

# THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF IMMOBILITY

Asian Migrants (not) on the Move in  
(Post-)Pandemic Times

**14-15 MARCH 2024**

Online via Zoom

For more information, please visit: [ari.nus.edu.sg/events/immobility/](https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/immobility/)



In migration studies, immobility is predominantly conceptualized as a disempowering and involuntary experience, symbolizing the curtailment of freedom to move as a result of prevailing structural constraints. Scholarly investigations have devoted significant attention to the institutionalized and nation-specific “regimes of mobility” (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013) that bestow varying degrees of conditional or unconditional mobility to certain individuals while imposing temporary or prolonged immobility upon others. Nonetheless, immobility does not invariably denote an involuntary circumstance, nor does it inherently culminate in negative outcomes. Scholarly discourse has shed light on the fact that immobility can also be voluntary or even desirable, arising from a lack of aspiration to relocate despite possessing the capability to do so (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Schewel, 2019). In such cases, immobility should be regarded as a proactive and purposeful practice that necessitates agency, involving extensive engagement in decision-making processes related to migratory and residential choices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the paramount importance of immobility. Stringent border restrictions have erected substantial barriers to geographical mobility, affecting even highly skilled and privileged migrants who were previously accustomed to high levels of mobility. Amidst the ongoing global crisis, entrenched regimes of (im)mobility have been reproduced and reinforced in certain contexts, while undergoing critical evaluation and reconfiguration in others. The evolving terrains of (im)mobility, stemming from the pandemic and extending into the post-pandemic era, have engendered far-reaching implications at both the micro-level, affecting the migration trajectories and life experiences of individual migrants, and the macro-level, reshaping nation-state governance, economic development, as well as cross-border population dynamics.

While research on migration and (im)mobility under pandemic conditions has ramped up, the predominant focus remains directed towards migrant mobilities rather than immobilities. With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting established (im)mobility regimes and introducing immobility to broader migrant populations, it becomes imperative to examine immobility as a distinct phenomenon with its array of experiences, narratives, and consequences. Furthermore, since existing knowledge concerning pandemic-related immobilities has been largely shaped by a Western perspective, there exists a pressing need to cast light upon the Asian arena that has hitherto remained relatively understudied within scholarly discourses.

In this context, the present workshop calls for a comprehensive investigation into the experiences and practices of Asian migrants pertaining to (post-)pandemic immobilities. The primary objective is to offer novel perspectives and insights into the ongoing discourses surrounding the complexities of migrant immobilities in the pandemic context, focusing on the interplay between migration regimes and human agency, the spatial and temporal aspects of transnational lives, and the shifting dynamics that preceded and followed the pandemic. The workshop endeavours to encompass diverse studies, delving into the intricacy of migration and pandemic immobility from the perspective of individuals, households, societies and nation-states, and remaining attentive to experiences of both the privileged and the marginalised migrant groups.

Potential workshop participants are encouraged to submit original works that address the following areas of interest, which include but are not limited to:

- How have governments in Asia regulated cross-border (im)mobilities and socio-spatial relations during the pandemic and its aftermath? How have these policies and measures affected the geographical (im)mobilities of migrants and their families?
- What does immobility mean to migrants in (post-)pandemic times? How has geographical immobility affected various aspects of migrants’ life, such as family and social relationships, employment and career, financial situations, and physical and emotional well-being?
- How have migrants’ (im)mobility rights been impacted by their citizenship and residential status in both the country of origin and destination? How, in turn, have the experiences of immobility amid the pandemic influenced their plans regarding future residential status and pathways to citizenship?

- How do migrants make sense of and navigate immobilities during the pandemic? How has the pandemic influenced migrants' decisions in relation to (im)mobility in the post-pandemic age? Do they choose to remain in their destination countries, return to their home countries, or move on to other places?
- How has the pandemic reinforced, reproduced, or challenged existing regimes of differentiation and exclusion regarding migrant (im)mobility? Does the pandemic contribute to greater or lesser equality in access to mobility for migrants? Who are the privileged and who are the disadvantaged?
- How has the pandemic transformed the meanings and social expectations surrounding immobility across Asian countries?

## WORKSHOP CONVENORS

**Dr Yang WANG** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Dr Wei YANG** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Dr Bernice LOH** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Dr Theodora LAM** | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Prof Brenda S. A. YEOH FBA** | Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

*Singapore Time***14 MARCH 2024 • THURSDAY****09:15 – 09:30****WELCOME REMARKS**

09:15

**YANG WANG**, National University of Singapore  
**WEI YANG**, National University of Singapore  
**BERNICE LOH**, National University of Singapore  
**THEODORA LAM**, National University of Singapore  
**BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore

**09:30 – 11:00****PANEL 1 • IMMOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE***Chairperson***BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore

09:30

Migrant (Im)Mobilities and the Poetics of Porosity in Post-Pandemic Sabah  
**ANDREW M. CARRUTHERS**, University of Pennsylvania

09:50

Pandemic Returns of Temporary Labour Migrant Workers to Nepal: Mobilities and Immobilities  
**RICHA SHIVAKOTI**, Toronto Metropolitan University

10:10

Undesirable Mobility / Desirable Immobility: Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong  
**YUK WAH CHAN**, City University of Hong Kong  
**DAVID HAINES**, George Mason University

10:30

Questions &amp; Answers

**11:00****END OF PANEL****11:30 – 12:30****PANEL 2 • IMMOBILITY AND MARGINALITY***Chairperson***LAN ANH HOANG**, University of Melbourne

11:30

Rohingya Refugees in Klang Valley, Malaysia: Permanent (Im)mobility?  
**ASLAM ABD JALIL**, Universiti Malaya

11:50

No Place to Call Home: Homelessness and Cross-Border Immobility during the COVID-19 Pandemic  
**HARRY TAN**, National University of Singapore  
**FRANCESCA LEE**, National University of Singapore  
**JENIN TEO**, National University of Singapore  
**RACHEL NG**, National University of Singapore

