

## **The Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion and Its Effects on the Transmigrant Filipinos in Malaysia and South Korea**

**Bubbles Beverly Neo Asor**

Division of Political Science

University of the Philippines Los Baños

bbasir@uplb.edu.ph

### **Abstract**

In the emergence of the newly-industrialized economies (NIEs) in Asia, the economic landscape in the region has also been altered. On the one hand, we have the high-performing Asian economies (HPAEs) – Japan, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia; and the developing countries drawing alongside– the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. The high economic growth rate in the HPAEs has increased demands for more workers from the developing countries in the region. Consequently, the shifting dynamics of migration has likewise yielded various mechanisms and responses from the host countries.

This paper examines the labor migration policies in Malaysia and South Korea and how it affects the level of incorporation and transnationalism among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Malaysia and South Korea have been chosen to represent the destination countries of OFWs in South East and East Asia, respectively having a significant number of Filipino workers. The analysis of migration mechanisms of these countries and surveys/participant observation conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2005 and Busan, South Korea in 2008-2009 showed that these two host countries have been employing exclusionary models of mechanisms which treat OFWs and other migrant workers as “guest workers”. While Malaysia is more exclusionary and restrictive and South Korea is using a new scheme called Employment Permit System (EPS), it is evident that these two receiving countries admit foreign workers for limited economic sectors and hesitate to provide them with civic and political rights. From the analysis of the migration policies and the level of “inclusiveness” and “exclusiveness” of these policies toward migrant workers, this study draws a parallelism to the degree of incorporation and transnationalism among OFWs based on the following variables: demographic (age, gender, education, marital status), incorporation variables (time in the host countries), linear transnationalism variables (plans of the respondents upon migration), and reactive transnationalism variables (whether the person experienced discrimination, index of satisfaction and the Perception of Society and Discrimination Index). This study shows that the level of exclusiveness and inclusiveness of migration mechanisms is an

important indicator in the scope and intensity of the incorporation or transnational participation of OFWs. Working around the hypotheses presented by Itzigohn and Saucedo (2002), this study presents two findings: (1) the stronger the emotional ties the OFWs maintain with their transnational linkages in the Philippines and the more they engage in transnational practices; and (2) the less inclusive the migration policies are, the more the OFWs engage in reactive transnationalism. By employing Filomeno Aguilar's dialectics of transnational shame and national identity (1996), this study shows that restrictive and exclusive migration policies in the host countries pushes OFWs to become more transnational and nationalistic at the same time.

The present paper entails that OFWs hesitate to undergo incorporation and explore an affinity to the 'Asian-ness' of the host countries so long as the migration environment is still "unwelcoming" as buttressed by the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

## Profile

Bubbles Beverly Asor is Assistant Professor at the University of the Philippines Los Banos, teaching Political Science, including Global Politics, Politics and Development, Contemporary Politics, Migration Studies and Political Philosophy. She is also the Division Head of the Political Science Division of the university.

Bubbles Beverly Asor research interests are in migration studies. She graduated in Political Science and has a master's degree in Philippine Studies. Her thesis, *Overseas Filipino Workers in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges*, included field work with 'runaway' Filipino workers in the Philippine Overseas Labour Office in Kuala Lumpur. Bubbles also worked with Filipino seafarers, and with refugees in Mindanao, the Philippines, for the Red Cross. She presented her work in conferences in Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea and Poland and also participated in the UNCHR Roundtable on Migration and Refugees Issues in Kuala Lumpur in 2005. Recently, she presented her paper "The Construction of Asian Identity in Filipino Workers through Intra-Regional Migration: Case Study of Filipinos in Malaysia and South Korea" at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Asia Scholars in Daejeon, South Korea. Bubbles Beverly Asor's publications include two policy papers, "Status of Migrant Workers in Singapore" and "Status of Migrant Workers in Malaysia", published by the Kanlungan Center Foundation, Inc. (KCFI) in Quezon City, Philippines. From 2005 to present, she has served as the editor of the Annual Report of the Apostleship of the Sea-South Korea. She is currently working on the articles entitled, "Overseas Filipino Workers in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges", to be published in the March 2010 issue of the *Philippine Studies Journal*, and "Migration Policies and Practices in

Southeast and East Asia” to be published in April 2010 the *Asia Pacific Social Science Review*.

## Keynote address: 'Returnees' Hybridity and Its Upside and Downside'

**Chan Kwok Bun**

Department of Sociology  
Hong Kong Baptist University  
ckb@hkbu.edu.hk

### Abstract

In the past two years, I completed four major research studies of emigration and immigration, dealing with the life conditions of a diverse group of migrants: immigrant artists, immigrant professionals, and return migrants, in Hong Kong, Singapore and Israel. I am finishing a book to organize my ideas emanating from these studies. In this keynote address, I will reflect on the life experiences of one group: return migrants in Hong Kong. When appropriate, I will make reference to other immigrant groups in Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere.

This is an age of mobility, indeed of hypermobility. Immigrants have a deep inner life energy, a restlessness or, if you like, an anxiety, an eagerness for achievement, that cries out for actualisation. Being in a restless whirlpool, in an inner turmoil, is the immigrant's existential condition, fate or inevitability.

