

Internationalization in Action: *Transformative Student Research at the Asian Institute*

2019

Richard Charles Lee Insights through
Asia Challenge (ITAC) &
Big Ideas Competition: Exploring
Global Taiwan
Student Research Presentations

Thursday, September 26, 2019

12:00 – 3:00 PM

Reception to follow

Room 208N - North House

1 Devonshire Place

Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy

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UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

THE ASIAN INSTITUTE at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy is one of North America's leading centres of Asian research and teaching. Our approach to Asia balances regional specialization rooted in local knowledge with transnational, global, and interdisciplinary conversations that contextualize and transect local viewpoints on contemporary issues.

The Asian Institute prides itself on offering innovative teaching programs, as well as distinctive hands-on international learning experiences for students. In their future careers, our students will navigate a knowledge economy shaped by globalization that requires fluency across cultural, business, social, and political spheres. In order to develop this fluency, spending time on the ground in Asia is a crucial complement to classroom learning. The Asian Institute aims to offer as many of its students as possible the opportunity for an academically rooted, life-changing field research experience in Asia at least once during their studies. To that end, we have designed unique extracurricular programs that are on the vanguard of supporting the University's wider goals of internationalization, redesigning undergraduate teaching, and increasing student mobility. Programs such as ITAC and the Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan are unique on campus and are important vehicles in achieving those goals.

Generously supported by:
The Richard Charles Lee Directorship at the Asian Institute
Global Taiwan Studies Initiative, Asian Institute

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2018-19

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PROGRAM:

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|-------------|--|
| 12:10-12:20 | ITAC Introduction
Professor Rachel Silvey, Richard Charles Lee Director,
Asian Institute |
| 12:20-1:20 | ITAC Presentations |
| 1:20-2:00 | Lunch Break |
| 2:00-2:10 | Exploring Global Taiwan Introduction
Professor Tong Lam, Director, Global Taiwan Studies Initiative |
| 2:00-3:00 | Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan Presentations |
| 3:00-4:00 | Reception |

2019 RICHARD CHARLES LEE INSIGHTS THROUGH ASIA CHALLENGE (ITAC) RECIPIENTS

Sites of (Un)belonging: Spaces/Faces of Honjok Youth in Seoul, South Korea

Yujuan (Emmy) Fu, Ethics, Society & Law; Literature & Critical Theory
Jennifer Han, Peace, Conflict & Justice and Political Science

The purpose of our three-weeks of fieldwork in Seoul was to uncover the nuanced identity narratives of honjok (혼족, roughly translated as “alone-tribe”) youth, focusing on their mobilities in public space and the sociocultural forces driving Seoul’s rising solo-consumer economy. After undertaking an extensive literature review in Toronto, we conducted interviews in Seoul with 19 subjects, classified into one of three categories: honjok youth, academics of youth-related studies, and organizers of youth-oriented community spaces. Through these interviews we learned of wide variances in honjok lifestyle, which point to the tightening embrace of a neoliberal ethos among youth in Seoul. Unexpectedly, our research also led us to discover a growing number of communal spaces created to specifically combat the isolation of youth in Seoul. Our final photo-essay aims to facilitate the exploration of the honjok phenomenon beyond its prototypical news-media romanticization (as in treatments by Vogue, Vice, and CNN). We analyze the changes brought about by honjok mobilities and the value-shifts accompanying a solo-consumer economy. Finally, we believe our research lends itself to fruitful cross-cultural analyses with the hikikomori population in Japan from sociopolitical, psychological, and economic stances.