12:10

Questions &amp; Answers

**12:30****END OF PANEL**

*Singapore Time*

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|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>14:00 – 15:30</b> | <b>PANEL 3 • AGENCY AND CONSTRAINTS IN IMMOBILE TIMES I</b>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Chairperson</i>   | <b>THEODORA LAM</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>14:00</b>         | Weaponizing Naturalised Citizenship: Mitigating the Risks of War Mobilisation in Putin’s Russia<br><b>MALIKA BAHOVADINOVA</b> , University of Amsterdam<br><b>ELENA BORISOVA</b> , University of Sussex                         |
| <b>14:20</b>         | Immobility as a Choice – Post-COVID-19 Locational Decision-making of Chinese Graduates in Singapore and Japan<br><b>RUTH ACHENBACH</b> , Goethe University Frankfurt                                                            |
| <b>14:40</b>         | Chinese Student Migrants’ Pandemic Experiences and Post-Pandemic Identity<br><b>HUAZHI QIN</b> , National University of Singapore<br><b>YUXIN ZHAO</b> , Independent Researcher                                                 |
| <b>15:00</b>         | Questions & Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>15:30</b>         | <b>END OF PANEL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>16:00 – 17:30</b> | <b>PANEL 4 • AGENCY AND CONSTRAINTS IN IMMOBILE TIMES II</b>                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>Chairperson</i>   | <b>BERNICE LOH</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>16:00</b>         | ‘Clap for our Carers’: Migrant Filipino Healthcare Workers in the UK during the Covid-19 Pandemic<br><b>BIANCA MARIE LUNA</b> , University of Southampton                                                                       |
| <b>16:20</b>         | The Immobility of the Highly Mobile: Intersecting (Im)mobilities among Foreign Entrepreneurs in Singapore<br><b>HELENA HOF</b> , University of Zurich, and Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity |
| <b>16:40</b>         | Migrant (Im)mobilities in an Exceptional Time: The Experiences of Transfer and Circular Migrant Workers in Singapore<br><b>WEI YANG</b> , National University of Singapore                                                      |
| <b>17:00</b>         | Questions & Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>17:30</b>         | <b>END OF PANEL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

# 15 MARCH 2023 • FRIDAY

Singapore Time

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|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>09:00 – 10:00</b> | <b>PANEL 5 • IMMOBILITY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>Chairperson</i>   | <b>KRIS HYESOO LEE</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 09:00                | “I Say I Will Stay for a Bit”: Transnational ICT Communication Chains Linking Mongolian Migrants and their Families During and After the Pandemic<br><b>SONDRA CUBAN</b> , Western Washington University                                                                         |
| 09:20                | Pandemic-Induced Immobility and Marriage Migrants in Cross-National Families in Singapore<br><b>BERNICE LOH</b> , National University of Singapore<br><b>BRENDA S.A. YEOH</b> , National University of Singapore<br><b>WEI-JUN JEAN YEUNG</b> , National University of Singapore |
| 09:40                | Questions & Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>10:00</b>         | <b>END OF PANEL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>10:30 – 11:30</b> | <b>PANEL 6 • OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF IMMOBILITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Chairperson</i>   | <b>WEI YANG</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 10:30                | Immobility-Mobility Nexus: The Opportunities and Challenges of the Australian COVID-19 Visa for Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers<br><b>YAO-TAI LI</b> , University of New South Wales                                                                                           |
| 10:50                | Negotiating the Rhythms of Transnational (Im)mobility in a (Post-)Pandemic Age: Chinese Professional Migrants in Singapore<br><b>YANG WANG</b> , National University of Singapore<br><b>BRENDA S. A. YEOH</b> , National University of Singapore                                 |
| 11:10                | Questions & Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>11:30</b>         | <b>END OF PANEL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>14:00 – 15:30</b> | <b>PANEL 7 • DIGITAL MOBILITY AMID GEOGRAPHIC IMMOBILITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Chairperson</i>   | <b>EXEQUIEL CABANDA</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 14:00                | Geographically Immobile, Metaphorically Mobile: How Filipino Emigrants Develop a Sense of Online Community in a Livestreaming Platform<br><b>FLORAMANTE SJ PONCE</b> , Université libre de Bruxelles                                                                             |
| 14:20                | Immobile but Mobile: The Poetics of Immobility through Online Platforms during the COVID-19 Pandemic<br><b>MY HANG THI BUI</b> , Seoul National University                                                                                                                       |
| 14:40                | (Im)mobility and Migration Infrastructure: The Dynamics of African Migration to China in (Post-)Pandemic Times<br><b>YANXUAN LU</b> , Peking University                                                                                                                          |
| 15:00                | Questions & Answers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>15:30 – 15:45</b> | <b>CLOSING REMARKS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 15:30                | <b>YANG WANG</b> , National University of Singapore                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>15:45</b>         | <b>END OF WORKSHOP</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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## Migrant (Im)Mobilities and the Poetics of Porosity in Post-Pandemic Sabah

**Andrew M. CARRUTHERS**

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Situated at the notoriously porous borders of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the east Malaysian state of Sabah bears witness to some of the largest clandestine cross-border flows in the world. This paper examines how undocumented Indonesian immigrants and their co-ethnic (Ang, Ho, and Yeoh 2022) Malaysian counterparts are jointly re-evaluating bordering practices and migrant (im)mobilities in post-pandemic Sabah. In September 2020, six years after a Royal Commission of Inquiry declared the “problem of illegal immigrants in Sabah” an “all consuming nightmare” (Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2014, 1), Sabah became the epicenter of a third wave of COVID-19 infections sweeping across Malaysia. Government officials causally linked clandestine cross-border movement with Sabah’s ongoing health crisis, implementing a national-scale operation aimed at “strictly control[ling] the country’s borders” (*Ops Benteng*, cited in Carruthers, 2020). This paper explores how pandemic-era policies of so-called “movement control” have reshaped infrastructures of migrant (im)mobility in post-pandemic Sabah. More generally, and with an ethnographic eye to Sabah’s infamously porous borders, I conclude by detailing what I mean by the “poetics of porosity,” while critically re-considering what habits of thought the “(im-)” in “(im-)mobilities” motivates in migration studies research.

**Andrew M. Carruthers** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches courses in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology, semiotics, and Southeast Asian Studies. He was the 2022-2023 U.S. Senior Fulbright Scholar to Malaysia, based at the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. An ethnographer of language and mobility in Island Southeast Asia, Carruthers studies Malay-speaking migrants’ everyday evaluative practices to better understand how they jointly navigate an archipelagic world. His writing has appeared in *American Anthropologist*, *Public Culture*, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, *Environment and Planning C*, among other outlets.

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## Pandemic Returns of Temporary Labour Migrant Workers to Nepal: Mobilities and Immobilities

**Richa SHIVAKOTI**

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The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in large-scale return of temporary labour migrant workers to their home countries, many had to leave without full payment of their salaries and endure lockdowns without any income or support. The pandemic also triggered a global economic downturn, leaving migrant workers in precarious conditions for longer times.