The immigrant's restlessness, harnessed by years of having worked and lived at the crossroads of diverse, sometimes contradictory, cultural currents, is the fountainhead of hybridity, creativity and innovation. To the immigrant, what is done in one way can always be done in another way, better, faster. The emergence of highly skilled immigrants as a creative class has caught the imagination of many nation-states, which are eager to entice migrants home, to stay, contribute and be happy. However, a good sociologist will always offer the sober reminder that innovativeness and creativity are best not seen as a personality type, or an inner psychological attribute, but as a social process that emerges, develops and waits for social realisation, depending upon the nature of the interactions between self and society, persons and others. In other words, the 'ins' of creativity await the 'outs' of external circumstances to be socially 'brought out', 'released', 'realised'. Creativity is a social process, not a personal characteristic.

One distinguishing characteristic of immigrants in general, and the return migrants considered in this paper in particular, is their differentness, which often marks them off against the sameness of locals, the stayers. This differentness is often in tension with sameness, which is not without its deleterious consequences. Differentness, to the return migrant, means creativity, but it is also a threat to the sense of security, certainty and continuity of the locals. One of the operating principles of tradition is that

things must go on as they have always done. Seen as such, traditional forces tend to be self-sustaining and self-protecting on the one hand, and prejudicial, even discriminatory, towards different others on the other hand – labelling, stigmatising, marginalising, punishing, even eradicating whatever is deemed as foreign and unfamiliar. Viewed sociologically, the fate of a return migrant, who himself has become more open-minded than before but who now lives in a society that is less than tolerant or appreciative of differences, depends largely on how his differentness is socially treated by the local others. You are or you become how you are treated by others. Social treatment, as an outer force, determines the inner psyche of the immigrant. It is here one locates the wisdom, and foresight, of classical sociology.

## Profile

Chan Kwok-bun is Chair Professor of Sociology, Hong Kong Baptist University. He taught at the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, between 1987 and 2001, and was the department's head before returning to Hong Kong in 2001. He was President, Hong Kong Sociological Association; Head, Department of Sociology, and Director, David C. Lam Institute for East-West Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University. Between 2005 and 2008, Professor Chan has published seven books: *Chinese Identity, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2005); *Migration, Ethnic Relations and Chinese Business* (London: Routledge, 2005); *Conflict and Innovation: Joint Ventures in China* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006); *Work Stress and Coping Among Professionals* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007); *East-West Identities: Globalization, Localization and Hybridization* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007); *Between Hong Kong and China* (中港徘徊 *Zhong Gang Pai Huai*) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company 中華書局, 2007); and *Our Family, Our Home* (吾家吾園 *Wu Jia Wu Yuan*) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company 中華書局, 2008). Since 2005, he is Editor of *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers), the official journal of The Hong Kong Sociological Association. He is guest-editing for 2009 two special issues on hybridity, one for *World Futures*, another for *Visual Anthropology*, while editing a book of essays titled *Hybrid Hong Kong*. His book manuscript titled *Hybridity: Its Promise and Limits* is now under review for publication. He is also editing the *Handbook of Chinese Families* for Springer. In the past two years, he completed four government consultancy research reports on emigration and immigration in Hong Kong, Singapore and Israel. His current research interests are in families in Chinese societies, Chinese business networks and Chinese capitalism; Chinese ethnic identities; migration, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and diasporas.

## Migration, Displacement and Difference: Identifying the Islanders of Ogasawara

**David Chapman**

School of Communication, International Studies and Languages

University of South Australia

David.Chapman@unisa.edu.au

### Abstract

Islands and their inhabitants are often described as isolated or insular and disconnected from the rest of the world. Such ideas reinforce a belief that island populations are unlikely to be involved in the dynamics of migration. However, as Connell and King argue 'islands have an unusually intense engagement with migratory phenomena' (1999: 1). The Ogasawara Islands of Japan are an example of a site of multiple layers of migration and displacement. The islands were first settled by Europeans and Pacific Islanders in 1830 and then colonised by Japan in 1875. At the height of World War Two the island's inhabitants were forced to evacuate to mainland Japan. The US navy then occupied the islands after the Second World War until their return to Japanese sovereignty.

The displacement of the entire civilian population during the War led to experiences that varied greatly among the diverse islanders. For most of the descendants of the first settlers, their physical difference from the majority Japanese presented them with particular challenges not encountered by the other Islanders. After the War the first settler descendants were able to negotiate passage back to the islands. Their difference and English language skills were contributing factors to the success of these negotiations. However, the remainder of the islanders not identified as first settler descendants were prohibited from return by US forces and remained on the Japanese mainland for 23 years. Although a number of sources have recorded the diverse experiences of the Ogasawara Islanders during this time, to date, there has been little analysis of the profound effects of these events on this community.

This paper is an initial attempt to rectify this gap in history and to tease out the numerous and multifaceted dimensions of the Ogasawara Islander experience. I argue that, like other Islanders described by Connell and King (1999: 2), Ogasawara identity is characterised by the tension between on the one hand, isolation and insularity and on the other, mobility and migration. I situate the Ogasawara Islands in their historical context of migration but focus on the period from evacuation in 1944 to the reversion to Japanese sovereignty in 1968 as an extraordinary period of mobilisation

in which the islands can be usefully discussed in terms of Foucault's "heterotopia" (1986 and 1989).

In this paper, although I discuss the identity of the Ogasawara Islanders, I am interested in the processes of identification more than the meaning of identity. Interviews of Islanders about this period indicate that the process of identification, in its numerous forms, has played a significant role in affecting notions of self. An investigation of these processes within the cultural, political and social contexts of the period provides insight that contributes to a deeper understanding of the influences on identity. Furthermore, an exploration of the differential mobilisation of the population and its nexus with identification contributes significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of Ogasawara, its history and its people.

