

International Workshop on Gender, Migrant Workers and Citizenship in Greater Mekong Subregion: Economic and Political Perspectives for a World in Crisis

(tentative agenda)

Asian Institute of Technology Conference Center
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Background and Objectives:

This workshop is a concluding workshop for the IDRC supported research project “Gender, cross-border migrant workers and citizenship: A case study of the Burmese-Thai border” conducted by AIT and University of Leeds. This study focused on Burmese women workers’ working condition and rights, as well as the underlying drivers in both Thailand and Burma which have led to the establishment of new industries and new workers in the border areas of these two countries. This involves understanding the policies of the Thai government related to industrial decentralization, as well as those concerning citizenship and registration of foreign workers, particularly from a gender perspective. The workshop will be discussing the findings of the project in relation to these issues, all of which must be understood in the context of local and national policies and also the regional and global economy.

The starting point for this analysis is the history and nature of industrial, export and labour policy in the region. This has been shaped by a series of national and international agreements concerning regional economic integration and free trade agreements – be it GMS, ASEAN, EU, APEC, NAFTA – which have encouraged a particular pattern of industrialization that depends on cross-border migrant workers. This has taken place along side a parallel raft of measures that control and regulate migrant mobility and employment which has had contradictory effects on the rights and citizenship of the workforce involved. The experience of these migrant workers in terms of how their rights and entitlements as workers and as citizens is mediated in both the countries of destination as well as of origin, is directly shaped by prevailing gender relations and norms as well as state regulation and practices of these different places.

Labour migration is a global phenomenon, and many researchers are working on the issue in different contexts which can all contribute to our understanding of these processes. The proposed workshop is unique in the sense that it focuses on the linkage of gender, labour migration, regional economic integration and the gendered concept of social reproduction. Through linking gender and labour migration to the macro-economic policy, as well as the ways in which state policies both

support and impede the daily and generational reproduction of labour involved in transnational migration, we hope to be able to enhance our understanding on the nature of the contemporary global economy and how it is bound up with the issues of citizenship, inter-state cooperation and competition, which include the struggle to benefit from but avoid the cost of the social reproduction of migrant workers and their labour power.

The current global economic crisis has further strengthened the relevance of this analysis. Our own research indicates that the crisis has led to a drastic decrease of employment opportunities and income of migrant workers, and it would seem, in Thailand as elsewhere, women migrant factory workers are especially vulnerable to losing jobs. But for these workers, losing their jobs also means losing whatever precarious entitlement they might have to reside and work in the countries of destination, as well as to secure the education and futures of their children. But many are not able (or willing) to return back to their countries of origin, because of political persecution, economic marginalisation or complex family networks, making them exposed to complex political and security implications of the crisis on top of the economic impacts. Women migrants are particularly affected since this (and other) research indicates that they bear a heavier burden and pressure to remit to their (natal) families back home as well as to support their (new) families in their places of destination. Squeezed between a rock and a hard place, they have little negotiating power, and no protection or support from either their countries of origin or of current residence, and so have little option but to further lower their living standards by accepting even lower work remuneration and working conditions.

The workshop aims to synthesize current research on the gendered nature of labour migration and migrant workers' citizenship, and how this is shaped by state policy and regional economic integration. It will explore strategic research agenda to enhance their rights as workers, mothers and daughters.

Organizers

Kyoko Kusakabe, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand.
Ruth Pearson, University of Leeds, UK.

Main participants

Participants to be invited to the workshop are researchers from Southeast Asia, Japan, Europe and US, as well as from NGOs and government agencies working on labour migration issues.

Methodology

The first two days of the workshop will be in a format of academic conference, where papers are presented followed by discussions. The last day is a closed session with selected participants, and we will have in-depth discussions on comparative perspectives of gender and labour migration, and explore strategic research agenda to enhance rights of migrant workers.

We are expecting to develop the workshop into an edited book or special issue of a journal, as well as develop joint proposal for future research.