This presentation presents findings from our research in Nepal, where we followed 150 pandemic returnee migrant workers from various destinations to Nepal with 4 semi-structured interviews over a 2-year period. We discussed issues related to their past migration pathways, their return and future aspirations. We conducted the first round of interviews May-Aug 2022 (150 returnee migrants), the second round in Dec-March 2023 (128 returnee migrants), the third round in July-Aug 2023 (92 returnee migrants) and the final round is expected to be completed between Jan-Feb 2024. We had a representative sample with migrants from all 7 provinces of Nepal, who had returned from the Gulf Cooperation Countries (from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, Oman), India, Malaysia, Lebanon, Korea, and Jordan.

On topics related to mobilities and immobilities, initial findings based on interview 1 and 2 suggest that even though returnees were initially gauging the post-pandemic situation, 63 of the 150 respondents in the 1<sup>st</sup> round of interviews had said they would like to go abroad for work again. However, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of interviews, 108 of the 128 respondents were still in Nepal. The primary reasons for wanting to re-migrate was due to the lack of employment opportunities, financial insecurities and need to repay loans. The primary reasons for staying were related to family reasons, medical reasons, working or having a business in Nepal and deciding to not go abroad again. With 4 sets of interviews, we will detangle these issues related to mobilities/immobilities and aspirations/capabilities of Nepali returnee migrant workers since the pandemic and present at the conference.

**Richa Shivakoti** is the Research Lead on Migration Governance at CERC Migration. Her research focus is on the governance of labour migration within Asia, particularly between the labour-sending states of South Asia and South East Asia and the labour receiving states in the Middle East. Her current research questions the sustainability of the circular temporary migration governance regimes in Asia. She is the primary investigator for a SSHRC Insight Development Grant and works with partners in Nepal and the Philippines to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on temporary migrant workers. Richa has a PhD in Public Policy from the National University of Singapore and a dual Masters in Public Affairs and Political Science from Indiana University, Bloomington. Previously, she was a research officer at Carleton University, a postdoctoral fellow at Maastricht University and the United Nations University in the Netherlands, and a visiting scholar at Georgetown University.



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## Undesirable Mobility / Desirable Immobility: Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong

**Yuk Wah CHAN**

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**David HAINES**

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Migration studies scholars have generally urged more regulation of labour migration in order to reduce its illegality and associated perils. However, well-regulated systems may hinder migrants' free movement. Thus, some have argued that relaxed migration governance, including illegality of status, may actually benefit migrant workers. The COVID pandemic, for example, produced much inconvenience and suffering for migrant workers. Many were either stuck in their workplace (and thus suffered from a long-term suspension of home visits), coerced to return home, or lost expected opportunities for overseas labor. Yet in that time of crisis, deregulation and the relaxation of restrictions benefitted some workers in terms of their domestic mobility, cross-sectoral job changes, and continuance and extension of work contracts.

Hong Kong provides an important case example. Migrant workers have been subject to short-term contracts during which they are subject to the orders and commands of their employers. During the epidemic, however, some "abnormalities" in that system occurred. Migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong found it much easier to change jobs, find new employers, and demand higher salaries. Moreover, since COVID-19 had forced the Hong Kong government to suspend flights and cut international connections in general, it had little choice but to relax compulsory exit requirements that force return at the end of the contract period. Such changes were appreciated by the workers. The pandemic thus yielded new constraints and new options both for those trying to govern labour migration and for the labour migrants themselves. Despite the frequent traps of immobility, workers had a chance to rethink their own logic of what "reasonable mobility and motility" might mean, and how it might mesh at times with governmental regulation. This paper addresses that future potential, illustrating it with the Hong Kong case, and placing it in a broader Asian context.

This work has not been previously published or elsewhere committed. We agree to make revisions if needed for future publication options.

**Yuk Wah Chan** is Associate Professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at City University of Hong Kong. She is the editor of *Routledge Series on Asian Migration*. Her research interests cover international migration and mobility, overseas Chinese studies, and food and identity.

**David Haines** is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at George Mason University, former president of SUNTA and former co-president of ASAP. Key books include *Safe Haven?, Immigration Structures and Immigrant Lives*, and *Wind over Water: Migration in an East Asian Context* (co-edited with Keiko Yamanaka and Shinji Yamashita). Recent articles are "Diseasescape and Immobility Governance" with Yuk Wah Chan (*Mobilities*, 2023), "Making a National Program National" (*International Migration Review*, 2023), and "The Perils of Pastors" (*Anthropological Forum*, forthcoming).

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## **Rohingya Refugees in Klang Valley, Malaysia: Permanent (Im)mobility?**

**Aslam Abd Jalil**  
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The Covid-19 pandemic had seen mobility being curtailed both through regular and irregular ways. Those living at the margins of society particularly refugees who do not possess any legal residency and rights, were simultaneously forcibly confined in and expelled from their residences in the name of public health and national sovereignty. Malaysia, being a non-signatory country to the refugee convention provides no basic rights to refugees although it has hosted hundreds of thousands of forced migrants from this region and beyond. The Covid-19 pandemic saw the zenith of xenophobia and scrutiny on Rohingya refugees in Malaysia when boats were turned away from Malaysian waters and Rohingya were locked up during the movement control orders (MCOs) through immigration raids. While Rohingya see Malaysia as a destination country, those who managed to come are stuck in limbo especially given that there is an increasing hostility by the public during and it continues post-Covid-19 pandemic. This paper seeks to address how Rohingya refugees experience temporality and navigate their immobility in a protracted refugee situation like Malaysia. Contesting Nursyazwani's conceptualisation of "mobile refugee" (2020) to describe Rohingya's imaginary citizenship in Malaysia through UNHCR card, I argue that the UNHCR document has become a tool to identify and target Rohingya identity which violates their bodily autonomy and undermines their experiential sense of dignity. While Rohingya were forcibly confined during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were also expected to leave Malaysia. In the background of global anti-migrant governance regime (Pécoud, 2020), stateless Rohingya in Malaysia are hoping to be resettled to third countries even though their chance is very slim. Drawing on an ongoing ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Klang Valley, Peninsular Malaysia starting from 2019 onwards, I provide critical analysis on the temporality and immobility experienced by Rohingya both during and post Covid-19 pandemic.

**Aslam Abd Jalil** is currently a lecturer at the International Institute of Public Policy and Management, Universiti Malaya. He obtained his PhD in anthropology and policy in 2023 from the University of Queensland, focusing on refugee work rights in Malaysia. With a background in anthropology, public policy, and business studies, his research interests lie mainly on refugee and migrant rights as well as labour migration system. Through advocacy research, Aslam's career in academia and active involvement in civil society have enabled him to translate research into action in advancing structural reforms.

