Wired *Tianxia*, Wounded Borders: *Ressentiment*, Firewalls, Migrant Bodies, and Aesthetic Interventions

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Lectures by Transit Asia Research Network (TARN)

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Abstract: What unfolds when *Tianxia*— “All-Under-Heaven”—is digitally interwoven into a global *Großraum*? Can such a wired realm nurture harmony as kin within a planetary household? Unlikely. *Ressentiment* festers beneath the surface, shaped by geo-historical legacies and geopolitical anxieties. Apparatuses like Germany’s proposed digital *Brandmauer* or China’s Great Firewall are merely the architectural facades of deeper affective fortifications. These sentiments, displaced onto racialized others, migrants, and outsiders, manifest as localized xenophobia and structural precarity, and echo through contemporary artistic expression. This panel examines

these entanglements across Europe and Asia while envisioning ethical and intellectual interventions against the repressive currents of our digital *zeitgeist*.

Keywords: ressentiment, digital governance, migration, tianxia

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Background

Transit Asia Research Network (TARN) is a research collective dedicated to examining the profound transformations and critical challenges within the complex geopolitical landscape of Asia and the wider world, particularly those related to conflict, inequality, and the enduring legacies of colonial power relations. In 2023, we organised a summer school titled Decolonisation in the 21st Century. Our collaborative research and reflections culminated in a published volume: Decolonisation in the 21st Century: Rethinking Coloniality, Resistance and Solidarity. Five of the authors of this volume are present today at this table.

As part of this programme, after the summer school, we travelled together to the fishing ports in southern Taiwan, where we visited officials from the port bureau, the fishers' association, and local NGOs. We also engaged in conversations with foreign fishers about their difficult working conditions. Through these shared efforts, we have gradually built a sense of comradeship. Each in our own way, we lean somewhat to the left—committed to addressing the concerns of marginalised populations and unequal citizens, believing in struggles from below, engaged in empirical social research, yet deeply invested in theoretical inquiry. At the same time, we are drawn to artistic sensibilities and critical thought.

This panel addresses the rise of authoritarian regimes in our time, while responding to the theme of this conference—*ressentiment*. For us, ressentiment takes various forms, locating its scapegoats in racialised, gendered, and marginalised others—both domestically and internationally. As a deep-rooted sense of antagonism and insecurity, it contains neither humour nor irony but instead manifests as stubborn disavowal and brutal suppression. We analyse how these affective undercurrents are not merely episodic but structural, systemic, and institutional, with deep historical roots. Through the artworks, we trace a long history of migration in East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and artistic intersections with Europe. We also consider how intellectual interventions and experimental practices might resist the authoritarian and repressive logic of our age.

[1] Digital Tianxia, Ressentiment, and the Struggle for Alternatives

Joyce C.H. Liu

My talk begins with the concept of Tianxia, *all under heaven*—or more specifically, Digital *Tianxia*, New *Tianxia*—and raises the question: Why does the Chinese *Tianxia* discourse recur today? Who invokes it, and to what end? What is the psychology and mentality embedded in this discourse? Does it signal a new *Nomos of the Earth*, a new world order?

Literally translated as "All-Under-Heaven," *Tianxia* originated as a moral and political cosmology—a vision of universal harmony under virtuous imperial rule. In traditional Chinese historiography, the emperor was the "Son of Heaven," his legitimacy granted by the Mandate of Heaven, and his rule claimed to be exercised through benevolence and ritual propriety. Yet *Tianxia* was never merely an

idealistic vision. Historically, it functioned as a mutable logic of domination—a sovereign grammar of world-making, realised through military expansion, ethnic genocide, forced assimilation, tributary rituals and trade, and bureaucratic incorporation. The Qing ruled over a territory more than twenty times larger than the "original" Tianxia attributed to the mythical Yellow Emperor's domain (c. 2700 BCE). *Tianxia*'s shifting boundaries trace a topography of cruelty.

As Peter Perdue and other historians (Laura Hostetler, James Millward, and Nicola Di Cosmo) have shown, Qing imperial expansion in the 17th and 18th centuries practised typical settler colonialism, unfolding across Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and the southwestern frontier. Over centuries, Tianxia operated as an aspiration, a legitimation strategy, and an administrative apparatus—an enduring imperial logic cloaked in the rhetoric of harmony and unity. While many Sinologists emphasised dynastic continuity under one civilisation, they overlooked the fact that the eighty-three dynasties in Chinese history—Han and non-Han alike—each made claims to sovereignty under divine order. Han-ruled regimes (Tang, Song, Ming) and non-Han states (Yuan, Qing), as well as polities led by the Xianbei, Khitan, Jurchen, Tibetan, Tangut, and Turkic peoples, appropriated the *Tianxia* paradigm of world order-making—that is, a Confucianist hierarchical order of governmentality.

