

Indonesian Domestic Workers and the (Un)Making of Transnational Livelihoods and Provisional Futures

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Chair: Elaine Ho, Department of Geography, NUS

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Abstract

Doreen Massey (2005) has argued that space and time should not be reduced to a bounded locality of the 'here and now' and instead proposed a geographical imagination of 'space as simultaneity of stories-so-far'. While such an imagination is useful in helping us understand the politics of simultaneity at work in transnational lives and livelihoods which are interconnected across space, an appreciation of migrant aspirations and future trajectories will require not just a consideration of simultaneous 'stories-so-far', but also 'stories-to-come' which may build upon, divert from, or even unmake the 'stories-so-far'. In this paper, we apply these ideas to our study (involving a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews) of the transnational journeys traced by Indonesian domestic workers employed in middle-class homes in Singapore. By taking seriously the embodied experiences and place-based imaginings of these migrant women as they unfold in multiple temporalities and spatialities, we begin to better understand their motivations in persevering to continue in a retrogressive '3D' occupation with severely constrained working conditions. By considering how notions of risk and hope feature in the making of provisional futures, we glimpse the way the migrant domestic workers cope with the 'technologies of servitude' while shaping their own mobile pathways across space and time, albeit under the strictures of a disciplinary migration regime characterised by asymmetrical power geometries.


About the Speaker



Brenda S.A. Yeoh is Professor (Provost's Chair), Department of Geography, as well as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, NUS, and coordinates the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics

and international marriage migrants. She has published widely in these fields. Her latest book titles include *The Cultural Politics of Talent Migration in East Asia* (Routledge 2012, with Shirlena Huang); and *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts* (ISEAS press, 2012, with Lai Ah Eng and Francis Collins); *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia* (Duke University Press 2013, with Xiang Biao and Mika Toyota); as well as a paperback reprint of her book *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (originally published in 1996 by Oxford University Press; reprinted by NUS Press in 2003 and 2013).

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