

A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a bright green t-shirt and pink patterned shorts, pushing a man in a wheelchair. The man has short grey hair and is wearing a grey patterned shirt. They are in a hallway with red and grey tiled floors and white walls. A white plastic bag is hanging from the wheelchair. The scene is brightly lit, possibly from a window at the end of the hallway.

MOVED TO CARE

Ageing, Care
& Migration

SINGAPORE IS A DYNAMIC MIGRATION HUB CHARACTERISED BY INFLOWS AND OUTFLOWS OF PEOPLE...

'Moved to Care' explores the connections between migration and ageing through twelve pictures taken by researchers from the Transnational Relations, Ageing and Care Ethics (TRACE) project during their fieldwork within and outside of Singapore. Four groups of people are featured here:

- i) Older Singaporean Residents and Their Relations with Foreign Domestic Workers
- ii) Older Migrants in Singapore who are Ageing alongside Older Singaporean Residents
- iii) Younger Singaporeans who have Returned from Abroad to Care for Their Ageing Loved Ones
- iv) Older Singaporean Migrants who are Ageing Abroad

Through these shots of ordinary life and accompanying write-ups, we provide snippets of how older Singaporeans in our study age in place or abroad, and hope that readers will be encouraged to consider questions of who should provide care, how care can be expressed and the costs of care. We hope to promote productive conversations about how particular issues on migration and ageing may be approached and addressed. All participants' names used in this collection have been changed to protect their identities.

FOREWORD





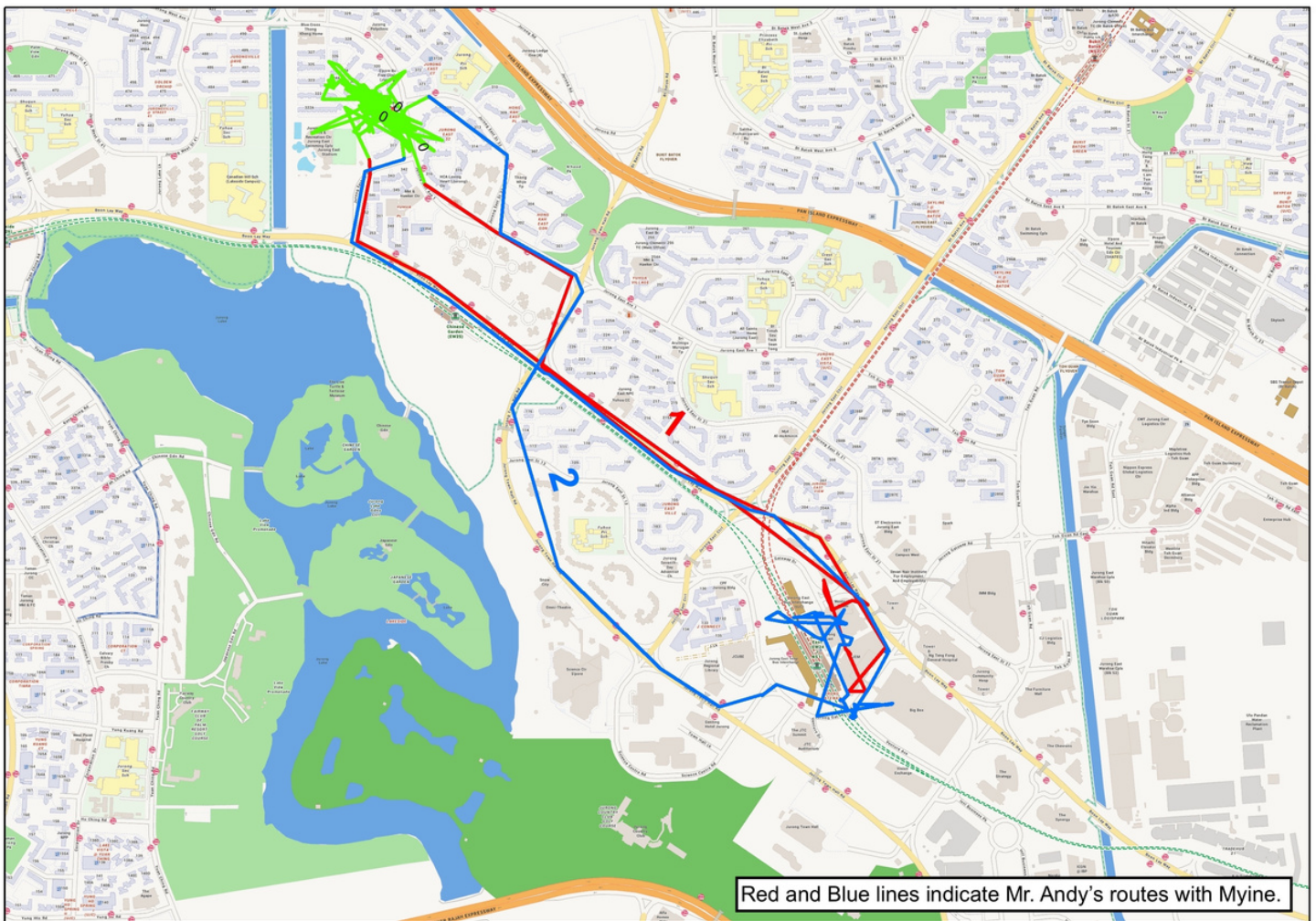
"I would need to pay for her transportation costs etc... You have to think of the money... I have no active income."

