

Re-Assembling Airspace: Taking Flight in Singapore

- Speaker:** **Dr Lin Weiqiang**
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- Date/Time:** Friday, 22 January 2016, 3.30pm – 5.00pm
- Place:** Earth Lab (AS2 02-03), Department of Geography, NUS

Abstract

This talk interrogates the production of airspace as infrastructure in Singapore, taking into account the city-state's geographical emplacement in Southeast Asia. It joins aeromobilities research in re-understanding air transport as a socially produced fact of life, but contends, at the same time, that the said literature should adopt a keener sensitivity to the way aviation's infrastructures are non-uniformly enfolded worldwide. I highlight two shortcomings in existing work. First, I note the tendency of aeromobilities—and, more generally, mobilities—research to nearly exclusively focus on empirical paradigms emanating from North America, Scandinavia, and parts of Western Europe. Second, I highlight the relative lack of attention to (aero)mobilities' specific routes of formation, and, within these, the possible interactions among plural geographies. I suggest that these shortcomings have blunted (aero)mobilities research's critical edge, by silencing the asymmetries of making move in a variety of contexts.

Drawing on assemblage theory, the rest of this presentation propounds a constitutionally more relational understanding of airspace(s). Informed by a wide range of investigative methods, including interviews, archival research and participant observation, the Singapore example will be used to chart four different airspace constellations: namely, aircraft cabins, airline route networks, aerial capacities, and air territories. I evince how these formations, though nominally familiar, are compositionally different from their counterparts explored in existing literatures. But neither being essentialist departures, they figure more as contingent and contested re-assemblings of dominant types, filtered through established cultural norms, laws, technologies, and institutional set-ups that order global air transport. Collectively, these insights on Singapore's airspace assemblages instruct a need to historicise how infrastructural spaces processurally emerge. They also point to the pertinence of learning about the latent (geo)politics connecting different, and differently positioned, assemblages.

About the Speaker



Dr Lin Weiqiang is an Instructor at the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. His research interests lie at the intersection of mobilities, infrastructures, transport (particularly aviation), human migration and transnationalism. He obtained his PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London in 2014, and has completed a one-year post-doc with Deborah Cowen at the University of Toronto in 2015. He has published in a wide range of journals, including *Geoforum*, *Mobilities*, *Environment and Planning A*, *Journal of Transport Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, and *Asia Pacific Migration Journal*. Weiqiang is a co-editor of the yearbook series, *Mobility in History*, and currently teaches a course on *Mobile Spaces* at the Department.

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