Speaker: Dr YUEN Shu Min  
NUS, Department of Japanese Studies

Date: Friday, 31 August 2018  
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Abstract
In the last twenty years, transgender people have acquired increased legal recognition in Japan following the decriminalization of sex reassignment surgery in 1996, and the enactment of the “Exceptional Treatment Law for Persons with Gender Identity Disorder” in 2004, which allows trans people who have completed sex reassignment surgeries to change their gender in the family register. Notwithstanding that, understandings of trans lives among the Japanese public continue to be limited, especially when representations of gender variance in the mass media are largely dominated by male-assigned cross-dressers or trans women who play up their gender in-betweenness for comic effect. Female-to-Male (FTM) trans people remain almost inexistent in the mainstream media, but going “underground”, one would find a rather lively FTM scene with its own self-produced media.

This presentation focuses on one such mini-komi (mini communication) media—Laph, a self-published lifestyle magazine produced by and for FTM trans people in Japan. Through a textual analysis of the back issues of Laph, as well as by drawing upon my fieldwork at the magazine between 2013 and 2018, I examine the production and representation of FTM masculinity in the magazine. I argue that the strategies adopted by the magazine in its construction of FTM-ness can be read as an attempt by a group of people who have fallen outside the norm to access and place themselves in, rather than resist, the realm of the “normal”. Through the case of Laph, I aim to bring to light one aspect of the invisibilized FTM culture in Japan, as well as to complicate current understandings of mini-komi or zine publications, and propose a (re)conceptualization of self-produced media beyond notions of resistance.

About the Speaker
YUEN Shu Min received her PhD in Cultural Studies from the University of Melbourne in 2016. Her key research interests include gender and sexuality in contemporary Japan, Asian Queer Studies, mobility studies, and media and cultural studies in Asia. Her current research project examines the intersections of gender transition with migration, with a focus on transgender domestic migration in Japan, and Japanese transgender medical travel facilitators in Thailand. She has published in academic journals including Asian Studies Review, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, Women's Studies International Forum and East Asian Journal of Popular Culture. She currently teaches subjects on gender and sexuality, and Japan-Asia cultural flows at the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore.

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