Madam Loy, Singaporean-Chinese, late 70s

Although Madam Loy is able to move about unassisted, she experiences difficulties with scaling steps and bending down. As such, Madam Loy would prefer for Lia, her Indonesian domestic worker, to accompany her on out-of-house trips (e.g. weekly aquarobic classes) lest she falls.

Without an active income, Madam Loy has been unable to bring Lia along due to the additional costs (e.g. meals, entry fees to the swimming complex) that such trips would incur.

Should foreign domestic workers accompanying seniors receive concessionary rates?



**"She will only bring me out
[beyond the park] once a
week"**

Mr. Andy, Singaporean-Chinese, late 80s

**"It's [the weather
outside] very hot"**

Myine, Myanmarese foreign
domestic worker, late 20s

Despite being wheelchair-bound, Mr. Andy continues to harbour hopes of leading an active life, such as visiting the neighbourhood malls and attending outings organised by the Senior Activity Centre (SAC).

While wheeling Mr. Andy to the nearby SAC and park is manageable and an important means of connecting stay-alone seniors to the community, Myine explains that participating in outings farther away can be physically taxing on her. As the SAC may be shorthanded at times, Myine is still needed to assist Mr. Andy (e.g. toileting needs) during such outings.

**How can seniors with mobility issues be better included in
activities organised by community organisations?**



**"Yes, it is
very small and
closes very
fast!"**

**Anna, Filipino foreign
domestic worker, late
30s**

One major challenge that Anna faces is the limited capacity of the lift that serves her employer's flat.

Not only is the lift unable to accommodate more than two wheelchair-bound users at once, the doors do not stay open long enough for Anna to comfortably manoeuvre her employer in and out with ease.

This constraint leads to periodic delays for users due to competing needs and demands on the lift service.

**What design features should be incorporated to build
an age-friendly neighbourhood?**



Setia, an Indonesian domestic worker in her 30s, dons very brightly-coloured *baju kurung* whenever she is out with her elderly employer so that she can pass off as a family member.

"I'm not saying that everyone here is like that. But sometimes some look at me like I'm so lowly. Why differentiate me just because I'm a helper?"

Despite her concerns about stigma, Setia carries out her duties wholeheartedly, including kneeling down to adjust the foot pedal on her elderly employer's wheelchair when needed.

How can Singaporeans be more appreciative of the contributions of foreign domestic workers?



"She is our fourth helper. All of them are okay, good people. It depends on how we treat them. If we are kind, they would reciprocate as well."

Madam Farzana, Singaporean-Indian, late 60s

Even though Madam Farzana is able to complete marketing chores on her own, she brings along her Indonesian domestic worker Kezia whenever possible.

Kezia's role is more than just a helping hand. Madam Farzana engages her in friendly chit-chats along the way and when Kezia offers her opinions on what to buy, her employer readily takes up the suggestions.

Madam Farzana views Kezia as a 'substitute daughter' as her biological children and grandchildren are grown up and have their own families.

How can families forge mutually respectful relations with their foreign domestic workers?



"[I've learned] how to push the wheelchair... transfer the patient... ironing. Sometimes, they teach cooking... also cleaning."

Cho Cho, Myanmarese foreign domestic worker, early 20s

Many local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide training courses for foreign domestic workers to upgrade their skills. Subsidies are provided by the government for them to do so.

Some courses help these migrants improve their eldercare skills, but they face difficulties attending or completing courses if their employers withhold permission or if it disrupts their caregiving schedules.

How can employers be persuaded to allow their foreign domestic workers to go for training courses?



"Even though we are senior citizens, we need to showcase our most positive and beautiful sides."

Madam Qiu, Chinese national, late 60s

This is the philosophy behind the catwalk class organised at one of Singapore's local Community Clubs, which are common spaces for seniors of mixed social backgrounds to come together.

The catwalk class is popular with Singaporeans, Malaysians, Chinese, Taiwanese and Indonesian older women. The ladies have performed at several community events.

To reward themselves, they organise a get-together after each successful performance to pose for pictures. Despite not always agreeing, sharing a unique interest has helped bring this diverse group together.

