or abroad. We will explore your projects in advance after semester starts.

**Final: TBA, 2013**

#### **Course Materials and Format**

(1) Students have to participate in film discussions, group activities, project presentations, and field trips and studies, as well as conducting and writing individual documentary experiences and final

reports. Participation and attending class is mandatory and it is critical for your grades.

(2) Film watching is essential in this class. Chosen films weight as important as traditional reading texts for us to understand diverse landscapes, lifestyles, as well as their identities.

(3) Most of the class materials will be in English or other major languages. This course will be delivered mainly in English or bi-lingual format. Please do not hesitate to contact Prof. Chang, if you have any question regarding language issue. The contact info is: [larc471@gmail.com](mailto:larc471@gmail.com)

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