## Profile

David's main professional interest is the study of Japan, its people, culture and history. He is engaged in two major research projects at present. One project investigates the social history of identification and documentation throughout Japanese history from the seventh century to the present. This project focuses on the household registry and the many population censuses related to it. This research also maps out human agency in response to social control and the tension between the necessity to be identified and the limiting constraints that inevitably accompany the processes of identification. This project has attracted support from the National Library of Australia, Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science and the University of South Australia.

David's second project aims to document the life stories of the descendants of the European, American and Pacific Islander first settlers of the Ogasawara Islands brought up during the US occupation of Chichijima. The Japan Foundation's Japanese Studies Fellowship Program has supported this project through funds for fieldwork in Japan. His recent publications include a book titled, *Zainichi Korean Identity and Ethnicity* (2008) published by Routledge and "Zainichi Koreans in History, Memory" in M. Weiner (ed.) *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity 2nd Edition* (2009) and "Inventing subjects and sovereignty: Early history of the first settlers of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands" (2009) in *The Asia-Pacific Journal*.

## Re-crafting an Ambivalent Colonial Legacy – Transnational Identity of Taiwanese Diasporas in Japan

**Han Peichun**

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies

Waseda University

peipeihan@toki.waseda.jp

### **Abstract**

This article examines cultural identity and the related discourse of one particular immigrant group, the “post-war comer” Taiwanese, in contemporary Japan. This group of immigrants came to Japan after the end of WWII and experienced complex transitions in both legal statuses and self-identifications. Symbolized as a legacy of Japanese colonialism, the post-war comer Taiwanese constantly re-negotiate and re-craft their identities and thus constitute a distinct case within the population of overseas ethnic Chinese.

Japan, widely considered to be a society of racial and cultural homogeneity, faces an increasing influx of immigrants, in particular those from East Asia in recent years. Immigration thus draws a broad range of concerns in the contemporary Japanese society and academia. However, there is a vacuum on Taiwanese Diaspora in the associated scholarship. This paper attempts to bridge the gap by looking into the impact of Japanese colonial rule on the ambivalent identities of Taiwanese immigrants. This paper claims that the modernization program under the Japanese colonial rule had a two-edged effect on identity reconstruction: positively in terms of progress in intellectual enlightenment; negatively in terms of lost in selfhood or subjectivity.

This group of Taiwanese migrants in postwar Japan struggle with surveillance, assimilation, resistance, and identity confusions. This paper concludes with the constructivist argument, that to balance between instrumentalist strategy for survival overseas and a primordial attachment to their motherland, Taiwanese immigrants’ identification with group boundaries may shift in accordance with situations.

### **Profile**

Han Peichun is a Ph.D. candidate in International Studies at the Waseda University. She received her B.A. in Studies of the International Relations from the National Taiwan University and M.A. in Public Policy from the Georgetown University at Washington DC, USA. Her research interests

focus on ethnic and migration studies, particularly on those related to identity and cultural comparisons. Her proposed dissertation surveys on the Taiwanese Diaspora, examining the unique traits of Taiwanese migrants and Chinese overseas in Japan through multidisciplinary approaches synthesized with sociology, political science, and history.

In addition to a number of newspaper editorial articles, she is the author of “China Studies in Japan”, published in the *Quarterly of Mainland China Studies* (Vol. 70, October 2005), and “Hidden in-betweenness — an exploration of Taiwanese transnational identity in contemporary Japan,” published in *Asian Ethnicity* (Vol.8, June 2008). Her latest paper, “Hybridized Identities, Perplexed In-between-ness — An Empirical Study on Taiwanese Diaspora in Contemporary Japan,” is expected to be published in the Asiatic Society of Japan’s annual publication, *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* (fifth series, Vol. 1, 2009).

## Brokers of Nostalgia Shan Migrant Public Spheres in Chiang Mai, Thailand

**Amporn Jirattikorn**

Division of Sociology

Nanyang Technological University

ajirattikorn@ntu.edu.sg

### Abstract

The recent influx of Shan migrant workers from Burma into Thailand provided the conditions for Shan “migrant public spheres” to emerge. This paper focuses on various public spheres that Shan migrants create and participate in the city of Chiang Mai: radio airwaves, Buddhist temples, and festivities. The paper discusses Shan migrant public spheres in Chiang Mai in three important aspects. First, it examines how the Thai state employs migrant public spheres to control its alien population. Second, I introduce another group of Shans in Chiang Mai – the long-term resident Shans. The mass migration of Shan migrants into this city creates an interesting relationship between the new arrivals and the long-term residents. Obviously, economic and educational factors as well as citizenship make the long-term resident Shans in Chiang Mai different from the new arrivals. Their ‘cultural capital’ also enables them to become cultural ‘brokers’ mediating the interest of Shan migrants with the Thai state. Third, while the Thai state and Shan ethnic ‘brokers’ may turn Shan public spheres into forms of both consumption and technologies of control, I explore how Shan migrants participate in these public spheres and to what extent they accommodate themselves into the dominant order. Shan migrant public spheres provide examples of how ethnicity is sustained in urban areas as a good business venture and how they provide sites of expression and negotiation of cultural selves and identities for Shan migrants.