In short, this *Tianxia* paradigm demonstrates a complex set of coercive and autocratic instruments, including the examination system, institutionalised ethno-political rule and racial classification, administrative bureaucracy, literary inquisitions (*wenziyu)*, ideological surveillance, and military deployment. Dynastic transitions—through conquest, extermination, or incorporation—redefined the territorial contours of *Tianxia*.

In the 21st century, *Tianxia* discourse is being revived, not as a nostalgic myth but as a vision and political blueprint for the future. Rebranded as "New *Tianxia*," the concept now travels with China's "peaceful rise," the Confucius Institutes, and global infrastructural initiatives—especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the heart of this vision is the Digital Silk Road: a sprawling techno-political project that wires the globe through data flows and cloud infrastructure. As Jonathan Hillman (2021) puts it, it is "China's quest to wire the world and win the future."

Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang conceptualizes New *Tianxia* as a world "without exterior" (*Tianxia wu wai* 天下無外)—a seamless sphere of all-encompassing guardianship. In practice, however, this ideal has become a template for algorithmic and authoritarian control. The wired digital great space now contains various securitized sub-spaces, resembling invisible dome shields fortified by intelligence systems. Domestically, China's Skynet and Sharp Eyes systems saturate cities and villages with biometric tracking and behavioral analytics.（2 hundred million public CCTVs, in 300 cities）Internationally, Huawei, Hikvision, and Dahua have supplied over 40% of the world's surveillance infrastructure to enhance national control, and 50 countries have joined the Digital Silk Road initiative.

We must ask: What is the motor of Digital *Tianxia*? Why is there such a desire to see and to control everything?

We can define the logic of Digital *Tianxia*—or *Tianxia* 2.0—as follows: the *Tianxia* vision provides an expansive space of sovereignty without borders, driven by a desire to see and to control. Unlike classical *Tianxia*, which relied on ritual submission and territorial absorption, its digital form expands—under bilateral memoranda of understanding—through foreign Special Economic Zones,

data hubs, algorithms, fibre-optic cables, and platforms, all enabled by the advancement of digital technologies.

In other words, Digital *Tianxia* is animated by a drive to monitor, classify, and control All-Under-Heaven through the monopolisation of cyberspace. Beneath this impulse lies anxiety—a fear of losing grip on both the real and symbolic levers of power. That fear feeds a r*essentiment* born of historical wounds, colonial humiliation, and perceived threats to sovereignty.

Tianxia 2.0 is not about conquering land—it is infrastructural, ambient, planetary. It governs through 5G monopolies, platform hegemony, rare earth extraction, algorithmic sorting, and data surveillance. It silences dissent, pacifies the public, and aestheticises domination.

As revealed in Zhang Jialing's 2023 documentary *Total Trust*, these infrastructures are not mere conveniences—they are architectures of domination. Digital Tianxia functions as both a political imaginary and a spatial apparatus. Eva Dou's recent book *The House of Huawei: The Secret History of China's Most Powerful Company* also reveals the deep connection between Huawei's equipment used to monitor Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and the hardware from the U.S. company Cisco that enabled China's Great Firewall.

To name *Tianxia* 2.0 is not only to critique a particular model of authoritarianism with Chinese characteristics. The critical question is not simply what Tianxia does, but what it enables. It also compels us to interrogate the broader architectures of digital empire—the logics and infrastructures that may be mimicked, adapted, or repurposed by other global powers to suit their own desires.

Resisting it, therefore, requires unmasking its seductive surfaces and exposing the *ressentiment* pulsing beneath the polished sheen of order and connectivity. It also requires forging solidarities from below—associations of free individuals unbound by state ideology, standing together against infrastructural domination.

What, then, are the possibilities for alternatives in an age where totalizing control masquerades as care?

In response to this tightening regime of networked sovereignty and techno-authoritarianism, we advocate for the cultivation of cross-local, grassroots alliances—situated, tactical, and improvisational. These are not utopias, but grounded actions of refusal enacted through the space of universities.

Consider the role of public forums following online screenings of critical documentaries, offering space for discussions on urgent issues: the surveillance of Palestinians and Muslims under occupation; the education programme Izkor of Israeli youth through patriotic schooling; the conditions of stateless populations like Tibetans and Rohingyas; or the sprawling networks of digital scam economies.

Other initiatives may seem modest, yet their implications are profound: campaigns supporting international fishers' rights to onboard Wi-Fi—a demand for connectivity not as surveillance, but as autonomy. Collaborative musical projects between migrant laborers and local artists, exhibitions exploring self-publishing and independent zine culture across Wuhan, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Seoul, Hong Kong, and Taipei—these are generative acts of cultural insurgency.

