

# Navigating Indonesia's bureaucracy: getting a research permit



We arrived in Jakarta two hours late; it could have been worse. Oh that's right. It was worse. Much worse! We arrived with no more drama than can be expected when travelling with a three-year-old and a one-year-old on a flight scheduled to leave at 2.30am but that does not take off until 4.30am.

Sharyn Graham Davies

MY GREEN SUITCASE, however, did not arrive at all. Where could it have gone? It was a direct flight from Perth to Jakarta taking less than 4 hours. Moreover, we were first off the plane and first to the baggage carousel. If the other 11 pieces of luggage made it, why not this one? Alas, there was no sign of my green suitcase; ten weeks later there is still no sign of it. There was nothing of great personal significance in the suitcase but the thought of having to replace all my underwear brought on a minor breakdown. Trying to find non-padded, non-synthetic

bras in Indonesia is near impossible – I know this because it is not the first time I have been separated from my luggage!

Such a welcome to Jakarta did not bode well for the purpose of my visit. I was in Jakarta to get a research permit. I, along with Adrianus Meliala at the University of Indonesia and John Buttle at AUT University in New Zealand, am looking at policing in Indonesia, so I wanted to make sure I had all the proper permissions and the all important research permits.

The experience of getting the research permit is one of the most frustrating of my life. To give just one initial example, after lining up at the Department of Immigration for an eternity, I finally got to the counter to be told, "Sorry, it's break time, come back in an hour." I was first in line when the counter reopened. "Sorry", the man said, "the computers are down. Best you come back tomorrow." I returned the next day. The computers were working. Hooray! "Sorry", the man told me, "but the person you need to stamp your application is sick today. He may come in after lunch, but he probably will not be here until tomorrow. He is the only person who can stamp your application. You best come back tomorrow." This was just the start of the process and already I wanted to bang my head against the counter until I passed out.

The first place you have to visit to get your research permit is RISTEK (Ministry of Research and Technology). So far so good! The second place you have to visit is the police station (Fig.1). The taxi dropped me right at the front of the police station, which, as it turned out, was quite far from my actual destination. As I approached the guards to ask for directions, I tried to decide whether their casual approach to gun safety, evident from their haphazardly slung assault rifles, made me feel more or less nervous. The officer I asked directions from had braces, not the ones he might use to hold up his thermal-like uniform that would be better suited to Arctic conditions than an equatorial country in July, but the ones on your teeth. This would not normally be notable except for the fact that he was the second officer I had seen that day with braces. Were the police finally being paid a decent wage? Filling in the forms at the police station I wondered, not for the first time, why pens in Indonesia never, ever, work properly. In fact, my pen performed so poorly that much of my application was barely legible. This did not seem to be a problem, though, and it made me wonder just how important filling in the litany of forms

really was. Indeed, the address I wrote on my son Alfie's form was so illegible that his official ID card lists his address simply as 'Hotel'.

The third and final place you have to visit is the Department of Immigration. Dealing with Immigration is for most people the most frustrating process of getting the research permit. Everything happens slowly, computers crash, only one person can do fingerprints and they are invariably on holiday, applications get lost, photos get mixed up.

It took me two weeks to get all the permissions and ID cards – indeed I looked more like an imminent criminal than budding researcher in the photo on my finally issued KITAS research permit card. I think, though, that if you do the following you may be able to complete the process in five full working days: arrive at RISTEK at 9am on a Monday, take taxis and the super-efficient Busway, always have exactly the right amount of money required (adding up all the costs, you will not get much change from US\$1000 if you are getting a 12 month research visa), be prepared to spend all day waiting and running around, do not get lost, make sure your taxi does not get lost, avoid street protests and demonstrations (especially where 8000 people are marching against the possible arrest of a popular imam), avoid public holidays, make sure there are no computer failures, have sufficient passport photos of the right size and colour, make sure your passport and/or application do not get misplaced in the toppling stacks of other applications, avoid Friday prayer times, make sure you are wearing suitable attire when they take your official photo, avoid Ramadan, be unencumbered by offspring no matter how cute, and make sure that the one and only person who can stamp your Blue Book, take your fingerprints, or staple your Red Folder together, is not on holiday, sick, or otherwise unavailable. If you manage to do all of the above (no chance!), it is within the realms of possibility to get all the permissions and ID cards within a week!

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Fig. 1 (above left): Outside the South Jakarta Police Station: "No Corruption, Collusion, or Nepotism – That's Our Commitment"

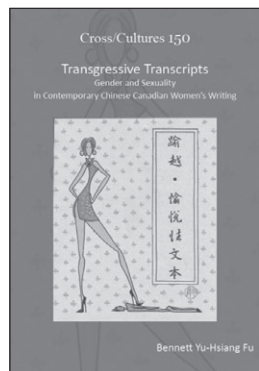
The Opinion

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## Transgressive Transcripts

*Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Chinese Canadian Women's Writing*

Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu



*Transgressive Transcripts* examines the construction of women's subjectivity and the textual production of Canadian female voices orchestrated in history, culture, ethnicity, and sexuality. The book, stressing the dissemination and re-inscription of femaleness and femininity in Chinese Canadian history, employs critical models that defy the sexual/textual imaginary of the Canadian literary scene. Four fields of study are conjoined: feminist theories of the body, gender and sexuality studies, women's writing, and Asian North American studies. Analysing four writers, SKY Lee, Larissa Lai, Lydia Kwa, and Evelyn Lau, the book anchors its thematic and theoretical concern with female sexuality in the context of Chinese Canadian writing. Feminist narratives and gender politics in contemporary Asian North American literature are highlighted via the trope of "transgression".

*Transgressive Transcripts* offers sophisticated readings of recent Chinese Canadian women's writing as a form of powerful agency that resists stereotypical representations and opens up new possibilities for heterogeneous feminist and queer identity formations. Building on a comprehensive critical overview of the current state of Asian Canadian literary studies, and combining studies of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, the interpretations are illuminating, provocative, and original.

— Donald Goelnicht, Professor, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Associate Dean, School of Graduate Studies, McMaster University

This book, a substantial contribution to an understanding of the ways sexuality mediates histories of national and transnational belonging, helps constitute the field of Chinese Canadian women's writing yet resists turning that writing into an object of knowledge or writers into informants. Of central interest is textual agency and the critical spaces literature opens within minority and feminist studies. Engaging with thorny, silenced issues such as how to write about sexuality and subjectivity, Fu uncovers transcripts subverting dominant culture and unacknowledged within Chinese Canadian culture. Particularly compelling is the analysis of processes of hyper-feminization, desexualization, exoticization, demonization, and abjection that have come to stand phantasmically for Chinese Canadian women's sexuality.

— Lianne Moyes, Professor and Chair, Department of English Studies, Université de Montréal

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