### Profile

Amporn Jirattikorn is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Division of Sociology at Nanyang Technological University. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008. Amporn’s research interests are in the areas of media flows and mobility of people across national boundaries. Her doctoral thesis focuses on the recent wave of Shan ethnic nationals from Burma who migrate to seek work in Thailand, exploring the roles of Shan media - in particular cassettes, video CDs, and music videos - which spills across

Burma's border, in the construction of new social identities within the Shan migrant community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Amporn's recent publications, "Pirated Transnational Broadcasting: The Consumption of Thai Soap Operas among Shan Communities in Burma" published in *Sojourn* (Vol. 23 no.1, 2008); and "From Beyond Rangoon to Shan VCD: The Politics and Authenticity of Appropriation" published in *Asian Cinema*, (Vol. 18 No.2, 2007), have centered on the construction of migrant identities through media consumption, media piracy and ethnic media production in Burma.

## Traditional Mothers and Global Kids: Emotional capital and Korean Educational Migrants in Singapore

**Kang Yoonhee**

Division of Sociology

Nanyang Technological University

yoonhee@ntu.edu.sg

### Abstract

In this paper, I explore the interplay among transnational migration, education and family, by examining South Korean migrant families' various strategies for facilitating their children's education in Singapore. Recently, a growing number of Korean young students in their primary and secondary schools have moved to Singapore for their 'early study abroad' (*chogi yuhak*). These young children are usually accompanied by their mothers, while their fathers remain in Korea to financially support their families abroad. This type of Korean transnational split household is commonly called "wild geese family" (*kirogi kajok*). Based on my ongoing ethnographic research among these Korean 'geese' families in Singapore, this paper aims to analyze multiple meanings and motivations underlying Korean educational migration in Singapore. Unlike common assumptions of transnational educational migration, this study draws attention to much broader consideration and motivations which even include the acquisition of 'emotional capital,' a term that refers to the various forms of emotional practices and resources that facilitate children's accumulation of other forms of cultural, social, and economic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1986). A shifting attention to this affective dimension of transnational migration, in turn, leads the Korean migrants to re-imagine and reformulate their desired transnational subject, which I call an 'Asian global,' an image of a person who is more multicultural, socio-centric, thus 'locally' grounded. By looking at family as an active site of identity construction, this study shows how Koreans' traditional notions of family and mothering have paradoxically contribute to generate this new type of 'global kids,' as mediated through their discourses on emotional capital and their aspiration of becoming global citizens in this rapidly globalizing world.

### Profile

Kang Yoonhee is Assistant Professor at the Division of Sociology, at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. She has published on the issues of language, culture and identity, based on her ethnographic research

on a Malay group in Indonesia (1998-2000) as well as Indonesian migrant workers in Philadelphia (2006-2007). She is the author of *God Crossing Borders: Religious Reconciliation and Trans/national Identities among Indonesian Migrants in Philadelphia Towards an Inclusive Democratic Indonesian Society: Bridging the Gap between State Uniformity and Multicultural Identity Patterns* (Indonesia: Atma Jaya Yogyakarta University Publisher, 2009). In July 2009, she presented her paper "Globish or Singlish?: Multiple language ideologies and alternative Asian modernity among Korean educational migrants in Singapore" at The International Conference of the Society for East Asian Anthropology, American Anthropological Association.

Currently, she is conducting a linguistic and ethnographic field research among Korean educational migrants, who have moved to Singapore for their children's early study abroad projects (2008-2010). By looking at both children's and their accompanying parents' discourses on their transnational migration experiences, this project aims to explore the discursive construction of a 'global yet Asian' identity as articulated and circulated among Korean migrants in Singapore.

## Class and Identity in a Transnational Philippine Village

**Philip Kelly**

Department of Geography

York University

pfkelly@yorku.ca

### Abstract

The province of Cavite in the Philippines is a nexus of multiple mobilities - foreign capital invested in local industrial growth; domestic migrants arriving from elsewhere in the country to work in agriculture, in industry and in homes; transnational migrants departing to join the prolific stream of Overseas Filipino Workers; and remittances sent home by such workers, as well as permanent emigrants. All of these flows are in evidence in a village in Cavite where I have conducted fieldwork periodically since 1995.

The meaning of class in such a village would once have been defined in conventional terms relating to the structure of ownership of land and other productive assets. Elevated positions in such a class structure would in turn have enabled particular cultural expressions of distinction and processes of class reproduction. Since the early 1990s in particular, the onset of the various human and financial flows noted above, however, makes class a far more complicated concept.

Transnational migration and remittances facilitate new forms of consumption and performances of distinction – ones that are quite removed from those associated with traditional class identities in a rural village. Thus, distinctions are not simply now accessible to villagers with new-found remittance wealth – rather, the very nature of class-based distinctions has itself been reworked. Domestic migration raises the prospect of intersections between class and regional identity, as migrants from elsewhere in the Philippines are constructed as ‘others’ in relation to long-time village residents. Both forms of migration raise questions about the intersection of class and gender, as certain types of work are recoded with respect to their masculinity or femininity.

In sum, this paper seeks to explore the implications of transnational and domestic migration for class identity in a Philippine village, and for the ways in which class is intersected with other social processes.

## Profile

Philip Kelly is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Department of Geography at York University, Toronto, where he has taught since 2000. He is also currently the President of the Canadian Council for Southeast Asian Studies. He was educated at the University of Oxford (BA Hons, 1991), McGill University (MA, 1993) and the University of British Columbia (PhD, 1997). From 1997-2000 he was Assistant Professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Program at the National University of Singapore. He has also held visiting appointments at the University of London, the University of Toronto, the University of the Philippines, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. He is the author of *Landscapes of Globalization: Human Geographies of Economic Change in the Philippines* (Routledge, 2000) and co-author (with Neil Coe and Henry Yeung) of *Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction* (Blackwell, 2007).