International student-led online journals, peer-to-peer forums, and transnational study groups are already emerging among post-graduate researchers from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Nepal, South Africa, Poland, Italy, Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. These are not just platforms of expression—they are micro-infrastructures of solidarity.

Such acts—cultural, material, pedagogical—are not peripheral to politics. They are politics. They mark the contours of possible worlds yet to be built.

Against the ambient power of *Digital Tianxia*, we call for persistent, situated resistance. We call for the reinvention of comradeship—not through empire, but through encounter. Not through domination, but through shared refusal. Not at the zenith of the sky, overseeing all under Heaven, but side by side.

[2] Firewalls

Brett Neilson

There is merit in the proposition that ressentiment is not necessarily something to be overcome. As a feeling that grows in the face of social inequality, ressentiment can provide scope for positive social transformation. However, contemporary political developments complicate this optimistic assessment. We confront a historical moment in which ressentiment and progressive social change operate in tension rather than alignment. The ressentiment of economically and socially marginalized populations—those rendered “surplus” by neoliberal restructuring—increasingly fuels reactionary rather than emancipatory political formations. The resurgence of nativism as a legitimate response to contemporary problems in various countries is just one register of contemporary ressentiment, instantiated also in political discourses of progressive patriotism and left nationalism.

This phenomenon manifests globally, suggesting structural rather than contingent causation. Accordingly, effective resistance must be organised across borders and involve new practices of international solidarity. Thus far the conventional liberal response has been institutional in form and national in scope: the construction of so-called firewalls—procedural and legal mechanisms designed to contain the political expression of popular ressentiment.

The firewall functions as both practice and metaphor. While reactionary politics appears as a spreading conflagration requiring extinguishment, the firewall does not eliminate the underlying combustion. Rather, it establishes boundaries beyond which the political fire of ressentiment cannot advance.

Germany's *Brandmauer* provides an instructive instance. This post-war covenant among mainstream parties—prohibiting legislative collaboration with far-right political actors—was breached in early 2025 when the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) voted alongside the Alternative für Deutschland on immigration restrictions.

The normative evaluation of such arrangements remains complex. Institutional firewalls may serve legitimate political purposes, yet they simultaneously demarcate the operational boundaries of liberal politics—the threshold at which liberalism's professed commitment to emancipation and openness transforms into defensive closure. More critically, the firewall's very existence acknowledges what the US Vice President J.D. Vance (2025) termed at the Munich Security Conference “the threat from within,” thereby revealing the structural complicity between liberal and reactionary formations that such defensive measures seek to obscure.

Today, firewalls are all around us, not only in institutional form but also instantiated in digital infrastructures. Consider the call for a “digital firewall against fascism” by the German hacker group the Chaos Computer Club (2025). Issued in the wake of the CDU’s election win, the proposal advocates technological and legislative measures that would shield German internet users from the kind of “data extraction and analysis” that has purportedly led to a “hostile takeover” in the US.

With emphasis on surveillance regulation, encryption protocols, age verification systems, and digital democracy protections, the call reproduces the defensive bordering logic of the Brandmauer in digital space. This technological iteration, however, reconfigures the geography of threat: rather than

emanating from domestic far-right formations, the danger is externalized, attributed to an ascendant “techbroligarchy” in the US.

Significantly, the Chaos Computer Club’s call mirrors both rhetorically and technologically what is perhaps the world’s most sophisticated digital content-filtering regime: the People’s Republic of China’s Great Firewall.

Applied selectively and through various means – including IP blocking, packet scanning, and speech and facial recognition – the Great Firewall is the inverse of what Joyce Liu has called digital *Tianxia.* If the latter is the expression of a “sovereignty without borders” exercised through algorithmic governance, fibre-optic infrastructures, logistical networks and platform capitalism, the former instantiates a rigorous practice of sovereign bordering enabled by analogous digital architectures. We might even go further to say that the technological apparatus of the firewall pushes toward the appearance of another form of bordering and power, not easily reducible to conventional political categories such as sovereignty and governance.

Conventional liberal discourse frames the Great Firewall as an exemplar of digital authoritarianism—a threat to privacy, freedom of expression, and democratic participation. However, this analytical framework quakes when we recognize liberalism's own deployment of firewalling mechanisms to establish operational boundaries and defend against perceived internal and external threats.

These structural continuities are particularly evident in cases such as the Chaos Computer Club's advocacy for digital barriers to shield Germany from an emergent reactionary politics in the US—a proposal that replicates the very logic of digital territorialization that liberal critique typically attributes to authoritarian regimes.