Shades of Brown Girl: The Many Colours of Transnational South Asian Femininity

Amrita Kumar-Ratta, MGA, PhD Student, Department of Geography and Planning

This project involved the development and execution of nine creative storytelling workshops that engaged approximately 90 South Asian women in the Greater Toronto Area, the Metro Vancouver Area, and Chandigarh and Bangalore, India around themes of race, gender, and identity through performance and narrative storytelling. The workshops explored the theme of colour in depth, seeking to unpack the symbols and stories that various shades of brown can elicit vis-à-vis South Asian femininity. Some initial conclusions can be drawn from this pilot project; for instance, many participants expressed that they often do not feel seen, heard, or represented (e.g., in the media, in public spaces, among colleagues, family and/or friends) and they find it immensely valuable to be part of a collaborative and creative space, often describing it as “safe” and “therapeutic.” Additionally, as many conversations and personal stories revealed throughout the process, South Asian femininity is indeed complex and intersectional and cannot be reduced to simplistic narratives that exoticize women on the one hand and strip them of their agency on the other. Finally, the creative research methods employed throughout the project were seen—by both the participants and the researcher/artist/facilitator—as deeply transformative elements of qualitative research with important implications for future ethnographic and/or participatory studies that seek to center the stories of marginalized women across geographies. Throughout these workshops, I recorded some preliminary photography and videography and collected a number of personal stories. I evaluated each workshop using consistent criteria and regularly documented through field notes. Currently I am curating a photo-journal in collaboration with a number of workshop participants.



Moving in and moving out: understanding the effects of social exclusion on the mental health of rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen

Katie Kwang, Psychology; Economics

Benita Leong, History; Political Science (UTM)

Hui Wen Zheng, Contemporary Asian Studies; Peace, Conflict, and Justice

Since the 1970s, a widespread and rapid process of rural-urban migration has helped drive growth in China, raising concerns about the mental health of migrants who face a litany of social, economic and broadly, structural, challenges. Existing literature on the topic overwhelmingly relies on qualitative psychometric tools, leaving questions as to what the specific risk factors are and how they interact with each other to affect an individual's mental state. Using the framework of social exclusion, this project explores how psychosocial factors including housing, gender, labour issues, migration policy, development and competition, and social expectations affect mental health. We collected data through interviews with service providers and subject experts, migrants, and through ethnographic fieldwork in Shenzhen's rural-urban villages and worksites. Ultimately, we found that the experience of social exclusion is profoundly mediated by factors such as living conditions, industry, gender, class, and age—leading to a diversity of outcomes. We posit that the widening gap between expectation and reality for migrants is a unique contributing factor to mental health concerns.

Rural Land Marketization, the Displacement of the Urban Poor and the Neoliberalizing Developmental State in Beijing

Zixian Liu, PhD Candidate, Department of History

In 2017, a series of state-initiated demolition and evacuation campaigns in Beijing, targeting “urban villages” (legally categorized rural land within cities) and migrant workers, elicited a widespread public outcry. Known as the “Beijing Purge Campaign,” these actions aimed at “purging low-end populations.” While most criticisms focus on the violence of the campaigns, my research argues that the Purge was driven by a new wave of marketization of rural land within cities as part of the exacerbation of the neoliberalization of urban planning in China. Based on “developmental state” theory, I trace how the marketization of rural land comes hand in hand with the qualitative turn in the discourse of development in China, and the neoliberalizing of the Chinese developmental state. My research suggests it is important to examine how the global rise of neoliberalism works in the specific Chinese context. In the Chinese case, a strong development state is the driving force creating a freer market and eliminating undesirable obstacles, even if these barriers constitute some of the most important and symbolic heritage of the revolution—the collective and egalitarian ownership of rural land.