He is currently part of a team of researchers exploring agrarian change in Southeast Asia through a Major Collaborative Research Initiative of Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. He is also the Director of the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, a knowledge mobilization initiative based at York University. His recent research has focused on the labour market integration of Filipino immigrants in Toronto, the transnational linkages created with communities and families in the Philippines, and the process of socio-economic change in sending areas. More broadly, his research seeks to explore the intersection of economic processes in workplaces and labour markets with cultural processes of identity formation.

## The Role of the State in Transnational Migrant Identity Formation: A 'Uniquely Singapore' Experience?

**Selina Lim**

School of Arts and Social Sciences  
Singapore Institute of Management  
selinalimsl@unisim.edu.sg

### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to establish the role that states play in transnational identity formation. Until recently, scholarship in transnational migration has largely ignored the role of the state, optimistically believing that the development of transnational communities would inevitably lead to the withering of states and state power (Portes et al. 1999). However, recent scholars have established that the state continues to play an important role in this age of migration. In particular, the extent to which migrants are able to carry out their activities in transnational arenas really hinges on the politics and migration policies of both the sending and receiving states (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Some scholars also correctly point out that it is increasingly awkward to talk about transnational identities without acknowledging the presence of sending and receiving states – and their work with regard to international treaties – that make this geographical mobility possible (Krasner 1995; Morris 1996; Waltz 1999; Fiorini 2000; Thompson 2001; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004).

As such, a sound understanding of this political dimension in the formation of transnational identity appears to be the critical missing link that could shed light on the relationship between the migrants' activities in transnational arenas and the particularly salient aspects of their articulated transnational migrant identity. In this respect, the Singapore experience is an interesting one. In recent years, the government's internationalizing efforts have encouraged Singaporeans to seek opportunities elsewhere. Stories gathered from the field by this author – as well as recently published studies of Singaporean transmigrants – show evidence that one's personal history with Singapore and personal feelings about the nation-state remain an integral part of his or her identity, despite having lived away for many years (Lim 2007; Ho 2008). These stories also suggest that family ties to the sending country continue to bind the transmigrant to what used to be home.

On its part, the Singapore government is also acutely aware of the importance of cultivating relationships with its homegrown talent residing overseas. And this has led the proactive state to step up efforts to maintain

strong links with its diaspora through outreach programs such as the Overseas Singaporean Unit (housed under the auspices of the National Population Secretariat in the Prime Minister's Office), Contact Singapore, as well as 'Singapore Day' cultural and cuisine events at various cities around the world. According to Smith (2003), such outreach programs help cultivate an 'extraterritorial' sense of national identity.

These endeavors to bring back homegrown talents from overseas have also lessened the sting of social stigma for returnees who are now no longer viewed as failures. And it is this relatively more tolerant and welcoming stance adopted by the state that has encouraged this turnaround, enabling Singaporean transmigrants to seek out opportunities in Singapore, while their families continue to live away from Singapore – a trend in which the transmigrant is popularly referred to as the astronaut migrant. Clearly, then, it is early days yet to sound the death knell for the state, even as the population of transmigrants increases worldwide. States and transmigrants seem unlikely bedfellows – but their continued coexistence will likely mirror that of nationalism and globalization.

## Profile

Selina Lim is currently Head of Social Sciences at the School of Arts & Social Sciences, SIM University, where she is overseeing the revamp of the social science core curriculum.

She obtained her Ph.D. in comparative politics in 2007 from The Ohio State University. Her dissertation, *Rethinking Albert O. Hirschman's 'Exit, Voice, and Loyalty': The Case of Singapore* looks to develop a typology of national loyalists based on Hirschman's "exit-voice-loyalty" concept and empirical research of Singapore emigrants and residents. Her research interests include issues and policies related to international migration, globalization, national identity, and intercultural communication. She is a frequent contributor to the local media on topics pertaining to the social science. In September 2009, she co-wrote "Include Arts and Social Science Teaching" with Neelam Aggarwal and Brian Lee for *The Straits Times*.

## Becoming New Overseas Chinese: Transnational Practices and Identity Construction among the Chinese Migrants in Japan

**Gracia Liu-Farrer**

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies

Waseda University

glfarrer@aoni.waseda.jp

### **Abstract**

The Chinese in Japan show two curious characteristics. First, they object to being called ‘immigrants.’ Instead, they embrace the identity “New Overseas Chinese”, a label invented and popularized by the Chinese in Japan. Second, they prefer permanent residency over naturalization. Although it is generally considered easier to obtain Japanese citizenship than permanent residency—naturalization requires five years of continuous residency while it takes ten years to be eligible for permanent resident status—three times as many Chinese immigrants applied and obtained permanent residency as Japanese citizenships between 2003 and 2007. Based on interview and survey data, this paper argues that both the choice of “New Overseas Chinese” identity and the preference for permanent residency in Japan speaks of Chinese migrants’ desire to maintain a flexible cross-border living and are in congruence with their transnational outlooks. Such desire and outlooks are shaped by the social and cultural contexts of Japan and supported by the expanding transnational economy between Japan and China. On the one hand, Chinese migrants’ identity and transnational outlooks represent immigrants’ strategies to overcome their marginality in a society they perceive as resistant to immigration and closed to outsiders. Institutionally, at least, Japan is ill-prepared to become an immigrant society. Although an illusion in some respects, America presents itself as a melting pot that turns every newcomer into an American. Japan, on the other hand, often represents itself as a racially homogeneous nation. The Chinese arrive in Japan fully conscious of the clear distinctions made between Japanese and foreigners. Though appearing orderly and civil with many desirable social amenities, Japanese society remains unwelcoming and exclusive in the eyes of many Chinese. Despite Japanese citizenships or permanent residence, Chinese newcomers perceive a “wall (*kabe*)” standing between themselves and mainstream society. On the other hand, Chinese migrants, especially skilled migrants, typically employ their Chinese cultural and linguistic skills in the Japanese labor market and occupy economic positions that have to do with businesses in China. In other words, Chinese migrants find career opportunities in the transnational economy between Japan and China. Moreover, with the expanding global economy, the recent Chinese migrants in Japan have begun to interact with older and well-established global overseas Chinese networks. Their