Timetable

DAY 1		
9:00 - 9:30	Registration	
9:30 -10.00	Opening	<p>Prof. Sudip Kumar Rakshit Vice President for Research (AIT)</p> <p>Ms. Navsharan Singh Senior Programme Specialist, The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)</p> <p>Mr. Katsumi Kakazu Director General, The Japan Foundation</p>
10:00-10:30	Introduction to the workshop Introduction of participants	Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe AIT
10:30-11:00	Photo session and coffee break	
11:00-12:30	<p>Setting the Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exposing the dangerous logic of human disposability: Reflections from the Mexico-US border ▪ Migration in times of Crisis: The Gendered Perspective 	<p>Chair: Prof. Ruth Pearson University of Leeds</p> <p>Dr. Melissa Wright The Pennsylvania State University</p> <p>Ms. Jackie Pollock MAP Foundation for the Health and Knowledge of Ethnic Labour</p>
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30 -14:50	<p>Session 1: Regional economic integration and the role of women migrant workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female Migrant Workers, Crisis and Future Prospect Perspectives ▪ Managing Labour Migration Initiatives in the Greater Mekong Sub-region 	<p>Chair: Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe AIT</p> <p>Prof. Patcharawalai Wongboonsin Chulalongkorn University</p> <p>Ms. Sanda Thant Mekong Institute</p>
14:50- 15:20	Break	
15.20-17:20	<p>Session 1 (contn'd)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional integration and migration in GMS ▪ Global garments, migrant labour and bordering the Greater Mekong Sub-region ▪ Cheap Labour Reserves & the Growth of Cities: Undocumented Migrant Workers in Macau 	<p>Chair: Dr. Shirlena Huang National University of Singapore</p> <p>Dr. Rosalia Sciortino Mahidol University</p> <p>Mr. Dennis Arnold University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</p> <p>Dr. Amy Sim University of Hong Kong</p>
18:30	Welcome dinner	

DAY 2		
9:00-11:00	<p>Session 2: State, family and women migrant workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ History, Stereotypes and Nation Building in Indonesia and Thailand ▪ Family, gender, identity and citizenship: Cross-border marriage within the Mekong frontiers ▪ Remittance-sending behaviour among migrants from Myanmar, the Lao PDR and Cambodia 	<p>Chair: Dr. Philippe Doney AIT</p> <p>Dr. Susan Giblin University of Leeds</p> <p>Dr. Suchada Thaweessit Mahidol University</p> <p>Dr. Sirinan Kittisuksathit Mahidol University</p>
11:00-11:30	Break	
11:30-12:50	<p>Session 3: Social reproduction and women migrant workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constructing the Female Migrant ‘Other’ in (Re)Productive Space: Care Workers in Singapore ▪ Regional Economic Integration and the Politics of Care: JPEPA Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement and Migrant Caregivers 	<p>Chair: Ms. Usamard Siampukdee University of Leeds</p> <p>Dr. Shirlena Huang National University of Singapore</p> <p>Dr. Chiho Ogaya Yokohama National University</p>
12:50-13:50	Lunch	
13:50-15:10	<p>Session 3 (contn’d)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Childcare arrangements of cross-border workers in Thai-Burmese border towns ▪ Poverty Trap, Migration and Unsafe Destination 	<p>Chair: Ms. Navsharan Singh IDRC</p> <p>Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe AIT</p> <p>Dr. Amara Soonthorndhada Mahidol University</p>
15:10-15:40	Break	
15:40-16:20	<p>Gender, Citizenship and Strategies: Current Crisis and Future prospects for migrant workers on the Thai-Burmese Border</p>	<p>Chair: Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe AIT</p> <p>Prof. Ruth Pearson University of Leeds</p>
16.20-17:00	Concluding discussion	
DAY 3		
9:00-10:00	Reflection of the first two days and brainstorming of emerging research agenda or research gaps	Chair: Ms. Navsharan Singh IDRC
10:00-11:20	Small group discussion on topics to take forward (coffee in between)	
11:20-12:20	Reporting back	
12:20-13:30	Closing and lunch	