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## **No Place to Call Home: Homelessness and Cross-Border Immobility during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Harry TAN**

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**Francesca LEE**

National University of Singapore

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**Rachel NG**

National University of Singapore

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In Singapore, little is known about transnational homelessness and the people who engage in cross-border living as a strategy to fulfil basic living and housing needs. Border closure during the COVID-19 pandemic made these people a prominent group among the homeless overnight. Little understanding of the challenges faced by transnational homeless people pre- and post- pandemic presented a gap in homelessness and cross-border mobility studies. This paper draws upon a wider study of homelessness over the pandemic and focuses on the experiences of participants who engaged in cross-border living between Singapore and its neighbouring countries prior to the pandemic. Participants were recruited from transitional shelters during the pandemic and consisted of individuals and families. Three key findings emerged from our study: First, transnational homelessness was an issue before the pandemic and remains to be of concern post-pandemic. Second, while cross-border mobility enabled people to access social and economic advantages, it is also paradoxical as it entrenched them in housing insecurity especially when the pandemic rendered cross-border living untenable. Third, trajectories post-pandemic for transnational homeless people remained uncertain; re-engagement with welfare services through homeless shelters created possibilities for new long-term housing options in Singapore but also accentuated their liminality in relation to their housing and socio-legal status in the country. These findings provide insights into transnational homelessness and the impact of cross-border (im)mobility in Singapore.

**Harry Tan** is Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. His primary area of research is homelessness, housing support and social inequality.

**Francesca Lee** is Research Assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. She is currently involved in research on long-term homelessness in Singapore.

**Jenin Teo** is Research Assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore. She is currently involved in research on long-term homelessness in Singapore.

**Rachel Ng** is Research Assistant at the Institute of Policy Studies. She is currently researching on long-term homelessness, and the work and saving behaviours of low-income families in Singapore.

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## **Weaponizing Naturalised Citizenship: Mitigating the Risks of War Mobilisation in Putin's Russia**

**Malika BAHOVADINOVA**

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**Elena BORISOVA**

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In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian male citizens— especially those naturalised – became a target for large scale drafting campaigns. They were called by the state to fulfil their military obligations to their (new) 'motherland'. We argue Russia weaponized citizenship in an attempt to attract more manpower to its war with Ukraine. Such weaponisation functions through a few distinct institutional and legal mechanisms: granting citizenship as a reward for contracted military service and revoking acquired citizenship in case citizens fail to stand up to the expectations of military duty. Rhetorically this is framed as affective claims of debt and duty testifying to 'genuine link' between the state and new citizens. The willingness to make a sacrifice is taken as a manifestation of this link. Racialised migrant workers and recently naturalised citizens from Central Asia in Russia were especially vulnerable to this move. Bound by familial obligations of care and material provision that tied them to the Russian labour market for the past three decades, they assess and hedge emerging existential risks of being/becoming Russian. They do so by utilising their intimate knowledge of Russia's institutional mechanisms and the bureaucracy. Long exposure to Russia's fickle migration policy and the distinct political economy of document production allows them to engage with the instability of documents in their material form and use the contradictory logics of legality and citizenship to their advantage.

**Malika Bahovadinova** is a political anthropologist working on migration, citizenship regimes, migration law and bureaucracy. She is focusing on these themes exploring the politics of representation in government and the changing content and normative ideas of citizenship in Eurasia. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Tajikistan and Russia. She is a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Amsterdam and currently completing her book manuscript *Making Migrants: The International Bureaucracy of Migration Management*.

**Elena Borisova** is a social anthropologist working on migration, (im)mobility, and citizenship in Eurasia. Her upcoming book *Paradoxes of Migration in Tajikistan: Locating the Good Life* (UCL Press) explores how regimes of mobility and citizenship are entangled with the issues of morality, personhood, the good life, kinship, care, and gender. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. Currently, she is Leverhulme Early Career Fellow based at the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex, developing a new project on war-time mobilities of Russians to Central Asia.

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## **Immobility as a Choice – Post-COVID-19 Locational Decision-making of Chinese Graduates in Singapore and Japan**

**Ruth ACHENBACH**

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Chinese students are among the most mobile in the world, making up roughly a third of foreign students in Singapore and Japan. The pandemic had brought this mobility to a screeching halt, forcing students to take a gap year, to take classes in Singapore and Japan from their home computers in China, or trapping them in student dorms abroad with little support. This experience has left an inextinguishable mark on students' lives – they became acutely aware of the fragility of their social surroundings, of the illusion of free movement even for the affluent students, and of their dependency on government policies in “home” and “host” societies. While the immediate effects of the pandemic are easily described – rushed movement or immobility – the longer-lasting effects for the specific group of Chinese students are more complex.

Qualitative interviews with 30 students and recent graduates in Japan and Singapore (conducted 2021–23) have shown that the Chinese government's way of dealing with the pandemic has left a feeling of insecurity, changing how, when and whether most participants consider returning to China after graduation or a period of working abroad. In contrast, despite all criticism, both Japan and Singapore's way of dealing with the pandemic have inflicted a relative sense of security. This has led to the following (im)mobility patterns: After involuntary immobility due to travel-restrictions, study participants now choose to settle abroad against their original intentions, or they move on but not back. This study analyzes changes in decision-making processes, in factors Chinese graduates in Singapore and Japan consider in their locational decisions through an intersectional lens. It shows how participants' awareness of their own power to shape their lives has been impacted long-term, ranging from initial disempowerment to a reclaiming of agency against newly observed obstacles related to business, politics, and inter-familial conflict.

**Ruth Achenbach** (Goethe University Frankfurt) is Principal Investigator (PI) of the BMBF-funded research project Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA) at the Interdisciplinary Center for East Asian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. The project analyzes intra-Asian mobility trajectories of skilled migrants. She is also PI of the EU-funded project AspirE – Decision making of aspiring (re)migrants to/within the EU: The case of labour market-leading migrations from Asia at the same institution, focusing on Japanese migrants in Germany. Her work focuses on the migration of Chinese students and professionals in East and Southeast Asia, Japanese migration to Germany, migrants' locational decision-making processes and Japanese development cooperation.