economic roles and practices further strengthen their identity as “New Overseas Chinese”.

### **Profile**

Gracia Liu-Farrer is Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Japan. Her research examines the economic, social and emotional lives of contemporary Chinese immigrants in Japan and their transnational career practices and living arrangements. Her latest publications include the article on the Chinese community in the book *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, edited by Michael Weiner (London: Routledge, 2008); and “Educationally Channeled International Labor Migration: Post-1978 Student Mobility from China to Japan” published in *International Migration Review* (Vol.43 No.1, 2009).

## Religious Identities and Migration trajectories: Filipino Migrants from Hong Kong to London

**Deirdre McKay**

School of Physical and Geographical Science

Keele University

d.c.mckay@esci.keele.ac.uk

### Abstract

This paper considers the identities of Filipino migrants within a global context. These migrants typically conceive of their work in Asia as a “stepping stone” towards a final destination either in Europe or North America. Their religious identities build these “stepping stones” by enabling migrants to 1) combat exclusion and prejudice and challenge local stereotypes; 2) negotiate working conditions; 3) increase social and cultural capital; and 3) find additional or better-paying work.

The paper draws on fieldwork with Filipinos doing domestic work in Hong Kong and those who have left Hong Kong for the UK. My respondents’ religious identities challenge and transcend the other identities ascribed to them by temporary labour programs. Their new - or renewed - faith-based identities come from a variety of confessions. Some are members of Philippine-based prosperity movements - based on American fundamentalist precepts - or similar, non-Filipino churches such as the Australian Hillsong. Others renew their engagement with a Roman Catholic or Anglican (Episcopalian in the Philippines) faith.

Expressing a religious identity, attending religious services, and belonging to a congregation are definitive of migrants’ self-understandings and important coping mechanisms. Church helps them to address their social exclusion, economic marginalization, and homesickness. Some churches provide powerful critiques of wealth, enabling them to voice resentments in religious terms. Faith reassures them that their work of caring and service dignifies them in the eyes of God, entitling them to a God-given prosperity. Churches offer not only spiritual comfort, but practical benefits too.

Church is a space where emotions can be safely expressed and friendships formed. Church is widely recognized as a safe venue. Attending church expresses a “good purpose” and is unlikely to draw suspicion or sanction from an employer. Church-based groups allow members to occupy public spaces as worthy people. Many churches offer training, counselling and employment support to help migrants manage work in Hong Kong and relations with those at home. Church social connections extend into

financial services and leisure activities, expanding migrants' social circles beyond village or province-of-origin ties to include Filipinos from different regions and ethnic groups and local Chinese. Church networks are thus a vital source of information and contacts for additional work, usually part-time cleaning or babysitting.

Changing churches offers Filipino migrants ways to advance themselves while in Hong Kong. With numerous churches actively recruiting new members, migrants can shop around, seeking a church that "feels right" or offers advantageous social ties. Churches can provide migrants with a new, faith-based family. This appeals to people who have broken or strained family ties at home, giving them a more immediate outlet for reciprocal exchange of gifts and affection. Many churches maintain connections to members working in final destination countries. They offer recommendations and guidance to migrants seeking to move on from Hong Kong. Conversion in Hong Kong enables migrants to streamline their obligations, join new networks, and re-imagine themselves as global congregants, all as part of a migration trajectory that will take them beyond Asia.

## Profile

Dr McKay is currently working on an Arts and Humanities Research Council UK project on religion in the Filipino diaspora. From 2009 - 2011 she is Honorary Research Associate in Anthropology at University College London.

Beginning from an interest in environmental conservation and local development in the rural Philippines, Dr McKay has followed her respondents overseas, publishing on landscapes, emotions, locality, and intimacy in Filipino migration. Her recent work examines on themes of faith, debt, and care among Filipinos living between the UK, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. She has published in *Mobilities*, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Visual Anthropology*, and *The Asia-Pacific Journal of Anthropology*. Her book, *The virtual village: coping with a global world*, is in review with Indiana University Press.

## Inverted Transnational Linkages among Chinese Returned Migrants

**Lucille Ngan**

Department of Sociology

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

sslngan@polyu.edu.hk

### **Abstract**

Research in the field of transnationalism has largely focused on the experience of migrants in the host country and only offhand remarks have been documented on those who have returned or moved on to a third place of residence. One underlying reason is because return migration conveys the same sense of closure, finality and completion of the migration journey and the experience of migrants who have returned to their homeland is predicated on the deterioration of linkages with the host country. However, for overseas Chinese migrants who emigrated prior to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, return migration is often another stage in a continuing journey with further movements ahead. This paper evaluates the concept of transnationalism, identifying gaps that have emerged from the use of transnational framework in return migration research. In particular, it argues that the way in which identity operates for Chinese returned migrants requires a conceptualization of transnationalism that encompass a focus on 'inverted' transnational linkages. These aspects are valuable in extending the current transnationalism framework for examining the Chinese diasporic experience.

