



## ACS Institute 2023: Exploring Inequalities in the 21st Century

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 News



The International Center for Cultural Studies of National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University hosting the ACS Institute 2023 to discuss social inequalities and environmental crisis in the 21st Century.

What is *coloniality*? What is the project of decolonization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The International Center for Cultural Studies of National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (ICCS-NYCU) hosted the ACS Institute 2023 from August 10 to 15. This was the first time that the Association for Cultural Studies (ACS) held a summer institute in Asia, bringing together over 100 experts, scholars, and students from 17 countries to discuss colonial structures in the 21st century, with a focus on common global inequality topics and those relevant to our day-to-day lives, such as digital surveillance, platform economy, stateless persons, displacement, international migrant workers, and environmental crises.

On the same day as the event began, the Transit Asia Research Network was also launched. The network aims to engage partners in the ICCS-NYCU's upcoming 5-year project, entitled “Conflicts, Justice, and Decolonization: Asia in Transition in the 21st Century,” to continue its interdisciplinary, interuniversity, and international collaboration on humanities, social issues, and the arts and to strengthen its ties with the international community.



Transit Asia Research Network Launch Ceremony, Aug. 10, 2023

When the COVID-19 pandemic first started, the world fell into turmoil with serious shortages of face masks, panic buying of everyday supplies, and even discrimination against Asian people in Western countries. A roundtable session of the ACS Institute 2023 discussed the Auntie Sewing Squad, a mutual aid organization started by a group of Asian American women to sew face masks and distribute them to those who needed them to combat the severe shortages of personal protective equipment in the United States during the pandemic. This organization was noteworthy from the public health perspective and because of their teamwork, care, and leading by example, they prompted a societal dialogue on migration, deprivation, as well as racial and gender oppression.

Another topic that attracted extensive attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was how the rapid pandemic-accelerated development of the platform economy has caused problems in the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Global South more generally. These problems include protecting the rights of digital platform workers, providing remote service delivery, and circulating fake news, as well as the operating models of organized fraud and illegal digital lending and loan applications. The event also discussed the gig work that ethnic minorities in Hong Kong did on food delivery platforms. Algorithm-based business models have lowered the entry level for certain jobs and increased the flexibility to choose freelance projects, which, although seemingly beneficial to gig workers, may actually impose greater control and surveillance over them. For ethnic minority workers, their problems extend far beyond the uncertainties inherent in the platform economy and gig work—compounding matters is the racial discrimination they face, whether explicit or implicit. The high usage of food delivery platforms in Taiwan since the pandemic also sparked discussion at the event. This highlighted how discussions on the autonomy of ethnic minority workers should not limited to the context of Hong Kong but are also applicable to the migrant worker issues in Taiwan and the broader Asia-Pacific region, with the potential to become the topic of a research project on the Asia-Pacific region.

On August 15, the ICCS-NYCU organized a field trip to an organic farm in Emei Township, Hsinchu County, where participants learned about the local practice of integrating duck and rice farming, organic farming, and irrigation ditches. The participants also visited Beipu Township to learn about the reclamation history and traditional dwelling culture of the local Hakka settlement. Another group of scholars visited the Qianzhen fishing port at Kaohsiung and Yanpu Port at Pingtung to discuss the precarious conditions of foreign fishers on the distant fishing vessels. Aug. 15-18, 2023.



Participants on the field trip organized by ICCS-NYCU



This international exchange event was cohosted by the ICCS-NYCU and the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University in collaboration with the Calcutta Research Group and the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. The participants hailed from leading academic institutions all over the world, including a benchmark center and our partners in the event—Western Sydney University (Australia), the Calcutta Research Group (India), Hanyang University (South Korea), Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Malaysia), Lingnan University (Hong Kong), and Mahidol University (Thailand).