Asian Modest Fashion in the Museum Space

Habiba Maher, Faculty of Arts and Science

Aliza Rahman, Faculty of Arts and Science

Our project explores the representation of the Modest Fashion industry, specifically examining the *Contemporary Muslim Fashions'* exhibition presented in its first European venue at the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany. Through this research, we consider how the museum space reveals the ways in which hijab is imbued with new meanings in Southeast Asia, evolved from its religious roots representing piety and modesty. Through the lens of the exhibition, the meaning of hijab was shown to now include an emphasis on choice, identity, and diversity among Muslim women choosing to wear hijab. We observed these new meanings of hijab in the ways tour guides spoke about the exhibition; the designers' work included in the exhibit, and the museological didactics describing individual pieces. More so, the exhibit revealed how the hijab has become increasingly commodified in Southeast Asia, acting as a gateway for national development in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. The exhibition examined the increased support for the textiles industry in these countries as the Modest Fashion industry has grown quickly. We use Voloder's (2015) work on Muslim consumerism to unpack how mass consumption of modest fashion and the hijab in Southeast Asia has become a means to communicate identity, as suggested by the exhibition. Lastly, we found that this exhibition on Southeast Asian Muslim Modest Fashion occurring in Frankfurt—a city experiencing rising Islamophobic sentiments—challenged the common misconception that Muslim women are oppressed by the hijab. However, not everyone accepted or understood this message, and instances occurred in which the exhibit was threatened with violence.

Unwanted Children

Minh Anh (Mia) Nguyen, Contemporary Asian Studies; Political Science

This project explores Israel's immigration regime and its socio-legal relationship with migrant workers, mainly through the lens of Filipino caregivers. When migrant caregivers get pregnant or give birth in Israel, their work visas are revoked, and their children do not receive residency status unless at least one of the parents is of Jewish-descent. The state's ethno-nationalist identity continues to justify its exclusive migration policy framework, one that restricts the right to give birth and the right to belong to non-Jewish migrant workers in Israel. As Filipina caregivers bear children in the host land of Israel, they are confronted by two choices. They either have to leave Israel with their newborns or send their children back to their homeland to maintain legal work status.

The project further approaches the theme of "mobilities" from a legal mobilisation perspective, examining strategies that activists have used to mobilise for Filipina caregivers' rights. This aspect of the research questions the extent to which activists succeed and/or fall short in challenging the ethno-nationalist conception of citizenship to obtain reproductive rights for Filipino caregivers. Findings show that Israel's current citizenship and residency regulations continue to prevent Filipino caregivers and other non-Jewish migrant workers from establishing permanent settlements in the country. However, the state's increasing demand for migrant caregivers and their inconsistent implementation of residency laws create consequent repercussions for both migrant caregivers and their Israeli-born children. Where would Israel repatriate these children to, when Israel is the state in which they were born?



The Invisible Hand of South-South Globalization: A Study of Chinese Migrants in Tehran

Man (Angela) Xu, Sociology Department

Media and academic debate on China's emergence as a source of investment, aid, and migration in the Global South often foregrounds the geopolitical strategies of the PRC and the role and experiences of state-owned enterprises. This research contests this discourse through an investigation of the experiences of Chinese transnational migrants in Iran. My analysis shows the heterogeneity, disparity, and conflict within the Chinese community in Iran and the different relationships between Chinese overseas authorities and Chinese migrants in Iran. Furthermore, I show that the experiences of Chinese migrants reflects the intersections of privilege and precarity. On the one hand, Chinese migrants benefit

from transnational connections; on the other hand, their minority and foreign status leads to certain precarity. Moreover, the extent to which migrants experience precarity varies depending on their relationship with the Chinese authority. Overall, I argue that the circulated migration between China and Iran represents new forms of marginal mobility within the Global South—the emergence of migration flows to “unlikely” places. These new forms of mobilities call for new theoretical frameworks that can account for the unique causes and processes of migration within the southern hemisphere.

2019 BIG IDEAS COMPETITION: EXPLORING GLOBAL TAIWAN RECIPIENTS

*The Referendum**

Adam Zivokinovic (“Zivo”), Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy
Ji Chen (Tony) Yin, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy

The Referendum is a documentary about Taiwan’s 2018 referendum on marriage equality. Triggered by a constitutional court ruling that ordered the government to amend its marriage laws, the referendum saw voters reject marriage equality. This documentary explores how the referendum happened, who was involved, and what they believed. The documentary contextualizes the issue within a larger conversation on the global acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights. It consists of interviews cut with archival footage, news clips, TV clips, and b-roll footage shot in Taipei, and takes a sensitive and nuanced view of both sides of the debate.



