

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT

**International Workshop on
Asian Transnational Families**

Organized by
**Asian MetaCentre
for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis**

and
**Department of Geography
National University of Singapore**

In association with
Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN)

and
International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on Population and Vulnerability

Supported by
**The Wellcome Trust
United Kingdom**

Date
2 – 4 February 2005

Venue
Singapore (Tentative)

Context and Scope

An exponential increase in international migration over the last two decades is one of the main drivers of contemporary social change in Asia. The extent and depth of the impact that these migration flows of unprecedented volume and complexity within and out of the Asian region have wrought on the basic fabric of Asian society is clearly visible when we examine the “institution” of the “family”. In the context of shifting global patterns of immigration and settlement as well as a range of more fluid migrations which may be transnational, circular, or multiple, the “transnational family” as a “new” form of living arrangement in which familial relations may reside and develop is becoming more common across a wide spectrum of society.

From the more “elite” astronaut families to those of overseas contract workers, transnational informal “networks”, remittance “flows” and “circuits” of care and affection – often facilitated by easier mobilities and communications – have emerged to connect geographically dispersed members. Just as mobilities transgressing international borders do not spell the end of the nation-state, the realm of the “family” continues to retain its significance in the face of distance, dispersal and translocality even as the desire to go on being a family under such conditions is continually reworked.

This international workshop on “Asian transnational families” gives emphasis to the following interrelated themes:

A. Family Projects and Politics

The transnational family is often a strategy undertaken to accomplish specific projects intended to enhance the overall well-being or status of the family. Family members and resources may be mobilized and sited in different countries as a means to work towards a common end (whether survival or optimization). For many “Asian families”, the education of the children has become a major “project” requiring the relocation of one or more members of the family in a different country. At the same time, as the “family” is by no means a monolithic unit, it is expected that transnational projects undertaken by the “family” will encounter sources of tension and discord among family members. Ideological and material mechanisms may be employed to retain family coherence in the face of physical separation.

B. Citizenship and Exclusion/Inclusion

Family relations stretched across distance today have to be managed in the context of the nation-state framework, which in most parts of Asia is predicated on the idea of a primary belonging to one society and a loyalty to one nation-state. In the case of the transnational family, migrant family members relocating to a new country may lack proper documentation or legal status. Sojourning, while possibly extended for years, may not involve either integration into mainstream society or the likelihood of family reunification. As individual family members find themselves located in different nation-states with different policies governing the politics of incorporation (in relation to citizenship rights, labour rights, or the management of ethnic or cultural difference), the “family” which hopes to remain intact as a social, emotional and economic unit will need to respond collectively to make sense of, capitalize upon, or simply live with the different sets of conditions confronting individual members.

C. Family Care-giving and Affection

The circuits of care and affection which sustain and (re-)construct transnational families can take many forms, including transnational motherhood, transnational fatherhood and the transnational caring of elderly parents. Attention needs to be given to elucidating the affective aspects of families stretched across borders, showing how individual family members work out and articulate their love for a spouse, their care of children, and filial obligations to parents despite physical absences. In ensuring that the configurations of a transnational family actually “work”, there are certain costs involved such as missed family time, deferred careers, shortened childhood and broken dreams. This provides a necessary complement to other understandings of the transnational family which tend to privilege its rationality as a calculated strategy to minimise risk and maximise benefits.

D. The “Other” Transnational Family

Family arrangements today are not only complex and diverse; they are also often fluid and unresolved, with an increasing range in the types of households being formed. In particular, the easier mobilities of today’s globalised world have engendered the increasing phenomenon of the “other” transnational family. This may take the form of the “second family”, with what may be termed “circulatory spouses” negotiating lives between two families, one located in their homeland, and a second (legal or otherwise) in their country of employment or leisure. The “other” transnational family not only raises questions as to how families are constituted and what the “institution” of “family” itself means, but also carry implications for gender roles and relations that take place within families.

E. Gender Identity and Generational Change

The potentially disruptive effect of physical separation on life cycles and inter-generational relations in the migration process is another aspect of the transnational family that must be considered. Broadly speaking, we need to interrogate how gender and generational identities are tied to the kinds of dialogues that migration establishes between the old and the new, and the narratives that are passed from one generation to the next. Of key interest are issues such as how transnational families evolve beyond the first generation in terms of gender roles, relations and identities, how cultural values are transmitted between generations fragmented across transnational space and how such transmission is gendered, and the impact of parental migration on the (migratory) aspirations and welfare of the children “left behind”.

Organising Committee

Associate Professor Brenda Yeoh, Asian MetaCentre, Asia Research Institute and Department of Geography, NUS, Singapore

Associate Professor Shirlena Huang, Department of Geography, NUS, Singapore

Ms Theodora Lam, Asian MetaCentre, Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore

Ms Verene Koh (Secretariat), Asian MetaCentre, Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore

Registration Fee

For those who would like to attend the workshop, registration fee of **S\$250** inclusive of 5% Goods and Services Tax is applicable. The registration fee covers the workshop papers and meals (lunches, tea-breaks and a welcome dinner only) for the 3-day event. Applicants will be responsible for their own travel and accommodation arrangements. Interested applicants should send in their cheques or bank drafts of \$250 in Singapore Dollars, made payable to the “**National University of Singapore**” together with a completed registration form (attached below) to our corresponding address. Please state your name and “Asian Transnational Families Workshop” on the reverse side of the cheques or bank drafts. Interested applicants are to respond by **31 October 2004**.

Sponsorship for Workshop Participants

Limited sponsorship is available on a competitive basis for junior researchers from **ASEAN Countries**. Junior researchers refer strictly to PhD candidates in a relevant discipline or those who have completed their PhD not more than five years ago. The application procedures are as follows:

- Applicants are required to submit a cover letter, CV and a note about 500 words explaining how relevant this workshop is to their research.
- Successful applicants will be awarded:
 - o accommodation of 3 nights during the workshop period,
 - o waiver of registration fee,
 - o a maximum of S\$400 subsidy to cover economy-class return airfare based on the original air ticket receipt,
 - o a small per diem allowance.

Please send your registration or application to:

Ms Verene Koh

International Workshop on “Asian Transnational Families”

Asian MetaCentre

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Applicants are strongly encouraged to send in their application via email by **31 October 2004**. Only successful applicants will be notified.

Enquiries

For enquiries, please contact Ms Verene Koh at (65) 6874 6797, Fax: (65) 6779 1428 or email: popnasia@nus.edu.sg. Correspondence address: Asian MetaCentre, c/o Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 5 Arts Link, Shaw Foundation Building, AS7, Level 4, Singapore 117570.