### **Profile**

Lucille Ngan received her doctorate degree in sociology at the University of New South Wales. Her PhD research examined the construction of Chineseness of long established Australian-born Chinese. She is Research Associate at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research interests include the Chinese diaspora, transnationalism, migration and ethnic relations. Her recent publications include "Generational Identities Through Time: Memories and Homelands of the ABCs" in *At Home in the Chinese Diaspora: Memories, Identity and Belonging*, edited by A. Davidson and K. E. Kuah-Pearce (Hampshire, Palgrave, 2008); "Living in-between," published in *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies Journal (Vol. 2 No.1, 2008)*; and "Methodological issues on studying the identity of long-

established ABC,” published in *Migrations and Identities* (Vol. 1 No. 2, 2008).

## Chinese-Singaporean Transmigrants: Inequalities and Performing Transnational Positionalities

**Caroline Plüss**

Division of Sociology

Nanyang Technological University

pluss@ntu.edu.sg

### **Abstract**

This paper is based on the in-depth accounts given by 15 female Chinese-Singaporean transmigrants of their transnational biographies. 13 of them resided in Singapore at the time of the interviews, and two of them were visiting. The interviewees, whose ages commonly ranged from the late twenties to the late thirties, are representative of facts that most Chinese-Singaporean transmigrants are middle-class; that if they work, they do so in highly skilled professions; that they have often studied abroad; and that they have resided in more than two countries. The aim of my paper is to articulate why and how the interviewees' performances of their identities through recounting their transnational biographies is linked to their attempts to realize their cultural, social and economic aspiration in their transnational life-worlds, which they formed through living in several societies.

The paper builds on the idea that transmigrants stay in different societies because of the benefits they deem to derive from living in different places. While studying the sojourners' identity performances, my emphasis is on discerning the patterns by which they sought to construct cultural capital to access new cultural, social and economic resources, and on analyzing why and how they employed their cultural, social and economic resources to do so. I elaborate upon the question of how resources from one network with given cultural characteristics and roots in one geographical region could, or could not, be converted into resources in another network with different cultural characteristics and roots in a different region. In other words, my paper attempts to analyze why and how the different cultural, social and economic characteristics that constitute the transnational experiences of the Chinese-Singaporean sojourners intersected.

While studying these intersections, emphasis is on discerning the strength of the interviewees' accounts of cultural assimilation, differentiation and hybridization when they explain how they related to elements in the different cultures in which they lived. The prevalence of either one of these three forms of cultural contact in the accounts is expected to provide insight into the question of who defined cultural capital when the interviewees negotiated their identities with other groups of people in transnational contexts. The

paper is expected to contribute to our understanding of how social inequalities can be reproduced under increasing conditions of globalization, that is, under conditions that potentially augment the number of accepted cultural practices. I also identify the principal difficulties with adjustment the sojourners experienced after 'returning' to Singapore to contribute to our knowledge of the phenomenon of transnational sojourning, which is accelerating with increasing globalization.

## Profile

Caroline Pluss received her doctorate in sociology from the University of Oxford, studying social cohesion in a non-doctrinal religious movement. She then took up the position of Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Hong Kong, where she conducted several research projects on ethnicity, migration, religion, culture, globalization, and social history in Hong Kong. Results from these projects have been published in several journals, as well as in edited volumes. Her current research studies the relations between culture, globalization and the transformations of the identities of Chinese-Singaporean transnational sojourners. Caroline Pluss was awarded a Tier-1 research grant for this project. Part of the study is to develop a theoretical approach to analyze the convertibility of cultural, social and economic capital in transnational contexts. Caroline Pluss is teaching in the areas of contemporary social theory, globalization and culture, ethnicity and ethnic relations, and qualitative sociology. Her recent publications include 'Trans-National Biographies and Trans-National Habiti: The Case of Chinese Singaporeans in Hong Kong', in *Reframing Singapore: Memory, Identity and Trans-Regionalism*, edited by Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin (2009, Amsterdam University Press); "Analyzing non-doctrinal socialization: re-assessing the role of cognition to account for social cohesion in the Religious Society of Friends", published in *The British Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 58 No. 2, 2007); and "Becoming different while becoming the same: Re-territorializing Islamic identities with multi-ethnic practices in Hong Kong", published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Vol. 29 No.4, 2006).

## "I am a Nurse!": Professional Identity, State Regulation and Career Pathways of Burmese Care Workers in Singapore

**Mika Toyota**

Department of Sociology

National University of Singapore

mikatoyota@nus.edu.sg

### **Abstract**

This paper examines an important, albeit often neglected, aspect of migrant identity formation and contestation, namely professional identity, in the case of migrant nurses. I will demonstrate how professional identity is assigned by established system as part of mechanism of regulating mobility, but is at the same time utilized by migrants themselves in order to claim entitlements. As such the negotiation over professional identity constitutes a critical zone where individual migrants face the power structure and work out their strategies. I will also demonstrate how professional identities intersect with identities based on nationality and gender, and by doing so deepen our understanding of identity and mobility in Asia.

