Chinese Women in Industrial Home-based Sub-contracting in the Garment Industry in Kuala Lumpur: Neither Valued nor Costed

Lee Lee LOH-LUDHER

ABSTRACT

This article examines the circumstances leading to fifty-five married Chinese women’s withdrawal from participation in the formal sector to enter the informal sector specifically in home-based sub-contracting work. These women sub-contract from the garment makers to sew, cut and embroider at home while caring for their family. The article also discusses if the efforts of these home-based sub-contractors are costed and valued by the factories, their families and themselves. The home-based sub-contractors provide an industrial reserve army that is truly disposable, flexible and cheap. They create an informal sector within the formal structure giving the best of both worlds for the extraction of surplus by the garment makers. However, although home-based sub-contractors offer tremendous advantages to the garment industry to ensure its competitiveness and flexibility, the industry, evidently, does not value them nor are they costed. Even the husbands fail to value these women’s contribution to family well-being.
The third millennium started with a bang in Thai Buddhist circles when a former philosophy professor was ordained a Buddhist nun in Sri Lanka. The Thai Buddhist hierarchy does not recognize nuns, and has, in fact, forbidden monks to ordain women. Thailand accommodates some 300,000 Buddhist monks – and some 10,000 white-clad Buddhist women, called "m ae chis". The social and spiritual status of these women has traditionally been extremely low and they are regarded as laywomen. In the English literature, they are confusingly called "nuns", hence the reluctance to use the same category for these newly ordained women. The traditional Sanskrit/Pali terms for ordained women are "bhiksuni" and "bhikkhuni", which are not well-known in Thailand, as these persons have usually been visiting Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean or Tibetan "bhiksunis". There is simply no category of genuine "nuns" in Thai society. Several women have been ordained novice nuns in either Sri Lanka or Thailand by Sri Lankan nuns after the trail-blazing act of the first Thai woman. This article argues that if this trend of ordaining women is allowed to continue, the Thai Buddhist "woman monks" will have to create a completely new category, identity and space for themselves as genuine "nuns" or bhikkhunis.
Malaysian Sikhs and Gender Issues

SARJIT S. GILL

ABSTRAK


ABSTRACT

Sikhism advocates gender equality between men and women in all aspects of their social life. The role and status of women has always been the concern of Sikhism, which asserts the equality of humankind. Based on my observation in Malaysia, I found that, in practice, Sikh women’s status is lower than men. Therefore, the ten Guru’s teachings of equality between men and women have never been fully practiced. Why this is so shall be explored in this paper. It could be suggested that this inequality exist because of the influence of the male majority in the Sikh community, which is a minority in the larger Malaysian context. Therefore, the Sikh male’s unwillingness to give up this dominant role and hence, the women continues to suffer prejudices. It is seems that the male-dominant ideology in the Sikh society is not only found in Malaysia, but throughout the diaspora, and even in their homeland in India.
Delving into the Whirlwind: Some Exploratory Notes on Everyday Life and Gender

CHONG EU CHOONG

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the social science in general and main stream sociology in particular have long ignored everyday life as a theoretical problem. As a result, the social-scientific discourses on social life have become impoverished for it. The writer argues for the need to incorporate everyday life as one of the central component of analysis in sociology. However, the very qualities of everyday life, its pervasiveness, complexity and evanesce, have rendered this area opaque to conventional approaches of sociology. In addition, feminist research has alerted us to the fact that we experience everyday as gendered subjects that further complicates the matter. Here, the writer seeks to explore ways to render everyday life and the gender subjectivity of everyday life more amendable to investigation, particularly within the Malaysian context. The writer suggests that there exists a tradition that has specifically dealt with everyday life and gendered subjectivity of everyday life as a theoretical problem. It is the writer’s position that one can never truly produce the last word on this subject but rather a tentative first word where one can only extend an invitation for further investigation into this area.

By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. … This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty… Charles Baudelaire.
Ungendering Gendered Identities? Transgenderism in Malaysia

MICHELLE LEE GUY

ABSTRACT

One of the limitations of gender theories is the lack of emphasis on the phenomenon of gender crossing. While debates on sex and gender surrounding issues of biological and/or social constructions of identity(ies) have intended to explain the differences between men and women; transgenderism is highly under-emphasised, if not ignored. This paper intends to explore the phenomenon of transgenderism in Malaysia by looking at male-to-female transgenderists, popularly known as mak nyah. A few questions are posed and examined, they are: what are the stages of gender crossing? What are the processes and social changes incurred during the transformation? To what extent such transformations affect and are affected by various social aspects? In relation to this, a few essential social institutions are investigated, such as religion, family, tertiary education, peer group, etc. In depth interviews and life stories of transgenderists are utilized to reveal personal perceptions and experiences of gender-crossing and identity reconstruction. These stories also show the strategies of adaptation, seclusion or conversion adopted by transgenderists in reaction to mainstream’s stigmatisation and expectations.