Beyond these political paradoxes stemming from the complicity of liberalism and authoritarianism, China's digital firewall assumes significance within the geopolitical dynamics of the expanding data economy. When reconceptualized as an exercise in data sovereignty and retention, the Great Firewall has generated substantial data accumulation for China.

In contrast to developing economies such as India, which remained open to data extraction by major American technology firms, China has transformed itself into what AI entrepreneur Kai-Fu Lee (2018) calls “the Saudi Arabia of data.” These accumulated data reserves prove particularly crucial for artificial intelligence development at a moment when China faces constraints from American export controls on semiconductor technologies and other strategic items.

This analytical reframing of firewalls offers a distinct perspective on the question of ressentiment. Rather than conceptualizing firewalls as institutional or technological barriers designed to contain the political consequences of ressentiment, this approach situates ressentiment within reconfigured relationships of geopolitics and geoeconomics articulated through digital infrastructures and computational systems.

Central to this analysis would be what Sandro Mezzadra and I call political capitalism (Mezzadra and Neilson 2024)—a concept that among other things captures how capitalist dynamics drive state transformation, shift relations among states, firms and other governance actors, and reconfigure various global divisions and lines, of which firewalls are one manifestation. Unlike discourse on state

capitalism, political capitalism reveals continuities in state transformation across regimes typically categorized as authoritarian or democratic, for instance as regards the governance of technological development.

The challenge is to develop an analytical framework capable of accounting for ressentiment's changing political valence within this context of political capitalism. If ressentiment increasingly fuels reactionary rather than emancipatory politics, this transformation cannot be understood apart from the geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics that shape contemporary state formation under changing technological conditions.

In this optic, ressentiment becomes entangled with questions of technological sovereignty, data accumulation, and strategic resource control. The defensive firewalls erected against ressentiment's political expression may themselves serve to consolidate new forms of capitalist territorialization and competitive advantage, even when constructed in the name of liberalism's most radical longings. Taking stock of these dynamics is crucial if we are to move beyond merely defensive responses toward an understanding of how ressentiment operates within—and potentially against—the logics of contemporary capitalism.

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[3] Contestations over Migration

Manuela Bojadzijev

The title of my lecture is 'Contestation over Migration'. Migration is a highly controversial topic. If you followed the German federal election campaign, the title may not come as a surprise. The migration debate strongly influenced the election campaign. Furthermore, the rise of authoritarianism and the strengthening of right-wing extremist forces — not only at the parliamentary level and not only in Germany, but also in other European countries — seems to be closely linked to the issue of migration. In recent years, right-wing discourse on migration has taken on a quasi-centripetal function, pulling broad sections of previously moderate parties and movements in an anti-migration direction and bringing them closer to what many regard as fascism.

As migration researchers, we tend to adopt a more relaxed approach. On the one hand, our findings show that migration is often given too much prominence in election campaigns. On the other hand, migration is happening anyway. Nevertheless, debates on migration take place in a highly politicised field, so a reliable compass is essential if we want to stop the current forces and regain ground. It is therefore crucial that we shape our concepts and research in such a way that we understand how, in the context of current structural crises and geopolitical shifts, the migration debate has become a terrain on which the far right has succeeded in redefining the points of contention.

To understand and potentially counteract the current challenges posed by the authoritarian turn, we must renew our critical perspectives. To this end, I will briefly review the key concepts that have been developed in critical migration research over the past 25 years, which have also gained traction within social movements.

1. The limits of methodological nationalism and the concept of citizenship

A fundamental problem in migration research has always been 'methodological nationalism', also known as 'container thinking', which is currently experiencing a resurgence in popularity. When nationalism is criticised as a methodology, our understanding of social action and our political horizon are limited to the nation state. This has been described by Immanuel Wallerstein, among many others, as the 'disciplining of thought in national categories'. This has long prevented us from understanding migration properly.

Wallerstein and others also sharply criticised the concept of citizenship. He noted that citizenship is 'by its very nature both inclusive and exclusive'. The term 'citizen' refers to a combination of duties and inalienable, inherited rights. However, the problem with the concept of citizenship is that it is meaningless unless some are excluded, and these 'some' must ultimately be an arbitrarily selected group.

The national construction of the concept of citizenship is therefore always a central arena of 'contestation over migration', precisely because 'migrants' are associated with different civilisations, religions, cultures, ethnicities and races.

The difficulties in dealing with migration therefore lie in the concept of citizenship itself. However, the debates surrounding this issue remain largely unresolved.

