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Gendering transnational communities: a comparison of Singaporean and British migrants in China

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Abstract

Studies of transnational communities and transnational labour migration have focused almost exclusively on the movement of low-skilled and unskilled workers across international boundaries. While these groups may be numerically dominant, it must be recognised that there are increasing numbers of managers and professionals engaged in work-related migration in association with the intensification of economic globalisation processes. Work which has been conducted on highly skilled migrants has largely been limited to examinations of intra-firm mobility and the workspace. This approach fails to consider the ways in which the migrants' experiences are embedded in the social, economic and political practices of the host country, but also in a specific household context. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the gendered dimensions of the life of these migrants and their accompanying family members has been somewhat under-researched.

Flows of expatriates can lead to the constitution of both 'communities of transnationals', as particular cities become foci of the activities of the 'transnational capitalist class', as well as 'transnational communities' which involve regular and sustained contact between individuals across national boundaries. In this paper we examine these social formations using two groups of migrants—British and Singaporean migrants to China (both mainland China and the Hong Kong SAR). We focus on the gender characteristics of these groupings, but also the gender division of labour in the creation and maintenance of these 'communities'. The paper is based on qualitative research carried out in China, Singapore and the UK 1997–2001.



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Keywords

China; Expatriates; Gender; Migration; Transnationalism

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