



## Research Seminar

# *The rationality of power and the power of rationality in Harbour reclamation in Hong Kong*

**Dr. Mee Kam NG**

Associate Professor, HKU

Wednesday, 24 March 2010 (12:45 -14:00)

Room 829, Knowles Building, HKU

### Abstract:

Flyvbjerg (1998) argues that power often overrides rationality as those in power frequently portray 'rationalisation' as rationality to define 'truths' that justify their actions. When power is great, rationality diminishes. Through differentiating the concept of power into 'outcome power' held by those with privileged access to power and 'social power' (the power of resistance) vested by everyone; and the concept of rationality into 'technical', 'strategic' (rationalisation) and 'value' rationalities, this paper argues that individuals possessing 'social power' can always exercise their 'value rationality' to make sense of the world and choose to carry out transformative actions. A concrete case study of the history of reclamation in Hong Kong illustrates how 'social power' exercised by individuals has challenged those with 'outcome power' and their 'rationalisations' for Harbour reclamation. Through 'value rationality' that re-defines the Harbour as a unique natural heritage to be preserved and protected by law, extensive reclamation plans were effectively halted, verifying the power of rationality.

### About the Speaker:

Dr. Ng is the Programme Director of the Master of Science in Urban Planning at HKU. She is a member of the RTPI and a fellow of the HKIP. Her publications have earned her five Hong Kong Institute of Planners' Awards. At the international level, she has been consultant to the United Nations and the European Union. She has collaborated with researchers in different parts of the world and has been invited to share her research findings in Europe, America, Japan, South Korea as well as China. She serves as a member in the editorial board of four international planning journals. She is also a member of the Advisory Board of the Global Research Network on Human Settlements hosted by UN-Habitat. In Hong Kong, she has served as a convener of the Railway Appeal Board and the editorial board of the journal of the HKIP. She is also a member of the Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund Council which sponsored her PhD studies many years ago. She has been very active in civil society activities and served as a founding vice-chairman of the Hong Kong People's Council for Sustainable Development and a founding member of Citizen Envisioning@Harbour.

*ALL ARE WELCOME*

Please visit our website [www.hku.hk/cusup](http://www.hku.hk/cusup), click on 'Events' for Seminar Series.

Enquiries: 2859-2721

CENTRE OF URBAN STUDIES AND URBAN PLANNING  
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