2. Autonomy of migration and resistance

The concept of 'autonomy of migration' highlights the inherent capacity and potential of migrants to traverse borders and pursue a better life, despite efforts to isolate them. Migration can also be viewed as a social movement that shapes the world. However, this concept does not romanticise the exercise of freedom of movement as a purely subversive or emancipatory act. Rather, it recognises historically specific social formations of human mobility as a constitutive force in the relationship between capital, labour, and the nation state. Throughout history, attempts to close borders have largely been unsuccessful, as human mobility can never be completely stopped. Nevertheless, attempts at border control naturally lead to terrible human and social costs. They have also given rise to a new logic of migration management.

3. Migration in the context of logistics: the control mechanisms of the authoritarian turn

The authoritarian turn is currently manifesting itself in a different way of management and control of migration. Anthropologist Xiang Biao has observed that the government's focus on migration has shifted from considering ‘how migrants move and explore’ to ‘how they can be moved’.

The language of contemporary migration management is logistical. This reorients the border regime, turning roads into corridors and creating platforms and hotspots for the swift identification, registration, and processing of migrants. The control architecture increasingly reveals the intention to organise people's mobility according to the logic of goods ('just in time and to the point'). The concept of the logistification of migration enables a more nuanced understanding of contemporary migration management, which is based on innovations in media technology (digital surveillance and the use of AI), as well as staggered transport and data infrastructures. This includes software for geomatching and automated decision-making, as well as sophisticated forecasting tools, which are already being promoted in research.

This development has far-reaching epistemological consequences as it alters the categories and classification systems of migration. Previous distinctions, such as between sedentary and mobile population groups, voluntary and forced migration, and reasons for entry (asylum, work or family reunification), are being called into question and adapted to the needs of host countries and their labour markets.

These changes manifest in campaigns that are often racist and sexist, fuelling social conflict around migration while systematically and discursively undermining previously valid legal structures such as the Geneva Refugee Convention and global support organisations such as the UNHCR. A recent example of this is the debate about 'essential workers' during the pandemic, in which migrants were disproportionately represented in systemically important professions such as care, logistics and agriculture. This demonstrates the selective nature of migration: those who are economically useful and culturally assimilable are desirable, while all others are to be kept away and removed.

The increasingly precise logic of logistics is becoming the dominant factor in making this distinction and in decision-making, as well as in the associated path dependencies.

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This brief review of critical concepts suggests that social debates on migration are a heuristic tool that enables us to understand a wide range of social conflicts, including those in which migration does not play a direct role. The aforementioned concepts have been shaped by a variety of influences. Anti-racist and migration policy work, artistic and activist forms of expression, and interdisciplinary research have developed them. These influences have taught us to constantly reanalyse migration in the context of the interplay between economic, political and cultural dynamics.

One could say that many conflicts related to migration revolve around the infamous concept of integration. But integration means nothing more than the ability of society to reproduce itself as it is. We are all familiar with discussions about the inability of migrants to integrate. They have become so widespread, so intrusive and so stereotyped that they have become a litany of recurring variations on the sexism of migrant men, their homophobia, youth violence, the democratic path of integration, the limited educational skills and cultural distance of migrants, and so on.

However, we continue to fall into the trap of questioning the ability of new arrivals to integrate, rather than questioning why states are unable to integrate them and accept new arrivals, and how they can organise this acceptance.

In view of the 'mortal crisis' of our modern world system and the rise of figures such as Trump, who are exploiting centuries-old ethnic, linguistic, cultural and political affiliations to create a 'new monstrous mix', we must take the current rearticulation of the nation seriously.

Speaking in terms of migration, 2015 and what was called the ‘summer of migration’ has been blamed for this development. As a sort of retaliation of older forces. Today, ten years later, we are faced with this scenario. It is becoming increasingly clear that the number of refugees in the world is growing every year. We have now passed the 100 million mark. Migrants are categorised and counted in many different ways. Their origins are processed, predictive tools for future mobility are developed, and social questions are answered with demographic platitudes. Walls and prisons are built, tools and weapons are programmed, databases are organised and networked, and the military and police are armed to control migration. People are killed, taken to waters and countries from which they never came. Billions are spent and 'invested' to keep migration out of Europe.

Given the extent to which the nation, or better: the form of the nation of states, determines our thinking and our understanding of the world, it is important to argue that the rearticulation we are currently experiencing, in the midst of the mortal crisis, cannot be taken lightly. I think that the election of Trump, with all the consequences of a coup d'état, has made this clear even to those who did not want to see it before.

Within these politics, they are appropriating the centuries-old history in which ethnic, linguistic, cultural, racial and political affiliations were interwoven in the form of the nation, and creating a new monstrous mix out of them.