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## Chinese Student Migrants' Pandemic Experiences and Post-Pandemic Identity

**Huazhi QIN**

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**Yuxin ZHAO**

Independent Researcher

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During the pandemic, China's restrictive travel policies, exemplified by "Five Ones" policy and "circuit breaker" rule, rendered Chinese student migrants, a previously highly privileged and mobile population, immobile. In the post-pandemic era, how do Chinese student migrants make sense of the experience of not being able to return home and reconstruct expectations about mobility? Focusing on the immediate responses during the pandemic, one major line of current studies frame meaning-making in this community through an ideological lens based on either patriotism or liberal 'Western' values. On the other hand, another line portrays sense-making as pragmatic, emphasizing building connections and finding relief from insecurity and helplessness. Conducting in-depth interviews in post-pandemic times, this study examines the way in which Chinese student migrants use to construct narratives concerning their migration expectations. The research findings reveal that Chinese student migrants mobilize pandemic-related experience to shape expectations regarding rights, belonging, security, and certainty, which contribute to defining their dual identities as citizens and immigrants in the post-pandemic era. Using a state-society perspective, the study integrates the two existing accounts discussed above and contributes to understanding the long-term cultural impact of forced immobility by the home country.

**Qin Huazhi** is a PhD student at the Department of Sociology at National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on education and mobility in China and Chinese diasporas. Her past research examined the cultural and social implications of China's private tutoring market. She is currently working on a project about the lived experience and migration plan of Chinese students in Singapore.

**Yuxin Zhao** is an independent researcher within the field of sociology. Her first line of research lies in conceptualizing the contemporary repertoires of social movements in this digital age. She previously investigated the social change potential of Chinese LGBTQ organizations in a restrictive political context. Her second line of research focuses on the school-to-work transition. She is currently working on a research project about the migration plans of Chinese international students who graduated from university.

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## **‘Clap for our Carers’: Migrant Filipino Healthcare Workers in the UK during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

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The Philippines is one of the world’s leading suppliers of migrant workers within care sectors. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Filipino migrant healthcare workers (P-HCWs) were one of many gravely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the many changes that the pandemic entailed, people’s (im)mobility were one that was experienced throughout the world in all geographic scales. This research, therefore, seeks to investigate the impacts of immobility among P-HCWs working in the frontlines for the UK’s National Health Service. Their immobility had consequences, especially to their relationships with the families who remained in the Philippines. The central question that this article will address is: how has the P-HCWs’ immobility affected various aspects of their lives, pertaining to the social relationships with their families, physical and emotional wellbeing and financial situations? The findings are drawn from in-depth interviews with twenty-one Filipino healthcare workers in the UK that were held remotely between April to July 2021. The findings indicate that their immobility had deep emotional impacts, but also presented shifts to their dynamics with families. The pandemic presented a heightened sense of responsibility in the workplace due to their duty of care to their patients and colleagues, but also to their families back home. The result of which was intensive engagement to transnational practices to navigate their immobility. Certainly, their stories are ones of dedication to, and care for their patients, hard work and perseverance to maintain crucial family ties in the face of separation. Their patient, caring, non-boasting ways give us all food for thought, as this article makes visible their valuable contribution to the country at this difficult time, and overall.

**Bianca Marie Luna** is currently a final-year postgraduate research student at the University of Southampton within the School of Geography and Environmental Science. Her research is funded by the competitively awarded Economic and Social Research Council’s South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership Award. Bianca’s PhD research explores the (highly) skilled migration of migrant nurses from the Philippines to the UK and how their migrations have reconfigured social relationships with the families who have remained in the Philippines. In particular, her research investigates the transnational migration of Filipino healthcare workers employed within the UK’s National Health Service. Bianca’s research interests therefore include skilled migration from the Philippines, transnational families, and care. She also serves as the PhD representative of IMISCOE’s Migrant Transnationalism Standing Committee.

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## The Immobility of the Highly Mobile: Intersecting (Im)mobilities among Foreign Entrepreneurs in Singapore

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This paper examines the transformation of East-West directed mobility flows of highly-educated migrants in East Asia, which are induced *and* followed by these migrants' own or others' physical *immobility*. The paper argues that the politics of restrictive migration regimes, the economics of innovation, and geopolitical shifts amidst the Hong Kong Umbrella movement, the Covid-19 pandemic and processes of decolonization have led to emigration of capital-rich East Asian migrants from Japan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Singapore, unfolding staying practices, i.e., voluntary immobility, thereafter. The same global processes lie behind the departure from Singapore among highly-educated migrants who more closely identify with postcolonial notions of a (Western) expatriate community. Their outflow has triggered anxieties among their peer group who remain in Singapore and hoped to stay long-term yet who find themselves in increasingly precarious conditions given their timely limited legal status, lack of economic resources and insufficient social safety nets. The grounded analysis of qualitative data collected among 35 migrant entrepreneurs in Singapore breaks down how immobility and mobility are interconnected and complementary and considers the different meanings (im)mobility as understood against the light of geopolitical developments and global events hold in store for those often considered to be privileged. The paper thereby contributes to recent advances in the field of mobility and immobility research and adds a critical perspective on the politics of skills in migration scholarship, the latter of which tends to underestimate the anxieties of capital-rich people and thus needs to better understand their ensuing mobility and immobility strategies.

**Helena Hof** is Senior Research and Teaching Fellow in Social Science of Japan at the University of Zurich and a Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Her work lies at the nexus of mobility studies, the sociology of work, skilled migration, gender, ethnicity and race, and global cities and entrepreneurship. In her current collaborative project on the role of skills in labor migration processes in Asia, Helena examines foreign entrepreneurs staying practices in Tokyo's and Singapore's knowledge-intensive startup scene. Helena holds guest researcher affiliations with Waseda's Institute of Asian Migrations in Tokyo and the Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore. She has published widely in well-known migration journals and is a book reviews editor of *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*. Her most recent publications include "Migratory class-making in global Asian cities: the European mobile middle negotiating ambivalent privilege in Tokyo, Singapore, and Dubai" (with Jaafar Alloul, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2023), the book *The-EU-Migrant-Generation-in-Asia* (Bristol University Press, 2022), and "Employment as an anchor: The prospects of emerging skilled migration regimes through the lens of migrants' access to the labour market" (with Aimi Muranaka and Joohyun Justine Park, forthcoming in *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*).



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## **Migrant (Im)mobilities in an Exceptional Time: The Experiences of Transfer and Circular Migrant Workers in Singapore**

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This paper examines the complex ways in which Covid-19-induced border controls and infrastructural disruptions affect migrant (im)mobilities, using the experiences of transfer and circular Chinese migrant factory workers in Singapore as an example. During the pandemic, the Singapore government relaxed regulations on migrant worker transfer and retention and allowed migrant worker levy waiver to help employers ease labour shortage. The temporary scheme created “a period of exception” for migrant workers who were already in Singapore and gave them some degree of job mobility. However, the stricter measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus, especially after the covid-19 outbreak in migrant worker dormitories, severely curtailed their mobility and left them stranded in the host state. While being able to continue to work in Singapore, migrant workers wait to be allowed to return and reunite with their families. The pandemic has also made them reassess their life priority and put family togetherness and wellbeing first. Drawing on in-depth interviews conducted with both transfer and circular Chinese migrant workers as well as content analyses of government policies and newspaper articles during the pandemic, the paper examines how different patterns of mobility and immobility are emerged from the exceptional circumstance and intertwined in migrant experiences, which further expose the dilemma and emotional struggles faced by transnational migrant workers.

