

**'Waste', Value and Informal Labour: The Regional E-Waste Recycling Production Network in Malaysia and Singapore**

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### Abstract

This presentation examines the regional electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) recycling network in Malaysia and Singapore, with a secondary focus on the articulations of informal labour within the network. I argue that there is a need to theorise production networks post-consumption; i.e. to focus on the activities and processes that occur after a commodity is consumed and subsequently discarded. I argue that discarded e-waste are not 'value-less' waste, but instead embody value (specifically latent use value), and have the potential to be re-inserted as 'raw materials' into production networks through the processes of recycling. Also, key to the processes of value (re)creation, enhancement and capture is the labour process.

I examine informal labour by focusing on karung guni (a local term for the rag-and-bone man) – analysing their critical role in value (re)creation in this regional e-waste recycling production network through the lens of petty commodity production. I argue that karung guni are constitutive of this production network through their collection and primary processing of e-waste, which forms the basis for subsequent value creation, enhancement and capture by downstream actors. Conceptualising karung guni as petty commodity producers – who own both the means of production and their own labour power – is significant in problematising as not so straightforward the separation of capital and labour into discreet categories as normally presented in global value chains (GVC)/global production networks (GPN) approaches.

This presentation makes four significant contributions to the GVC/GPN literature. First, it recognises activities beyond the point of consumption (which has been the focus of present GVC/GPN research). Second, it conceptualises the constitutive role of informal labour in the development and structure of production networks. Third, it emphasises the continued relevance of the state. Fourth, by adopting a multi-sited case study method, it contributes to debates on how to carry out GVC/GPN research.

### About the Speaker



Aidan Wong is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. He read his PhD at the School of Geography and the School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London, under the supervision of Professor Adrian Smith and Dr Liam Campling. His research interests are broadly concerned with Economic Geographic issues, in particular issues involving labour, specifically informal labour, theorizations related to value, and the application of approaches in the political economy tradition, with emphasis on the Global Value Chains and Global Production Networks frameworks. Linked with this is an interest in development issues and poverty, which are influenced by literature on petty commodity producers.