Through our research, we found that the anti marriage equality groups have a much more nuanced approach to LGBTQ+ issues than we previously imagined. While their beliefs can be partially attributed to hostility to LGBTQ+ folks, their stance is complicated by underlying disagreements on the nature of government. We also observed that the spread of information through mass media and social media played a pivotal role in swaying the result of the referendum. Furthermore, we found that Taiwanese religious organizations played a vital role in the referendum, essentially forming the backbone of anti-LGBTQ+ groups.

**a co-recipient of the 2019 Richard Charles Lee Insights through Asia Challenge*

The Everyday Politics of LGBTQ Minorities in Taiwan: Discrimination, Legalization, and Community

Anson Au, Department of Sociology; Department of Chinese Literature (Joint Appointment), National Sun Yat-Sen University

On May 17, 2019, Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage, the first society to do so in all of Asia. Despite pundits' celebration of the decision as a sign of liberal progression, the legalization appears at odds with the results of recent major referendums that show a majority of the Taiwanese population opposes pro-LGBTQ+ values, following a steady pattern of declining tolerance for LGBTQ+ minorities in Taiwan. To make sense of this conundrum, this article conducts a qualitative study of LGBTQ+ minorities and activists to interrogate experiences of discrimination in LGBTQ+ minorities' everyday lives. I analyze the latent forms of discrimination in the tensions and politics of navigating between expression and censorship in the family and the workplace, how legalization exacerbates rather than alleviates these forms of discrimination, and how pro-LGBTQ+ organizations protect LGBTQ+ minorities and accordingly develop recommendations for public policy. This genre of everyday politics across the family and workplace alike bears emphasis in order to foreground patterns of political participation and of mental health problems that continue to disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ minorities.

Exhibiting In-Justices: Human Rights Discourses in Taiwan's Recent Redress Efforts

Sabrina Teng-io Chung, PhD student, Department of East Asian Studies

In December 2017, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice and the Organizational Act of the National Human Rights Museum, both of which serve as landmark legislation, enabling state-directed efforts to redress historical wrongs and injustice perpetuated during the nation's authoritarian era—a period juridically defined as spanning from 15 August 1945 when the Japanese empire collapsed, to 6 November 1992, the lifting of the Martial Law on Taiwan's offshore islands. Despite concerns regarding this new wave of redress efforts' unwillingness to tackle past and ongoing forms of injustice related to the legacies of Japanese imperialism and Han settler colonialism in Taiwan, the establishment of the Transitional Justice Committee and National Human Rights Museum in 2018 (a year that also marked the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), institutionally effectuated a proliferation of teleological accounts celebrating Taiwan's transition from a divided, conflictual nation to a post-violent one.



This project takes Taiwan's recent redress efforts not so much as the ideological and institutional markers of democratic progress but entry points from which a genealogical inquiry can be made about how ideas of justice, the human and its rights are contested, codified, and negotiated. It offers a close examination of past and current exhibition practices related to Taiwan's 228 Incident and the following White Terror, practices whose epistemological and affective frames of reference are arguably closely intertwined with the Cold War and post-Cold War historical and institutional conditions of knowledge production. By attending to the ways in which the Taiwanese state's multiple efforts to redress historical injustices have been enabled yet contained within such structures of power/knowledge, this project seeks to call forward a reconceptualization of ideas of justice as that which is yet-to-come, irreducible to the teleological and therapeutic terms of human rights discourses.