What other activities can help to bridge cultural and nationality differences amongst seniors?



"Nationality does not matter. We welcome anyone who wants to practise taichi"

Mr Seet, Singaporean-Chinese, early 60s

Through chance encounters and word of mouth, Mr Seet has formed and leads an informal taichi club at one of Singapore's largest public parks. The members include seniors from Singapore, Malaysia and the People's Republic of China.

Mr Seet appreciates the knowledge of the exercise shared by the Chinese nationals in the group. Although this privileges Mandarin as the main medium of communication, Mr Seet maintains that having a shared interest is what matters in fostering exchanges across social differences.

While such activities foster social bonds for some, are other seniors inadvertently excluded from participation?



"Yeah I think that's the choice. It's like, okay, whoever is not married... is normally with the parents. That's kind of Singapore culture."

Cathy, Singaporean-Chinese, early 50s, returnee

After working abroad in Hong Kong, Vietnam and China for close to a decade, Cathy returned to Singapore three years ago. Despite being away for extended periods of time, she still regards the city-state as her home since her family and most of her friends are residing here.

Although Cathy has four other siblings, being the sole, unmarried daughter prompted her to take up the responsibility of living with and caring for her aged mother.

Since moving back, the cost of the foreign domestic worker employed to look after the octogenarian – previously shared among all five children – has also fallen entirely on Cathy's shoulders.

Why do singles often end up being the default caregivers of seniors?



"Because of [her] father, [my daughter] came back [from Australia]...That's why [her] dog is here..."

Madam Melissa, Singaporean-Chinese, early 70s, parent of returnee

Madam Melissa is thankful that her daughter decided to return from abroad to care for her ailing husband. She shared that her daughter's presence puts her at ease and Madam Melissa is able to leave the house during the weekends for some alone time (e.g. shopping).

As Madam Melissa's daughter is working full time, she is unable to provide everyday hands-on care, a situation that is not very different from when she was abroad.

The one who helps Madam Melissa pass her time and accompanies her on most days is actually her daughter's pet dog Kayla.

Does moving back to Singapore to live in proximity necessarily translate into greater care for seniors?

"We can't [afford to retire early]! We still have to work until very long."

Mr Neo, Singaporean-Chinese, early 60s, working in China



"One person RMB5,000 [SGD\$1,000 a month] — can barely afford it [a place in nursing home], so must save up."

Mr Kai, Singaporean-Chinese, early 60s, retiree in China

Despite having worked in China for two decades, Mr Neo intends to extend his stay there. Like a growing number of older Singaporeans, Mr Neo does not wish to depend on his adult children in the future and prefers to be physically and financially independent. When he reaches a frail state, he plans to hire a paid caregiver but remarked that it is "not cheap".

Mr Kai echoed similar sentiments about opting to retire in China because of the high costs of living in Singapore. He foresees that he will barely be able to afford admission to a nursing home in China, much less so here in Singapore. He added that he even has to reduce social visits to the eatery near his home in order to save up for the future.

What aspects are important for one to retire or age in place with peace of mind?



"Are the otters photoshopped into the picture?"

Singaporean in China

This was a question asked by one of the attendees during Singapore's 53rd National Day celebration in Guangzhou, an event where patriotic Singaporeans living in China would gather to socialise over dearly-missed Singaporean cuisines.

Several of them have been away for so many decades that they have lost touch with news in Singapore, including not noticing that otters are now considered an increasingly familiar presence in Singapore.

That aside, some expressed that they have little or no idea about the costs and options of ageing in Singapore. Others highlighted dwindling social ties back home, which is another reason why they are conflicted about retiring in Singapore.

How else can overseas Singaporeans ageing abroad be better connected to life back in the city-state?



RESOURCES

*Click on the agency's name to be directed to the relevant page(s)

Active Ageing

- Council for Third Age (C3A)
- National Silver Academy (NSA)

Caregiving Training & Support

- NTUC Learning Hub
- HOME Academy

Eldercare Schemes & Policies

- Agency of Integrated Care (AIC)
- Ministry of Health (MOH)

Enquiries & Helplines

- SilverPages: 1800-650-6060
- SAGE Counselling Centre: 1800-5555-555
- ComCare: 1800-222-0000

TRACE

Using Singapore as the key hub, TRACE is a multi-sited research project that explores how migration impacts ageing and caring processes within and across borders. To find out more, click [here](#).

Principal Investigator

Associate Professor Elaine Ho Lynn-Ee

Co-Principal Investigators

Associate Professor Shirlena Huang
Associate Professor Thang Leng Leng
Professor Brenda Yeoh

Team Members

Dr. Sylvia Ang, Dr. Jenny Chiu, Dr. Guo Zhou, Dr. Ting Wen-Ching, Mr. Liew Jian An, Ms. Nessa Swinn