
As part of the endeavor to “unthink globalization” (BEAVERSTOCK 1996: 424) AND ILLUSTRATE THE EMBODIED, GENDERED, AND RACED CHARACTER OF TRANSNATIONAL SKILLED MIGRATION, WE FOCUS HERE ON THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND IDENTITIES AMONG WOMEN FROM THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) WHO HAVE MIGRATED TO SINGAPORE EITHER AS PROFESSIONALS OR DEPENDENTS OF PROFESSIONAL SPOUSES. THE WOMEN WERE

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attracted by the city-state’s openness towards international talent. In moving across national boundaries in response to the opportunities offered by globalization, they also move in and out of the range of regulation by territorially and culturally specific “regimes of power and knowledge” (Nonini 2002). As women working and living in transnational space between different gender regimes, their migration accounts offer us the opportunity to explore the way different bases for hybridized forms of identification between “home” and “host” are negotiated. We examine these negotiations in terms of the women’s perspectives on their migration decisions, immigration policies of the host country, as well as their encounters and experiences within the spheres of work, childcare and public space in Singapore. This is first preceded by a brief account of the broader socio-political context that frames PRC professional migration from China to Singapore.

FROM CHINA TO SINGAPORE

Prior to Deng Xiaoping’s implementation of the “open door policy” in 1978, the People’s Republic of China had little interaction with the world beyond its shores, particularly during the Cultural Revolution from 1967 to 1976. Having inherited a technologically backward and economically poor country, Deng Xiaoping, as a leading figure advocating reform, designed his directives towards gaige kaifang (“reforms and opening up to the outside world”) when he assumed leadership (Tang 1996: 21). Apart from economic reforms, the open door policy encouraged personnel exchange, such as those sent by the Chinese government to study and be trained in Western and Japanese institutions and firms. Even though there were no formal changes to exit controls, it has been suggested that by the turn of the decade restrictive controls

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These migration accounts were derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 33 PRC women who hold employment passes (category Q1 and above), or dependent’s passes. The interviewees were located through snowballing, keeping in mind the need to achieve a balance in terms of the major parameters such as gender (27 PRC men in the professional class were also interviewed but their accounts are not the focus of this chapter), marital status (11 singles, 12 married without children and 10 married with children), migration status (a mix of lead migrants and accompanying spouses) and occupation (the sample included academics, research scientists, engineers, computer analysts, financial information analysts, and business managers). The interviews were conducted in the language the interviewee was most comfortable with, which was Mandarin in most instances (a few were conducted in English). Interviews were taped, transcribed, and when necessary, translated into English.