INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Student Mobility within Southeast Asia

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THE ARTICLES IN THIS issue focus on Asian student mobility and were originally presented as a panel at the 7th EuroSEAS conference held in Lisbon, in July 2013. The joint research group that evolved from there further developed the themes of the papers in a workshop in Lund in 2014, as well as through subsequent intensive discussions.

Access to education has long been a reason for migration and mobility. This issue's main concerns are the many Asian youths who travel abroad to study, as well as international students studying in Southeast Asia. Several of this issue's articles focus on students who study in neighbouring Asian countries. Gender, religion, ethnicity, intergenerational dynamics, commodification, and historical processes are central themes that the authors examine in relation to student mobility. The findings in these articles are based on fieldwork that has been carried out in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and Great Britain. Methodologically, the authors use interviews, participant observation, life stories, narratives, statistics, and observations. The articles written by Marie Carlson, Bengt Jacobsson, and Ann Kull are built on findings from research carried out within the project: *Transnational Student Mobility in Higher Education in Asia – An interdisciplinary study of young people's strategies and living conditions* funded by the Swedish Research Council. Arndt Graf's article is part of the research project *Africa's Asian Options (AFRASO)* funded by the German Federal Ministry of Higher Education and Research (BMBF) in its initiative to strengthen area studies in Germany. This joint Swedish-German issue of *TRaNS* is thus by itself transnational in terms of the work processes involved, as well as trans-regional, as it reflects European perspectives on Southeast Asia.

This issue commences with an article by Arndt Graf who uses statistical data to explore trends of student migration to Malaysia, analysing both sides of supply and demand. The article demonstrates that Malaysia is playing an increasing role in providing education for international students. Graf points to the interesting

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fact that Malaysia, a former colony of a European country, has developed into an attractive destination for international students and is one of the first Muslim-majority countries to become a major hub of international higher education. The article discusses the circumstances for building the attractiveness of Malaysian higher education abroad. One of the key questions raised is whether the international students share a specific demographic profile. The article analyses the linguistic, religious, and developmental backgrounds of the international students who come to Malaysia. One finding is that most international students in Malaysia do not come from the neighbouring countries, but from West Asia and Africa. Arabic is in fact the most widely spoken language among the international students in Malaysia, and native speakers of English come from 40 countries, mostly from the Commonwealth nations. In terms of religion, more than 60 per cent of the international students are Muslims. Also, on average, the countries of origin of the international students in Malaysia are much less developed (in terms of the Global Innovation Index) than Malaysia. Malaysia also supplies higher education services for students from much smaller countries around the Indian Ocean and the Pacific who do not find such differentiated choices at home.

Through his statistical analysis, Graf also found that there were more than 2,500 students in Malaysia who were native speakers of Turkic languages. One of those Turkic speakers was a student from Turkey who is the focus of the article written by Carlson and Jacobsson in which the 'life story approach' was the main method used for data collection, and the student's narrative is analysed as an intersecting story. The authors explore different kinds of capital, links, and exchanges within the student's family. Carlson and Jacobsson interviewed the student both in Malaysia when she studied there, and in Turkey when she had returned home. The student's life story is discussed as a relational, situational, and contextual story. Religion plays an important role in the student's life. The motive for leaving her studies in Turkey was the headscarf ban, and Malaysia was, of course, a perfect alternative in respect of covering the hair. Several themes are discussed in relation to the student's narrative and examples include: family relations, the meaning of education, religion, ethnicity, and gender. The authors conclude that it was not surprising to find the significance of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, especially in relation to the importance of the family and serial reciprocity. However, they did not expect to find that emotions were such an important driving force for student mobility – in this case especially emotions related to ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Malaysia is also in focus in Thimm's article. The aim of the article is to analyse how gender, education, modernity, and migration are negotiated within intergenerational family ties. More specifically, she focuses on how migration for education is negotiated in Chinese-Malaysian families. Thimm carried out long-standing ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore and Malaysia among Malaysian-Chinese students and their families. She states that in Malaysia and

Singapore education is increasingly important; one reason being the connection of educational standards to social status and power. In turn, this is intertwined with altered allocations of meaning concerning gender and ethnic relations. This article analyses how educational migration leads to female self-transformation and discusses how a Chinese-Malaysian woman's migration journey leads to becoming 'modern'. The concept of multiculturalism is used when investigating the social and political processes in the culturally segregated societies of Malaysia and Singapore. Thimm points to the fact that the young Chinese-Malaysian female students migrate from Malay-dominated Malaysia to Chinese-dominated Singapore and, therefore, the migration process is also a means of experiencing an altered ethnic context. In sum, the article shows that gender, ethnicity, and religious belonging underpin the 'modern' habitus of the Chinese-Malaysian female educational migrants.