The terms and concepts used in the migration debate do not 'originate' from migration theory alone. Conceptualising migration in order to intervene into contestations over migration involves to not simply discuss their own normative content and then wait for the world to act accordingly.

They cannot be reduced to purely descriptive, empirically verifiable categories.

Instead, conceptual work on migration navigates the intersection of the normative and the descriptive, the 'should' and the 'is', drawing its vision for improvement from the existing struggles, tensions, and possibilities of the present.

In my opinion, we must bring this controversy to the debates about migration.

[4] Tactical Resistance of Minority Gig Workers

Lisa Leung

My presentation will speak about the added precarities facing migrant/minority gig workers in the face of encroaching surveillances in neoliberalist contexts, but also their tactical yet liminal agencies to resist and navigate the exploitative platform management. The struggles and precarities facing migrant gig workers have been much researched in recent years, because their increasing precariousness exposes how platformed economy induces structural inequalities on migrant workers worldwide. In Hong Kong, 3 south Asian ethnic groups, the Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese, have had a long history in Hong Kong since British colonisation. Despite generations of settlement, South Asian descendants still remain in the lower ebb of society, being confined in 'menial jobs' such as construction, logistics, cleaning, and are subject to low employment opportunities. The rise of platformed businesses such as food delivery lured many into working as deliverer, especially during COVID. The South Asian 'gig' workers were not only subjected to the harsh and exploitative management of food platforms, but also racist behaviour from restauranteurs, food servers, customers or even passersby on the lock-downed streets. The Hong Kong case could shed light on how the various forms and layers of racial discrimination against minority gig workers could be deeply entrenched in areas with a colonial past and are contemporized through platformed management and labour. Furthermore, Hong Kong shares with certain Asian polities in terms of having a dominant ethnic majority (ethnic Chinese in the case of Hong Kong). While conditions of migrant gig workers vary across the many job types within the wide spectrum, they also vary across different political, economic and cultural, AND demographic contexts. Hence, this calls for thicker qualitative and more longitudinal methods to delve into more nuanced forms of racialized aggression in the workplace and in the everyday, and how they interplay in the lives of migrant worker-selves. It also calls for more historical, and intersectional perspectives, especially in Asian economies, in order to unravel the layers of micro-aggression against minority gig workers that are afforded, manipulated, and induced, by algorithmic platform management.

Second, racial minority migrant workers are capable of engaging in forms and layers of tactical and organized resistance against platform hegemony and state surveillance, albeit temporary. in Hong Kong, the successful strikes that managed to paralyse food delivery platform service on November 13 and 14, 2021, were organized by Pakistani migrant workers. In an article, I argued that the migrant gig workers' agencies for the tactical 'visibilization'/ resistance come down to the following: i) social media affordances to coordinate online mobilization with offline, cross-district organization; ii) role of local Chinese NGO, who played the essential role of liaising with local media, strategic organization and logistics. Perhaps more importantly, it could also be the ethno-cultural and political 'capital', from kinship fraternal bonding to a belief in protests as proper democratic expression. As the 'foreignized' other, these migrant workers assumed they would somehow be 'beyond' police surveillance, both online and offline.

Third, the role of organized labour unions is worth re-examining, which also necessitates a rethinking of forms and extent of 'solidarity' employer and commercial surveillance through algorithmic manipulation. The example of the Foodpanda strike already signalled the gradual decentralization of formal labour unions, in place for spontaneous, self-organized, 'amateur' labour solidarity.

Fast forward to what's happening recently, there are still sporadic, spontaneous and localised 'strikes' organized by a dozen of food runners, mostly migrant/ minority workers, which are confined to particular districts, and in any case far from causing significant threats to the platform's business in general. One reason why migrant/minority workers are again the strike leaders is of course that they have higher stakes in the gig labourforce. As global economy continues to worsen and becoming more unpredictable, gig workers are increasingly at the mercy of even more extreme forms of neoliberalist platform exploitation, and new layers of precarity. Here the algorithmic management of platform business enables further hoarding of data, lowering workers' wages without notice, and further disintegrating any possibility of clear wage calculation. Workers have no way of knowing how much they actually earn each month, not to mention compare monthly income. On the other hand, workers' life is increasingly data-fied, turned into commodity for the food platforms.