The migration of nurses from developing to developed countries in search of better professional career pathways has long been observed. In recent years this phenomenon has significantly accelerated due to the growing global demand for health care professionals, particularly nurses. English speaking countries, such as the UK, USA, Australia, Ireland and Canada, appear to be the most popular destinations for nurses. Singapore has started recruiting foreign nurses actively since 1990s and is perceived as 'stepping stone' for their career pathways by foreign nurses from the Philippines, China, India and Myanmar.

The process of migration of nurses is increasingly regulated by government as well as professional bodies. As a result, only qualified nurses from overseas are admitted. In the case of Myanmar, the economic hardship and very limited channels of outmigration result in a situation that many nurses from the country are among the most qualified among migrant nurses in Singapore. However, while the professionalization of nursing skills constitute an important mechanism that facilitates transnational mobility, the process at the same time also leads to the situation that nursing skills acquired in countries of origins are not fully recognised at the destinations. As a result, despite their high level qualification and commitment to nursing career, those who were trained as professional nurses in Myanmar are initially employed as nursing aides in Singapore. In order to take the

designated examination in Singapore which enable them to be officially recognized as nurses, many have to prepare for a number of years and particularly have to rely on their employers to produce letters of recommendation. This not only means that the nurses experience a decisively downward mobility in their career, but also puts them in disadvantageous positions in the labor market.

This paper, based on my ethnographic study with Burmese nurses in Singapore (2006-2008), tackles the institutional reasons why they are deskilled, describes how the mismatch between the migrants' self identity and the officially sanctioned status manifest itself in everyday life, and delineate the migrants' strategies. In the paper, I will first provide an overview about the professionalization of the nursing occupation, of which the establishment of the internal occupational hierarchy is an essential part, and about the international migration of nurses in the region. I will then zoom into the case of migrant nurses from Myanmar in Singapore and describe their backgrounds and motivations for migration. This is followed by the section on the process of deskilling as a result of government regulation. I will then provide ethnographic data about the everyday experiences of the gap between externally assigned category (nursing aids) and self identification (nurses). Finally I tackle their coping strategies and particularly their actions aimed at fulfilling their self professional identity.

## Profile

Dr. Mika Toyota is an Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore. She obtained her PhD in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hull, UK in 2000 following long-term field research (1994-1997) with transnational ethnic minorities in the borderlands of Thailand, Burma and China. Subsequently she lectured at the University of Hull for three years before taking up a Postdoctoral fellowship at the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis (2002-4), and Research Fellowship at Asia Research Institute (2004-2008), National University of Singapore. Dr Toyota has seen her work published in reputable journals such as *Racial and Ethnic Studies* and *International Development Planning Review*. Her recent publications include "Editorial introduction: international marriage, rights and the state in East and Southeast Asia," published in *Citizenship Studies* (Vol.12 No.1, 2008); "Ambivalent Categories: 'Hill tribes' and 'illegal migrants' in Thailand" in *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Insurrectionary Politics at Territory's Edge*, edited by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr (University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and "Bringing the 'Left-behind' back into view in Asia: A framework for

understanding the ‘migration-left behind nexus’”, published in *Population, Space and Place* (Vol. 13 No. 3, 2007).

## **Global City Competition, Demographic Change and Foreign Migrants in Singapore**

**Wong Tai-Chee**

Humanities and Social Science Education

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

taichee.wong@nie.edu.sg

### **Abstract**

Intensifying globalization has accelerated mobility of human workforce across the globe. In Singapore, as in almost all developed economies, the frenzied quest to enhance its global city standing by upgrading its competitive capacity has been accompanied by a worrying falling fertility rate, and a graying population. In countering the disadvantage of a limited talent pool of a small population, public policy has been oriented towards attracting foreign talent to meet the rising demand for highly specialized jobs required of a high-ranking global city. Alongside a parallel demand for a contrasted source of lower-skilled foreign workers who are key takers of poorly remunerated jobs, local response has been mixed. Against the backdrop of a widening income gap, threatening effects have prevailed most significantly amidst the grassroots fearful of foreign competition for lower-paying jobs in which they are less equipped to face rising competition against a more youthful foreign workforce.

This study investigates the two layers of foreign workforce in Singapore. The upper echelon encompasses the highly skilled and specialized talent who hold generally senior professional positions in large and local companies as well as foreign transnational corporations. Their job marketability is international. The lower echelon comprises those engaged in the three Ds (dirty, difficult and dangerous). The study enquires the theoretical interpretations relating to the prevailing global trend of transborder workforce mobility and factors underlying such movements. Besides investigating the perceptions of identity of migrants, potential conflicting areas and political resolutions are also analysed in the small contested living space of the city-state.

### **Profile**

Wong Tai-Chee received his PhD from the Research School of Asian and Pacific Studies, Australian National University, and is Associate Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He teaches urban studies and other human geography modules.

He was visiting professor to the Institute of Geography, University of Paris IV-Sorbonne in 2007. His main research interests are in urban and regional issues on which he has published books and many articles in international journals. His four latest books are *Four Decades of Transformation: Land Use in Singapore 1960-2000* (Eastern University Press, Singapore 2004) and *A Roof Over Every Head: Singapore's Housing Policies between State Monopoly and Privatisation* (Sampark 2005), Edited volume with Brian J. Shaw and Kim-chuan Goh, *Challenging Sustainability: Urban Development and Change in Southeast Asia* (Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2006), Edited volume with Belinda Yuen & Charles Goldblum, *Spatial Planning for a Sustainable Singapore* (Springer, 2008).