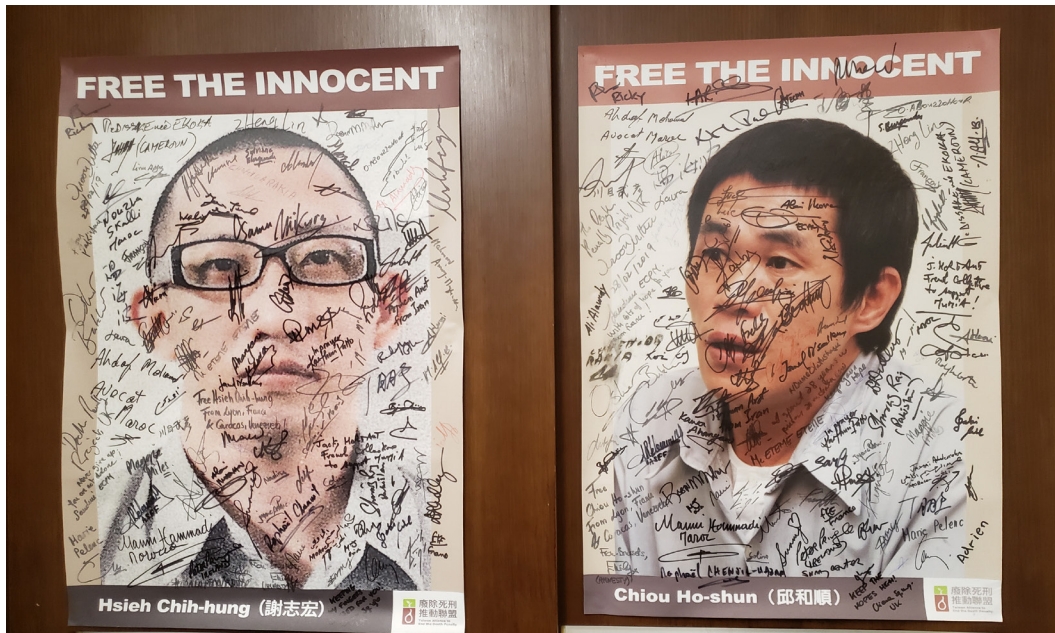


Hsieh-Piao and the Politics of Personalization in Taiwan

Yiwei Jin, MA student, Department of Political Science

In Taiwan, most candidates for public office go on a tour to personally thank voters after elections conclude. This tour is called *hsieh-piao* (謝票), a practice that has existed in Taiwan for almost 70 years. My research project tries to understand why the practice continues to thrive in Taiwan. Based on archival and survey-generated data, I argue that *hsieh-piao* in Taiwan today is a product of personalized voter-politician relationships—relationships built over repeated personal interactions. In these relationships, positive impression of the

candidate is established over a long period of time across many interactions, and hsieh-piao plays a major role in this process. However, not all voters relate to politicians in such a way. In fact, I found that the majority of voters do not think much of hsieh-piao. Politicians, while aware of the fact that most voters do not care about hsieh-piao, nevertheless perform it. Some are worried about losing support from voters for whom hsieh-piao is important, and some also see hsieh-piao as intrinsically meaningful.



Anti-Death Penalty Efforts in Taiwan

Niki C Yang, Criminology

Celina B. Servanez, Criminology and Sociolegal Studies (graduate department)

Sohrab Naderi, Political Science and Criminology

Our team sought to research why Taiwan has retained the death penalty despite being a developed country with modern liberal democratic norms. To this end, we conducted interviews with individuals familiar with anti-death penalty efforts in Taiwan—mainly volunteers and executive members of two major reform organizations, the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty (TAEDP) and the Judicial Reform Foundation (JRF). Our research reveals that Taiwan’s retention of the death penalty is related to systematic issues suffusing Taiwan’s criminal justice system as a whole. We found that support for capital punishment is part of a feedback loop wherein societal, affective reactions to high-profile cases influence court decisions and vice versa. Such support is largely passive and normative not for any cultural-specific reason, but due to widespread belief in the idea of retribution as “justice.” We conclude that NGOs like TAEDP and JRF are inherently radical by the very fact that they recognize and give voice to a sector of society whose silence and disposability is otherwise the norm.

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