Under these circumstances, individual migrant workers resorted to tactical 'visibilisation' by making use of social media platforms. For example, some Pakistani descendant workers produce and release videos on Youtube, in which they discuss job related problems, relevant labour laws, and even offer information about visa applications to their compatriots who are considering seeking employment in Hong Kong. Another prominent case involves an Indonesian domestic helper, who 'rose to fame' by making YouTube videos complaining about employers' exploitative practices. These youtubers suffice as 'migrant worker advocate' as they also benefit fellow workers with information about labour laws in Hong Kong. They also serve to raise public awareness towards racial discrimination in Hong Kong. The business of asserting this role also incurs a set of risks which the advocate entrepreneur must negotiate. For the migrant worker advocate, the perceived risks and costs are higher given her migration status (as a domestic helper). Migrant helpers may also become the target of surveillance from their home governments. Yet, as James Scott deems as 'weapons of the weak' of subjugated groups which might undermine the power of both conservative and progressive orders at work, through 'everyday resistance'.

Fourth, in the AI and plaformized era, human labour value – and virtually footprints of all aspects of our life – will be datafied and turned into commodities for further commercial exploitation and political surveillance. The hoarding of these data creates double 'firewalls' that would also cripple different means and effort of intervention and activism, including research. Their intersection, in the meantime, is bound to oppress human agency, except through consumerism. In the face of mounting technological surveillance (eg. Biotechnological metrics, policing social media content criticizing delivery platforms for exploitative practices or revealing algorithmic loopholes) by the government and neoliberalist capitalist economy, The Ethno-Cultural / Technological Affordances Of Migrant Workers, albeit micro- and fragmented, may offer Insights on, and outlet for, Ressentiment of our times. Our tasks as researchers and advocates are to devise more creative tactics to combat platform injustices by collecting alternative and nuanced 'data' through qualitative and longitudinal (n)ethnographic methods through working with workers across job sectors. We need to join hands with grassroot labour groups to connect and share resources through various 'commons', devising small-scale resistances and strengthening synergistic convivialities from below. With these collaborative efforts, we need to trace and network with initiatives at different levels of micro-solidarity, including groups of disgruntled workers who stage guerrilla protests in local areas to voice out and shame platform businesses. Or, individual migrant workers who adopt micro-resistances in everyday interactions, with whom we share resources to raise public awareness of platform evils, and more importantly, in a bid to shake the public off their overriding consumerist values.

[5] Subnationals and Transmigrants: Exploring Ressentiment in Modern and Contemporary Asian Art

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I propose to think through some of the issues of resentment and *ressentiment* by tracing figurative art in Asia in the 20th century, starting with an early inversion of *ressentiment* through the celebration of non-dominant (or at least non-economically-dominant) ethnic groups through the lens of cosmopolitan emigré or transmigrant artists in early to mid 20th century Southeast Asia.

In 1940s Singapore, then part of British Malaya, exiled, expatriate, and displaced painters including Liu Kang became known as “Nanyang” artists - embracing the term frequently applied to ethnic Chinese organizations and artistic output in Malaya from the 1920s to the 1950s. Liu and his fellow Nanyang artists had trained elsewhere in the 1920s and 30s – in Shanghai, Xiamen, New York, and Paris. In Republican China, art academies had been founded in the early 20th century as part of that nation’s efforts to create infrastructure to train the nation’s art teachers, who would in turn contribute to educating a modern and well-rounded citizenry. These academies had been founded by artists who themselves had studied abroad in Japan and Europe, mostly in France. As political turmoil continued in China, artists and many other intellectuals migrated to Malaya in the 1940s and 50s, including Cheong Soo Pieng (1948), Chen Wen Hsi (1946), and the aforementioned Liu Kang (1946). Georgette Chen arrived in Penang in 1951 and moved to Singapore in 1953. Her journey had included Paris, New York, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. Lim Hak Tai, shown here in a 1940 portrait by Chong Pai Mu using muted, almost muddy hues and an impressionistic style, had left China and moved to Singapore a decade earlier. An artistic leader who co-founded the Xiamen Academy of Fine Art in 1923 and subsequently founded the Nanyang Academy of Fine Art (NAFA) in1938, advocated transposing the values explored in Chinese modern art in the 1920s and 30s to the artists’ new environment in Nanyang, the Chinese term used for Southeast Asia (literally “Southern Seas”).

In the cases of Lim, Chong, Liu, and Chen, we can see the assortment of aesthetic preferences that these modern Chinese painters brought with them and further adapted in the context of their new surroundings in Southeast Asia, following trails blazed by earlier Chinese transmigrants of their generation and earlier.

