

CHINA STUDIES WEBINAR SERIES 2020-21 TERM 2

Intersecting Labor in the Social Factory: Trajectory of a Migrant Woman in South China

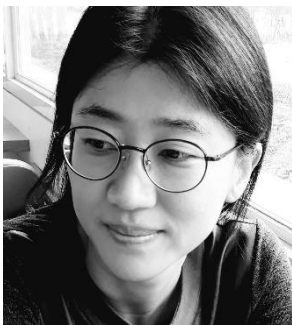
Mun Young CHO

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16 Apr 2021 (Fri) 1:00-2:30pm (HKT)

Conducted in English

Online via Zoom



Mun Young Cho is a professor of the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Yonsei University, South Korea. She is the author of *The Specter of “The People”*: *Urban Poverty in Northeast China* (2013). From social work projects targeting Foxconn worker-cum-volunteers in Shenzhen to social innovation practices among educated youth in Seoul, Cho is currently tracing assemblages of “the social,” focusing on how they tell us about the experiential and existential condition of precarity.

Given the mutual growth of the industrial and service economy, the feverish digital economy, and the historically sedimented rural-urban divide in contemporary China, how is it possible to delve into the subjectivity of workers beyond overarching notions such as “the proletariat” and “the working class”? Over six and a half years, my presentation traces the labor trajectory of a young migrant woman, whom I first met in a Foxconn factory in Shenzhen. I expand on her workplace from Foxconn to what Mario Tronti calls the “social factory,” where the extraction of a surplus occurs through social relations across various moments and places. Across the urban and rural, waged and unwaged, and online and offline, her labor trajectory in the social factory shows us how she experienced alienation in various ways as she navigated multiple forms of labor—factory labor, service labor (insurance), volunteer labor, and distributive labor for marriage. Redeploying the concepts of “labor” and “factory,” I argue that rural migrants’ own emotions, consciousness, or actions are not a mere combination of structural, institutional, or discursive forces but a contingent outcome that emerges when different forms of labor are encountered in often unforeseeable ways.



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