INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Asia(ns) on the Move: Globalisation, Migration and Development

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INTRODUCTION

THE CENTRAL CONCERN OF this special collection of papers is the complex relationships between globalisation and transnational migration on the one hand, and social change and development in Southeast Asian societies on the other. The increasingly pervasive forces of globalisation, associated with "increased levels of education, proliferation of international media, improved transport systems and the internationalisation of business and labour markets" (Hugo 2005: 94), are evidently at work across both more developed and 'transitional' economies in Southeast Asia. Indeed, since the 1980s, globalisation's reach has transformed social institutions, social relations and social imaginations, and as a consequence, pathways to development have been fundamentally changed as Southeast Asian societies experienced heightened capital and human mobility.

With the quickening pace and intensity of Southeast Asians on the move, social worlds in an increasingly interconnected Asia experience considerable flux, and in the process new opportunities for the "melting, blending and re-solidifying" of old and new subjectivities are produced (Jarvis *et al.* 2009: 111). Such processes may be highly contradictory, and can be "potentially both emancipatory (enabling) and confining (disabling and elitist)" (Jarvis *et al.* 2009: 111) in its effects on individual livelihoods and social relations. Taken together as a special collection, the articles in this issue illustrate the ambivalence and provisionality of human lives in navigating the uneven terrain of globalisation at three levels: in terms of the fashioning of individual migrant trajectories; householding and the reproduction of familial relations; and the (dis)connectivities between the local and the global.

GLOBALISING AMBITIONS AND MIGRANT TRAJECTORIES

The rise of Asian economies in recent decades has been accompanied by what amounts to a revolution in Asian universities' push towards internationalisation.

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Marked by the growth of international ranking exercises to feed the increasing demand for consumer information, leading universities in the region no longer cater solely to a domestic market but are jostling to extend their international reach. In this regard, Ho's (this issue) article demonstrates why international students are no longer to be regarded as "a small temporary minority locked away in ivory towers", but a critical focus of national and university policy geared to attracting international students in order to generate and sustain talent for the workforce and to arrest if not reverse fertility decline.

For the new generation of Southeast Asian youths, Singapore-based universities, given the widespread use of English alongside their cosmopolitan outlook, provide an increasingly viable alternative compared to the more established choices hosted at western destinations such as Australia, Europe, and North America. Ho's (this issue) paper shows that Southeast Asian students-to-be are attracted to the National University of Singapore (NUS) not only on account of its proximity to home (after all, given the growth of airline travel and telecommunications in the region, "cost wise and time wise [journeys to Singapore] became no different for Southeast Asians than a journey to their own capital cities"), but principally because of its strong academic reputation and the anticipation of job prospects in Singapore. As Ho argues, "studying at NUS is a rational choice for Southeast Asian students because the local degree ensures them a Singapore job and at the same time the growing international reputation of NUS bestows a stronger currency on the degree such that they will have options in their home and third country labour markets should the job in Singapore fail to materialise."

The increased volume of intra-regional student migration not only re-orientates the ambitions and trajectories of young people seeking higher education opportunities (see Cheng 2014) but also has the effect of thickening the networks of social and economic ties in the region. New forms of mobility and networks are likely to grow and coalesce, as international students who have studied in the region are also likely to work in the region after graduation, either by returning to their home country, staying on in their host country, or moving to a third country in the region. This in turn may augur well for the promotion of regional integration.

Also focused on the shaping of migrant trajectories, Xiang's (this issue) article focuses on "would-be migrants" in northeast China and examines the question why people invest heavily in overseas migration (*chuguo xiangmu*), in many instances to Singapore, despite the high risk of failure. Powerful notions of global modernity have created a widespread "transnational imagination" (Appadurai 1996) and migration projects have become a means to escalate wealth accumulation as well as re-fashion the self (for examples of the gendered cultural politics of fashioning modern identities and mobile subjectivities through rural-urban migration projects, see Elmhirst, 2002; Esara, 2004; Gaetano, 2008) in order to be able to be in an advantageous position to ride the crest of China's

rapid development. As Xiang explains, part of the going-abroad project involves becoming a "new legal subject" who is "capable of establishing legal identities, forming contractual relations with other parties, and producing documents as required by the authorities". Would-be migrants embody multiple contradictions: they "were keen to exploit uncertainty, but were constantly looking for institutional support and legal protection". These moments generate new pathways towards success for the individual intent on outracing the rapidity of development in China.

GLOBAL HOUSEHOLDING AND
THE REPRODUCTION OF FAMILIAL RELATIONS

Globalisation and increased mobilities have not only increased cross-border economic transactions in Southeast Asia but also have a major impact on human relationships within families and households. More specifically, Yeoh and Huang's (this issue) article argues that globalisation has altered the organisation of reproductive labour within the family/household. Rapidly ageing societies such as Singapore are increasingly dependent on 'global householding' and 'care migration' strategies (in the form of both domestic worker and healthcare worker migrations) to plug eldercare deficits. These strategies not only help sustain the inner workings of the (idealised) family, but have broader implications for gender and class relations. The feminised nature of care migration tends to mask the fact that the burden of social provisioning of everyday and generational care is not only privatised within the family but continues to fall unequally on women's shoulders. The relegation of eldercare work – performed by migrant domestic workers in their employers' home or healthcare workers in eldercare facilities – to low-end, unskilled work in host countries often means that aspirations for upward social class mobility within the sphere of reproductive labour tend to be suppressed and made more elusive. There is hence a need to temper the prevailing optimism in coupling 'migration' with 'development' with a broader perspective that takes into account the way 'care migration' may work against more progressive gender and class relations. In particular, for "migrant domestic workers who often have limited material resources and few civil rights, the prospect of self-development and the building up of new subjectivities and political spaces to act often runs up against state and society's rules of marginality and exclusion" (Yeoh *et al*. forthcoming).

