

2023 - 2024

Harold J. Plous Award Lecture

UC SANTA BARBARA

# Charmaine Chua

Breaking Our (Supply) Chains: Anti-colonial Resistance in a Just-In-Time World

Thursday, April 11, 2024 | 4 PM | Alumni Hall, Mosher Alumni House



The rise of "Just-in-time" logistics, as a practice and strategy for organizing the globe-spanning distribution of goods, has insinuated supply chains into nearly every aspect of our daily lives. Algorithms track our purchasing patterns and workers' delivery speeds. Cavernous warehouses and ports swallow working-class neighborhoods. Monstrous cargo ships move across the world's oceans, connecting products made by Asian factory workers to North American consumers at the click of a mouse. This talk challenges the dominant idea that "the logistics revolution," as it is often called, pulled millions in the developing world out of poverty and brought trade to their

doorstep. Instead, by tracing the historical intersection of the rise of logistics with the end of formal empire, I argue that when viewed from the perspective of the decolonizing Global South, the rise of transnational supply chains defanged alternative visions of postcolonial economic development and demobilized global labor struggles. Yet, supply chains are not all-powerful. Learning from activists who have disrupted and occupied supply chains to make anti-colonial demands across history, we will see how supply chains have also been sites of collective resistance and international solidarity, from demands for decolonization then, to demands for decolonization now.

Charmaine Chua is Assistant Professor of Global Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on supply chains, decolonization, and labor struggles. She is currently writing two books, *The Logistics Counterrevolution: Fast Circulation, Slow Violence and the Transpacific Empire of Circulation*; and *How to Beat Amazon: The Struggle of America's New Working Class* (co-authored with Spencer Cox). Chua's academic and public work has been published in numerous venues. She is an editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*; a founding faculty member of the UC-based *Marxist Institute of Research*; and an organizer with Amazonians United, Cops Off Campus, and UCSB Academics for Justice in Palestine. In 2023, she was named a Freedom Scholar, an award recognizing academics who demonstrate long-term commitment to supporting social movements.

The Harold J. Plous Memorial Award was established in 1957 to honor Harold J. Plous, Assistant Professor of Economics. The award is given annually to a faculty member of the rank of Assistant Professor or Instructor who has demonstrated outstanding performance by creative action or contribution to the intellectual life of the college community.