**Wei Yang** is Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her PhD thesis examined the experiences of mainland Chinese migrant women workers employed in the manufacturing and service sectors in Singapore. As a sociologist and migration studies scholar, she is interested in exploring the interconnected relationship between gender and mobility, between larger global structures and processes and individual migrants' aspirations and everyday lives. Her work has been published in *Pacific Affairs*, *Gender, Place & Culture*, and *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

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**“I Say I Will Stay for a Bit”:  
Transnational ICT Communication Chains Linking  
Mongolian Migrants and their Families During and After the Pandemic**

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This paper is based on a study conducted in the summer of 2022 in South Korea with Mongolian migrant women (about half of whom were undocumented) and their im/mobilities. This paper will focus on the ICT based transnational family communication among Mongolian migrant women who were in South Korea and their families in Mongolia during the COVID pandemic and the closing down of this little-known Northeast Asian corridor. Their communication, through social media and phone calls, was a means for not only bonding and staying in touch, giving financial and emotional support, and caring about members at-a-distance, but also for sharing news and preparing for chain migration at a time when they had to stay put in their countries, due to pandemic policies. Narrative interviews yielded insights about aspects of their transnational family communication, findings of which showed that the ICTs operated as a type of chain, linking families together, both migrant and non-migrant members, even when the actual family migration chain became inactive. I draw on my theory of transnational ICT based communication chains (TICCs) (Cuban, 2017), as an adaptive mechanism for the ways family members reassemble as a response to im/mobilities, in the context of migration. As a type of live wire and lifeline, their TICCs became a temporal “transport mechanism” (Mennecke et al. 2011) and “rescue chain” (Cuban, 2018) for social presence and remittances between families separated by pandemic policies and geographic borders. The TICCs allowed for transnational families to maintain bonds in the absence of physical contact, and although far from ideal, linked members together through a chain migration system, in the places they resided. Where mobility across borders was impossible, the TICCs prepared would-be migrant members for potential movement while anchoring the stayers (Kellerman, 2012; Kyle, Koikkalainen & Gupta, 2019; Schewel, 2019). Focusing on immobile/sedentary Mongolians, particularly emigrants who were in South Korea during and post-pandemic period, furthermore, challenges cultural stereotypes of rural nomadism and masculinized hypermobility in the literature on Mongolia (Myadar, 2021).

**Sondra Cuban** is Professor in Health and Community Studies with her studies focused on engendered migration, highly skilled migration, im/mobilities, migrant care workers, and transnational communication and new media. She has written three books on these topics: *Deskilling Migrant Women in the Global Care Industry* (Palgrave, 2013), *Transnational Family Communication: Immigrants and ICTs* (Palgrave, 2017), and *Mapping Southern Routes of Migrant Women: A Case Study of Chile* (Routledge, 2022). She is currently researching and writing about Mongolian women in South Korea with grants from the Jack Street Fund for Mongolia, American Center for Mongolian Studies, and the Henry Luce Foundation. She has worked at Lancaster University’s CEMORE where she was a member (2006-2013) and received grants from Oxfam, the IOM, ESRC, European Commission, and the Fulbright Commission. She is the associate editor of *Journal of Family Studies* and is on the advisory/editorial board of other journals on migration and education.

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## Pandemic-Induced Immobility and Marriage Migrants in Cross-National Families in Singapore

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With the rise of international marriage migration in Asia, cross-border mobility and transnational circuits of care have assumed increasing significance in intergenerational family social reproduction and collective welfare across borders. Sustained by what Simola et al. (2022, drawing on Mason's (2018) 'affinities') call 'potent connections' between family members across distance, the task of reproducing the cross-national family was disrupted by the unprecedented onset of an immobility regime as the pandemic gripped the world. In particular, migrant wives in cross-national families, often expected to shoulder key responsibilities for reproductive work in natal and/or marital families, found themselves confronted with new challenges. Based on a Singapore study comprising two waves of qualitative interviews – conducted pre-pandemic in 2019 and after the height of COVID-19 in 2020-2021 – with 47 female marriage migrants in cross-national families across socio-economic class, we sought to understand the effects of the immobility regime on two fronts. First, with the imposition of travel restrictions, these marriage migrants were compelled to devise new ways to maintain transnational intergenerational care, primarily as daughters to support natal families, but also in some cases, as mothers of left-behind children (from previous unions). Second, the immobility regime also had important consequences for their role as migrant wives and mothers in Singapore. As pandemic-induced mobility constraints led to home-based arrangements for both adults and the children, the intersection of migrant-status and class-based concerns became more pronounced in shaping migrant women's homemaking and mothering roles. Particularly for migrant wives from low-income families, the added responsibility of guiding their children's home-based learning without possessing adequate linguistic and cultural capital accentuated their limitations as 'foreign' mothers. The unanticipated immobility regime also raised new forms of precarity along citizenship pathways. While the extended waiting period for a more permanent legal status induced uncertainties for some migrant wives lower down the visa ladder, others experienced renewed hope that their citizenship applications would be quickened in pandemic times. The global pandemic and corresponding transnational and everyday (im)mobilities thus had differential impacts across multiple scales and spatialities, as marriage migrants fashion themselves as 'good' daughters, wives and mothers in between their natal and marital families.

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**Brenda S.A. Yeoh** is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Research Leader, Asian Migration Cluster, at NUS' Asia Research Institute. She was awarded the Vautrin Lud Prize for outstanding achievements in Geography in 2021 for her contributions to migration and transnationalism studies. Her research interests in Asian migrations span themes including social reproduction and care migration; skilled migration and cosmopolitanism; and marriage migrants and cultural politics.

**Wei-Jun Jean Yeung** is Professor at the Department of Paediatrics at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Director of Social Sciences at the Singapore Institute of Clinical Science at A\*STAR. She was Provost-Chair Professor in the Department of Sociology in 2008-2023. Professor Yeung is a leading expert in social demography, family studies, population health, and social stratification. She is the inaugural president of the Population Association of Singapore and the founding director of the Center for Family and Population Research at NUS. She has published extensively in leading journals and is cited widely in academic publications and high-impact global media. Her recent publications include volumes on *Family and Demographic Transition in Southeast Asia*, *Family and Population Changes in Singapore*, *Productive Aging*, *Young People in Uncertain Labor Markets*, and *Family Policies and Care Regimes in Asia*.