Casting her analysis against the backcloth of "globalisation, neoliberalisation and the reorganisation of social welfare in the early twenty-first century", Newberry (this issue) explains how the increasing global preoccupation with rolling out early childhood programmes in Indonesia since 2000 "seems to pivot on the continuing unacknowledged care labour of women and the reproduction of precarious labour." By expecting Indonesian women to extend their

'householding' work to the domestic community through the delivery of low-cost or volunteer care labour, the stability of the community is underwritten while the precarity of care work further deepened. In this way, Newberry illustrates the paradoxes of development in an era of neoliberal decentralisation in Indonesia: even as global attention shifts from a focus on women's rights to the championing of children's rights alone, "the child is figured as an individual to be empowered as against women whose community care labour is required to provide the capabilities for that empowerment."

A common theme that runs through both articles by Yeoh and Huang (this issue) and Newberry (this issue) is the critical role women play in the reproduction of both the 'family' and the 'community' in the age of globalisation. At the same time, it is also salient to note that often it is the enduring nature of 'traditional' social forms such as 'family' and 'community' that make them unquestioningly effective as vehicles "to endorse and conscript women's domestic labour for nationalist development" (Newberry, this issue).

Local-Global (Dis)Connections

While both Ho (this issue) and Xiang (this issue) portray individuals as aspiring, mobile risk-takers able to seize the opportunities thrown up by the advancing sweep of globalisation, Myint (this issue) calls attention to those whose voices fail to register at the national level or in international circles. His paper hence reminds us of the uneven effects of globalisation.

Using two case studies of state-initiated hydroelectric dam projects in the Mekong River Basin, Myint's (this issue) article focuses on the gap between local livelihood issues and international development policy planning. The resultant policy contentions between planners and villagers revolve around four issues: the degradation of fisheries due to dam construction; the loss of forest and land from dam construction; the definition of poverty and the framing of development projects around poverty reduction; and differing conception as to what constitutes environmental education. Noting that "under both international and domestic frameworks [for development], local communities and citizens have neither the legitimacy not the political authority to define the problem and meaning of development, both of which have direct consequences on their livelihoods", Myint (this issue) critiques the state-centric nature of the Mekong River Commission and advocates a shift towards loosening the institutional structure to recognise non-state actors, "local resource appropriators and users" as "legitimate participants" in development projects.

Sakai (this issue) explores local-global (dis)connectivities of a different kind. While Islamic finance has experienced significant expansion globally, Islamic banks in Indonesia have been growing more slowly. In contrast, as Sakai's (this issue) article shows, a grassroots Islamic financial movement known as

Islamic Savings and Credit Cooperatives or *Baitul Maal wat Tamwil* (BMT) has grown outside the formal Islamic banking system in Indonesia over the last three decades. In tandem with the growing interest among Muslims to promote Islamic finance as part of "Islamic propagation by deeds (*dakwah bil hal*)", BMTs are positioned as instruments of social justice, which is advanced by emphasizing the offering of small loans to small businesses as a way of offering "inclusive financial services"; assisting the needy (for example, by extending financial products and services to overseas migrant workers); offering not-for-profit social programmes; and providing training sessions to employees to deepen Islamic understanding. At the same time, Sakai (this issue) shows that "in reality, the BMTs' core activities are modern financial transactions based on Islamic jurisprudence and their clients do not have to agree with the BMTs' perceptions". Non-Muslim clients may in fact see the BMT simply as a source of business capital.

In sum, both Myint's (this issue) and Sakai's (this issue) articles demonstrate the variability of ground-level dynamics empowering 'development' in the face of powerful globalisation forces. While Myint gives weight to the importance of incorporating local livelihood issues in international development plans, Sakai foregrounds the need to understand 'development' not just through the calculus of economics, but also in terms of its highly variegated social and cultural complexion.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The processes behind globalisation, migration and development have fuelled a new spatial order of interconnectivities among nations, communities, families and individuals in and beyond Southeast Asia. The mobility of ideas, knowledge, images, commodities and people, as well as the uneven transgression of national borders in today's globalising world, may well be liberating or emancipatory at times, but may also reinforce existing social ideologies, including those of the nation-state. This sense of ambivalence and contingency – as reflected in the articles in this issue of *Trans –Regional and –National Studies in Southeast Asia* – is important in ensuring that transnational studies of Southeast Asia do not automatically assume a celebratory stance, often implicit in globalisation discourses, where 'flows', 'speed' and the absence of geographical friction are considered unquestionably desirable goals in themselves. Instead, by remaining alert to the unevenness, contradictions and paradoxes that may occur within a transnational framework, such studies potentially reconfigure the way we think of key concepts underpinning contemporary social life, including notions such as 'identity', 'family', 'community', 'nation' and 'development'. As a world in motion, Southeast Asia offers immense opportunities to continue to move such studies forward.

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