The remaining two articles discuss the increasing participation in mass higher education across Southeast Asia. Singapore has taken a lead over the last decades and developed itself as a regional hub of international higher education. Ye's article focuses on Singapore and explores transnational higher education strategies both to and from Singapore. The aim is to understand the sociological dynamics that influence the individual as well as the institutional levels that motivate the students' decisions to move abroad for higher education. The article looks on outbound educational mobility from Singapore to the UK and inbound educational mobility from Vietnam to Singapore. Ye uses two case studies. One draws on interviews conducted with current and former Singaporean students at two universities in the UK, while the other focuses on Vietnamese students at two Singaporean universities. The study confirms that studying abroad gives the students opportunities to accrue educational capital, by building up linguistic skills, and by gaining social and 'cosmopolitical' resources. Like several of the authors in this issue, Ye employs the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Ye identifies two types of Southeast Asian student mobility that constrain experiences of student mobility, which she labels as 'consecration' and 'commodification'. The article shows the different routes for students who want to study abroad, where some students can chose subjects and places to study while other students are chosen, for example, through scholarship schemes.

The final article in this issue is written by Kull and focuses on student mobility and Islamic education in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world. The findings are based on interviews with eleven South-East Asian students who study at an Islamic university in Jakarta. The article's overarching aim is to explore how those international students' experiences of studying in Indonesia influenced their identity and how their studies impacted on their social networks. The article also explores individual strategies for mobility, and the influence of religion, class, and family background. The eleven respondents form a heterogeneous group of students regarding family backgrounds, religious norms from their homes, and how much previous contact they have had outside of their homeland. Gender

is a key concern in this study and the finding is that gender has had only a very minor influence on the students' possibilities for studying abroad. This could, of course, be explained by the fact that the students who were interviewed are those who already study abroad. Also, this article confirms that the students have accumulated social capital by studying abroad. Their studies have extended their transnational social networks, and the study found that they have benefitted from studying in a foreign country in various ways. Concerning the process of the students' transnational identity formation, Kull states that most are to be regarded as temporary transnationals. Kull's article also explores why the students chose international Islamic studies in Jakarta and how they evaluate the education offered there. A majority of the respondents said that they would choose to study in Indonesia again. Reasons given were the generous scholarships from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Islamic university's good reputation.

The overall purpose of this Special Issue is not simply to add new empirical insight into student mobility in Southeast Asia. Rather, by combining various methodologies and approaches, and by focusing on more than one country, this Special Issue provides the opportunity to comparatively discuss several key questions, including the transnational and transregional dynamics of international student mobility in Southeast Asia. Higher education in Southeast Asia today is no longer only bound by nation states, or by 'ideoscapes' such as 'insular Southeast Asia' or 'maritime Southeast Asia'. Instead, student mobility between, for instance, Vietnam and Singapore demonstrates the current fluidity between these two previously not so intensely related countries. The empirical research presented in this Special Issue also illustrates how the transregional perspective is gaining increasingly more momentum. Here, several Southeast Asian counties, such as Singapore and Malaysia, have become intermediary stopovers, before international students move on to other shores, including North America, Australia, or Europe. This is particularly interesting in the case of students from much less developed countries in West Asia and Africa, some of whom continue to migrate internationally after studying in Singapore or Malaysia.

A last perspective discussed in this Special Issue in several empirical case studies, especially by Carlson and Jacobsson, as well as in Graf's statistical analysis, is the dimension of Islam in international student mobility to Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia. For the first time ever, tens of thousands of followers of the various *madhhab* (schools of Islamic law) are encountering each other in Malaysia, where the Shafi'i *madhhab* is widely followed. Questions for future research are thus whether this unprecedented encounter and exchange is leading to discourses that could be described as 'trans-*madhhab*', generating a drive for innovative theological reforms within Islam. In this regard, then, this Special Issue of TRaNS might be useful for discussions of such categories beyond the (trans-)national and the (trans-)regional.