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## **Immobility-Mobility Nexus: The Opportunities and Challenges of the Australian COVID-19 Visa for Chinese Temporary Migrant Workers**

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Migration and mobility studies have discussed the regime of (im)mobility and the various impacts of COVID-19 on temporary migrants' life chances. Fewer studies, however, have systematically examined the potential opportunities and challenges associated with (physical and social) immobility during and after the pandemic. This paper focuses on the Australian government's COVID-19 temporary activity visa (subclass 408, also known as the COVID-19 Pandemic event visa or stream visa)—a visa that allowed temporary migrant workers whose visas were expiring, and who were unable to depart Australia, to stay and work in Australia until they could return to their home country. Drawing on interviews with 22 Chinese temporary migrant workers to examine their spatial and temporal experiences during and after COVID-19, I found that the COVID-19 stream visa gave those who suffered geographical immobility an opportunity to stay and make money in Australia. As the need for labor in certain sectors increased during COVID-19, some workers "benefited" from this visa and used it as a pathway to acquire an employer-sponsored visa (such as subclass 186 or 462) and eventually permanent residency. Other workers said they were "trapped" by the visa, as the extension of their "gap year" during the pandemic and the type of work permitted to them did not allow them to accumulate the necessary socio-cultural capital for their future social mobility. For them, geographical immobility during the pandemic led to social immobility and limited their subsequent life choices in the post-pandemic age. This paper extends the literature on (im)mobility by presenting the ambiguities (and diverse consequences) of physical and social mobility/immobility during and after the pandemic.

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## Negotiating the Rhythms of Transnational (Im)mobility in a (Post-)Pandemic Age: Chinese Professional Migrants in Singapore

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As the COVID-19 pandemic retreats in the public imagination three years after it first immobilised the world, global mobility regimes are seemingly well on the road towards restoration. Yet, for migrants and their families, the significant disruptions to established pre-pandemic transnational mobility routines continue to have important consequences. Drawing on a qualitative study of Chinese professional migrants in Singapore, we investigate how highly skilled migrant professionals navigate and negotiate the perceived ruptures between their mobile past, the (partially) immobile present, and the uncertain future of (im)mobilities in the (post-)pandemic era. Using concepts from rhythm analysis (Lefebvre, 2004; Reid-Musson 2017) as a scaffold for our analysis, we understand the transnational (im)mobility routines of professional migrants as a polyrhythm – an interweaving assemblage of heterogeneous rhythms of (non)movements in different geographical contexts and with different purposes (e.g., family, work, and social life) – which is shaped by the institutionalised macro-rhythms of migration regimes and socio-economic milieus. We make three main arguments. First, we examine how the sustained eurhythmia of (quasi-)seamless transnational mobility abruptly came to a halt with the COVID-19 onslaught, giving way to an unsettling arrhythmias of enforced immobility as migrant professionals strove to rework their immobility in response to the emerging tensions and precarity. Second, as the pandemic deepened, these migrants exhibited an inclination for ‘immobility inertia’, where immobility became normalised and ingrained in quotidian routines to the extent that a preference for immobility extended into their post-pandemic (im)mobility rhythms even after cross-border movements had resumed. An ‘immobility mindset’ also emerged where the benefits of immobility were valorised while risks associated with mobility were recalibrated. Third, while some migrants enjoyed a comparatively swift return to eurhythmia by successfully re-establishing regular mobility rhythms, others remained trapped by prolonged arrhythmia replete with uncertainty and precarity. We attend to the way a series of contextual factors – such as legal status, family structure and responsibilities, and transnational connections – gained new significance as migrant professionals navigated nation-state migration regimes, creating social differentiations and vulnerabilities within the unequal terrain of (post-)pandemic transnational (im)mobilities.

**Yang Wang** is Research Fellow in Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore (NUS). She received her PhD in Communications and New Media from NUS, and master’s degree in Mass Communication from Peking University. Her research interest lies at the intersection of information and communication technologies (ICTs), migration, family and gender. She has been doing research on transnational communication and transnational householding, mediated intimacy, household ICT domestication, gender positionality of Chinese migrant mothers, mobile parenting, education and skilled migration, as well as workplace digital transformation and digital organising. Her research integrates insights from multiple disciplines, including media and technology study, sociology, anthropology, human geography and migration study, cultural study, psychology, social work, and organizational and management study. She has published in leading international journals including *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *New Media and Society*, *Journal of Children and Media*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*.

**Brenda S.A. Yeoh** is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Research Leader, Asian Migration Cluster, at NUS’ Asia Research Institute. She was awarded the Vautrin Lud Prize for outstanding achievements in Geography in 2021 for her contributions to migration and transnationalism studies. Her research interests in Asian migrations span themes including social reproduction and care migration; skilled migration and cosmopolitanism; and marriage migrants and cultural politics.

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## Geographically Immobile, Metaphorically Mobile: How Filipino Emigrants Develop a Sense of Online Community in a Livestreaming Platform

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Since the second quarter of 2020, the world has observed how the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease) pandemic shakes up global economic and political landscape and limits people's geographical mobilities and face-to-face interactions. In the Philippines, the government had implemented lockdown policies—one of tightest in the world—that imposed tough physical distancing measures and cross-border restrictions. The implementation in turn impinges upon not just the mobility of people who plan to leave the Philippines, but also the capability of overseas Filipinos to return, temporarily or permanently, to their home country. Despite this 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002; De Haas 2014; Schewel 2020) engendered by structural and political constraints, some Filipino emigrants have still managed to be *metaphorically mobile* by doing livestreaming using their mobile phones. Here metaphorical mobility refers to how people reconcile the difference between their 'imaginary worlds' (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011, 762-763) of *me* and my *fellow*. This study focuses on the ways in which Filipino emigrants attempt to be metaphorically mobile by socially, culturally, and emotionally connecting themselves with their fellow Filipinos within and outside the Philippines. Scholars who studied mobile phones and international migration have centered largely on how these technologies help migrants maintain transnational ties with their family members from the country of origin (Acedera and Yeoh 2021; Cabanes and Acedera 2012). However, they have been reticent about how international movers utilize mobile phones to make connections with strangers.