Liu Kang, like many of his fellow Shanghai- and Paris-trained contemporaries was part of the larger “School of Paris.” His work *Painting Kampong* (1954) retains his interest in Henri Matisse’s early 20th century Fauvist color palette while incorporating the aesthetics of the wax-resist batik dye techniques of the region, synthesised local visual cultures with his legibly modern vocabulary. As an ode to batik compositions, the “harsh” white outlines in this idyllic scene of the tropical plein-air painter seem aesthetically more harmonious than those used by post-Impressionist painters in Europe prior to World War I, despite the relatively violent and traumatic conditions of wartime China that precipitated the migration of Liu and his colleagues. Looking at the assemblage of local architecture, houses, and figures in *Painting Kampong* (1954), we see a neighborly arrangement: a central figure of a painter, presumably a recent female transplant from China with art academy training, like himself; a small, presumably local but otherwise unidentifiable child; two women wearing Malay sarong and kebaya, whose patterns are rendered in simplified geometric shapes; and a male figure also in *baju Melayu* including a *selandang* shoulder sash and *songkok* hat - perhaps

formalising or elevating the attire that might realistically have resembled the less ethnically-specific garments worn by the male figure in one of Liu's sketches of the same scene from 1952.

To stay with the interest of Nanyang painters in portraying their neighbors, we can look at the more formal portraiture of Chong Pai Mu and Georgette Chen, each depicting a Malay woman in batik sarong and kebaya in an otherwise nondescript interior environment. The portrayal of these female subjects seems comparable to the previously-shown portrait of Lim Tai Hak, with the major difference in the attention to the batik, the iconic defining cultural feature of the supra- and sub-national affiliations of the diverse communities of Malaya and Indonesia.

Shifting our gaze to an earlier contemporary of the Nanyang painters in the entrepot environments of Malaya and Singapore, Alix Aymé was a French painter, a student and collaborator of Maurice Denis, who spent time in China and then Indochina when her husband's military career brought him to the region. A faculty member at the Ecole des Beaux Arts d'Indochine in Hanoi from 1934-39, she studied and learned the technique of lacquer painting with the help of Japanese lacquer artisans, thereafter teaching the technique to her Vietnamese students with the hope of reviving a pre-modern decorative painting technique and encouraging a more localised extension of the French curriculum. In this landscape scene, we see a similar aesthetic treatment of the rural inhabitants of a lush tropical landscape as we saw in Liu Kang's work from about 20 years later - the figures' faces are abstracted while the environment itself is as much a character in the scene as the people. The hills, architecture, banana trees and *ao dai* garments worn by the female figures each tell part of the story - perhaps, as in the case of Liu in Singapore, an artistic effort to chronicle, celebrate, and study the local environment and culture. Perhaps this is not entirely distinct from the post-Impressionist primitivist fantasies that Aymé and Liu had encountered and incorporated into their work in Paris, but it does seem to be tempered by their own semi-permanent placement within Southeast Asia.

Shifting from the overall positive impressions of Southeast Asia and local art mediums that these French-educated foreign artists employed in British Malaya and French Indochina, the artistic production of postwar Japan, Korea, and Taiwan engaged with the concept of both the foreign and indigenous "other" in a less direct and also less celebratory manner. I can offer a few examples that I think productively invert the logic of political ressentiment. Taiwanese painter Li Shih-chiao's Market Entrance from 1945 serves as an interesting bridge from the context of foreign painters observing Southeast Asian landscapes and people, to a local artist, similarly trained in an academic context, chronicling his home city's chaotic transition following the period of Japanese colonial rule. In the case of Yamashita Kikuji's *The Tale of Akebono Village*, considered the most iconic artwork of Japan's reportage movement, we see the vivid and gruesome portrayal of the fallout from class struggles between landlords and tenant farmers in a remote mountain village and the precariousness of life for farmers portrayed. The artist's interpretation of these real incidents were researched not through news coverage, but through the social networks of worker-poets in South Tokyo - a context of cross-class solidarity in the 1950s. In Korea, Oh Yoon was one of the founders of Reality and Utterance - part of the Minjung (people's) movement that attempted to portray the lives of ordinary people, in contrast to the abstract monochrome, minimalist postwar art of *dansaekwa* as well as the competing top-down logic of emergent capitalism and military rule in the 1960s and 70s. In *Vindictive Spirits*, Oh uses the East Asian painting format of the handscroll to present ghosts who died with a grudge as a history of tragic deaths in Korean history - connected to the Donghak Peasant Revolution, the Korean War, and the Gwangju Democratization Struggle.

Shifting to a look at figuration in the context of New Media Art in contemporary Asia, I have a few examples to share here that might seed further conversations: examples of the continuation of mining class struggles, both explicit and implicit, and local vernacular methods of storytelling and image-making from Cao Fei (China), the House of Natural Fibre (Indonesia), Chris Chong Chan Fui (Malaysia), Jeanne Penjan Lassus (Thailand), Ngoc Nau (Vietnam), and Yeo Siew Hua (Singapore). Perhaps a far cry from the School of Paris where I began, these artists deal with the figure as a mode of surfacing populations otherwise misrepresented, unseen or unappreciated.