Leveraging digital ethnographic data from online conversational and in-depth interviews and participant observation in Kumu livestreaming application between November 2021 and August 2023, this study explores how Filipino emigrants—who were geographically immobilized by the pandemic—immerse in the livestreaming platform to become metaphorically mobile and develop a sense of online community. Kumu, which was founded by four Filipino businessmen in 2017, has claimed to be the top-grossing Filipino livestream app, reaching almost ten million registered users within and outside the Philippines. In 2021, nearly eight million Kumu users did broadcast more than 40,000 livestreams every day, and they visited the mobile app approximately 60 million times monthly (Kumu 2023). During the lockdown, Kumu has served as a platform that connects Filipinos across the globe in real time. Apart from participating in online Karaoke and drinking sessions, giving virtual gifts, establishing families and Kumu intracontinental and regional networks, joining and supporting Kumu campaigns, playing mobile games, and organizing entertaining games and singing competition, Filipino emigrants who utilize the app also maintain their connections with other Filipino users by deliberately refraining from talking controversial political topics while livestreaming (e.g., 2022 Philippine presidential election, politicians' involvement in the embezzlement of public funds, etc.). This study of the production of overseas Filipinos' 'mobile selves' (Pholsena 2020) in Kumu contributes not just to the social analysis of the intersection of geographical immobility and metaphorical movement, but importantly to the recent dynamics of global Filipino diaspora and livestreaming phenomena in the context of the (post-)pandemic.

**Floramante SJ Ponce** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Maison des Sciences Humaines de l'Université libre de Bruxelles (MSH-ULB). He has been a lecturer at the Martin Luther University's Institute of Anthropology and Philosophy (Halle, Germany) and the PUP's Sociology and Anthropology Department (Manila, Philippines). Ponce completed his PhD in Social Anthropology at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Germany). His doctoral research focuses on how a Chinese BRI project in Laos engenders experiences of modernity, market integration, and geographical, socioeconomic, and metaphorical (im)mobilities. He published some of his works in *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, *Asian Anthropology*, *ISEAS–Yusuf Ishak Institute*, and *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South* (forthcoming).

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## **Immobile but Mobile: The Poetics of Immobility through Online Platforms during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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This study moves beyond the traditional focus on bodies in migrant (im)mobility to discuss the mind's transnational mobility, particularly in the case of Vietnamese migrants in South Korea, whose bodies stayed in a foreign country during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following study question arose: Can Vietnamese migrants in South Korea truly be considered immobile during the pandemic? Drawing on qualitative content analyses of reports, newspapers, social media platforms, and literature on migrant (im)mobility and transnationalism, this study argues that Vietnamese migrants in South Korea experienced ongoing mobility during the pandemic by employing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Here, I argue that Vietnamese migrants' hearts, minds, and knowledge remained consistent and, at times, intensively mobile within and across borders through online platforms despite limited physical mobility during the pandemic. This phenomenon constitutes what I refer to as the 'poetics of immobility'—migrants' multilocational emotional and intellectual experiences regardless of their bodies. First, Vietnamese migrants maintained continuous and strengthened contact with their families and friends in Vietnam through social media to update their loved ones' wellbeing, symptoms, and treatment methods. Second, migrants consistently accessed Vietnamese news and media publishers and social media to remain informed about the new disease, border closures, and rescue flights. Accessing news in their native language is important for migrants because of the unfamiliar nature of the disease and Vietnam's strict border controls. Third, with the widespread adoption of social media and virtual transnational experiences, Vietnamese migrants were unhesitant about hosting significant life events, such as weddings and funerals, while connecting with their relatives in Vietnam through livestreaming. Finally, Vietnamese migrants regularly shared information about patient routes, infected cases, and test locations with their peers in South Korea through online Vietnamese groups and chats. By integrating the discussion of migrant immobility with online transnationalism, this study demonstrates that the flows of intangible things are important, and thus, the agency of migrants is crucial for understanding their association with (im)mobility, rather than (im)mobility itself. It encourages the incorporation of personal, structural, and transnational dimensions, across time and space, in studying migrant (im)mobility. This study contributes to discussions of the aesthetic dimension of migrants' emotional and intellectual experiences in the literature on mobility and immobility.

**My Hang Thi Bui** received her PhD in Geography from Seoul National University in 2024. Her work engages with migrant studies, urban studies, and transnationalism. Given her Vietnamese background and academic training in South Korea, Bui has engaged in multi-sited ethnography and life-course approaches to investigate marriage migration, intra-group diversity within migrant communities, and transnational urban politics in the Asia-Pacific region. Her research on Vietnamese migrants' marriage migration regime, ethnic placemaking, culinary practices, and transnational investment has been published in journals such as *International Development Planning Review*, *Food, Culture & Society*, and so on.



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## From Geographical Immobility to Digital Mobility? How African Merchant Migrants in China Navigate Transnational Mobility under the Pandemic

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This paper goes beyond the mobility-immobility dichotomy and positions mobility-immobility as a continuum profoundly shaped and reshaped by migration infrastructure and individual agency. Drawing on ethnographic work from 2019 to 2023 in the African enclaves in Guangzhou city, this research aims to navigate the nexus between African migrants' (im)mobility landscape and the migration infrastructure before, during, and after the pandemic. As the paper will unravel, African mobility to China before the pandemic is relatively active under the physical infrastructural support from the ethnic enclave despite strict regulations and potential prejudice from the local society. However, the global pandemic has provided the local government with opportunities to intensify everyday regulations via digital technology (e.g. the health QR code) over international migrants like African migrants, some of whom live illegally, leaving them increasingly immobile in local society. In addition, major trade centers in the ethnic enclaves are forced to shut down due to the pandemic, which has been a fatal hit for African mobility even after the pandemic. Besides, the pandemic has again brought mobile subjects like Africans to the fore of rising discrimination from local society, cracked down on their mobility in China, and further accelerated their return to their home country. Under immobile situations, African migrants have taken advantage of the technological infrastructure (e.g. Alibaba) to sustain transnational trading via digital mobility. In the post-pandemic age, China has gradually loosened restrictions and instead facilitated international immigration, African migrants return only to find the shrinking of local markets in Guangzhou, which might further lead to their spatial diffusion in China. In so doing, the research seeks to document the far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on (im)mobility, add to the nascent body of literature on migration infrastructure and immobility, and offer reflections on the future of African migration in China.

**Yanxuan Lu** is a PhD student at the Department of Sociology, Peking University, China. She is interested in internal/international migration, informal/precarious work, and labor intermediaries in China. From the migration infrastructure lens, her master's dissertation has explored the institutional predicament, lived experiences, and agency practice of African migrants in mainland China based on years of ethnographic work in Guangzhou. Her current research centers on the mediation of Chinese labor migration. Her publications have appeared in *Palgrave Macmillan*, *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, and *Social Science in Guangdong*.

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