

ARI news

Main Story

FORCE OF LIFE

Special Feature

THE ISLAM QUESTION IN CHINA'S NEW SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

Second Muhammad
Alagil Arabia Asia
Conference

Outreach Event

IN THE PURSUIT OF "FINDING SINGAPORE"



WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR



PROF PRASENJIT DUARA

Coming on the heels of Singapore's 50th Independence Day celebration, this newsletter includes three stories by ARI scholars based on their work on the city-state.

Prof Chua Beng Huat's contribution to the *Singapore Chronicles* book by the Institute of Policy Studies features multiracialism in Singapore while the Changing Family Cluster's Research Fellow Sharon Quah writes about her new book *Perspectives on Marital Dissolution: Divorce Biographies in Singapore*. The book has already been launched and discussed in The University of Sydney, and was presented again in Singapore's National Library on 18 September. The third by Postdoctoral Fellow Simone Chung reports on the screening and panel discussion on "Finding Singapore", the ARI Asia Trends film shown on 14 July 2015. The attendance at the event in The Substation was full house.

After a year of major gifts and grants—for Arabia Asia Studies, Disaster Governance in Urbanising Asia, and Religion and NGOs in Asia awarded to ARI in 2014—many of us have turned our attention to the new research projects. The researchers recruited for these projects began to come in the summer of the year and ARI has a new crop of young scholars in our midst to take us to the next stage. Meanwhile those who have made significant advances in their projects held a few conferences to publicise the significance of their topics. This issue of the newsletter showcases the Asian Migration Cluster's conference on the precariousness of migrant populations. Organised by Dr Malini Sur and Dr Siddharthan Maunaguru, the conference entitled "The Force of Life: Living in Precarious Spaces and Times in Asia" (20-21 July 2015), invited

notable keynote speakers Professors Partha Chatterjee and Veena Das and attracted a very large number of participants and listeners. Also featured in this newsletter is the conference report on the Asian Connections Metacluster's "Silk Roads, Muslim Passages: The Islam Question in China's Expansion" written by Muhammad Alagil Postdoctoral Fellow in Arabia Asia Studies, Dr Nisha Mathew. Finally, we held the 10th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies which capped off our Asian Graduate Student Fellowship Programme which we host May to July every year.

We are also very proud to announce that Professor Brenda Yeoh, cluster leader of the Asian Migration Cluster and Dean of FASS, was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Silver) at the National Day Awards 2015.

Finally, as many of you know, two of us will be leaving ARI in December. Associate Prof Michael Feener who has ably led the Religion and Globalisation Cluster will be joining Oxford University; we wish him the best in his new career. I will be retiring from ARI and NUS and moving back to the US to join Duke University. There is not a shred of doubt in my mind that these five years at ARI have been the most stimulating and rewarding years of my intellectual career. I want to thank each and every one of you in the administrative staff, our long-term researchers and visiting scholars as well as the many participants who come regularly to our events for making it so. Since I will miss you all sorely, I do hope to return to ARI from time to time.

22 -23 SEPTEMBER 2015

**GOVERNANCE AND CIRCULATION
OF ASIAN MEDICINES**

CONTACT PERSON:

Ms Valerie Yeo, valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg

3-4 DECEMBER 2015

**THE MISSION OF DEVELOPMENT:
RELIGION AND TECHNO-POLITICS
IN ASIA**

CONTACT PERSON:

Ms Valerie Yeo, valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg

5-6 NOVEMBER 2015

**CROSSING BORDERS:
GOVERNING ENVIRONMENTAL
DISASTERS IN A GLOBAL
URBAN AGE IN ASIA**

CONTACT PERSON:

Ms Tay Minghua, aritm@nus.edu.sg

1-2 MARCH 2016

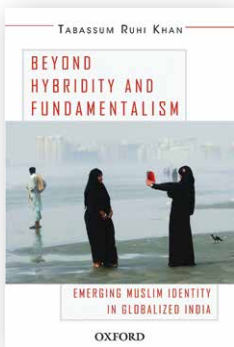
**CARING FOR ELDERLY IN ASIA:
LONG-TERM CARE IN THE
FAMILIAL CONTEXT**

CONTACT PERSON:

Prof Jean Yeung, ariywj@nus.edu.sg

Details of events are available at:

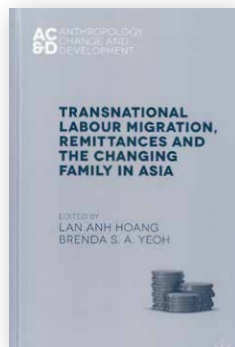
<http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/calendarofevent.asp?categoryid=6>



**Tabassum
Ruhi Khan**

*Beyond Hybridity
and Fundamentalism:
Emerging Muslim
Identity in Globalized
India*

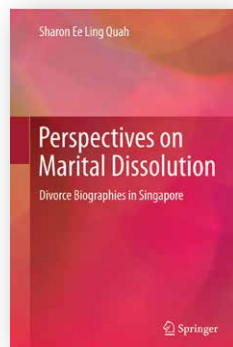
Oxford University
Press, 2015



**Lan Anh Hoang
and Brenda
S. A. Yeoh (eds)**

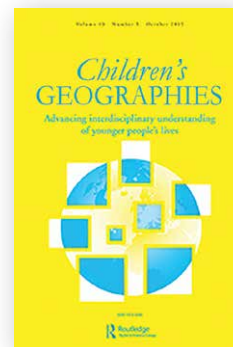
*Transnational
Labour Migration,
Remittances and
the Changing
Family in Asia*

Palgrave Macmillan,
2015



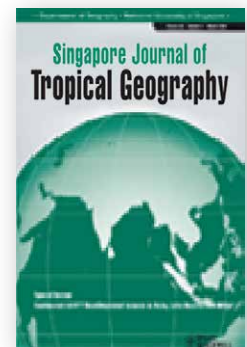
**Sharon
Ee Ling Quah**

*Perspectives on
Marital Dissolution:
Divorce Biographies
in Singapore*
Springer, 2015



**Cheryll Alipio,
Melody C. W. Lu,
and Brenda S. A.
Yeoh (eds)**

*Asian Children
and Transnational
Migration*
Children's Geographies
13(3), 2015



**Maureen Hickey,
Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho,
and Brenda S. A.
Yeoh (eds)**

*Special section on
Establishing State-led
"Diaspora Strategies"
in Asia: Migration-
as-development
Reinvented?*
*Singapore Journal of
Tropical Geography*
36(2), 2015



Keynote address by Partha Chatterjee – *When Victims Become Rulers*

FORCE OF LIFE: LIVING IN PRECARIOUS SPACES AND TIMES IN ASIA

DR MALINI SUR
RESEARCH FELLOW

In July 2015, the Asian Migration Cluster brought together anthropologists, historians, political theorists and geographers to think about the concept of force in relation to violence and precarity. Across the vast continent of Asia and elsewhere, stranded refugees, earthquakes and protracted hunger, and states that muscle-flex and yet come apart at their seams, invite scholars to reflect on life's unevenness.

These predicaments also require that the social sciences acknowledge that life can no longer be studied in neatly bounded locations and categories. Alongside devastations, the more insidious workings of violent nationalisms and arbitrary state power compel us to engage life in relationship to force; force that destroys life and force as life's productive potential. Panelists representing nine countries delivered eleven papers covering Bangladesh, Cambodia, Japan, Malaysia, Lebanon, India, Iran, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Syria and Turkey. Some scholars explored how societies who live in circumstances of prolonged deprivations and uncertainties,

not only survive but also mobilise, and flourish. Others showed how violent margins are vibrant centres of exchange and profit.

On the first day, Prof Partha Chatterjee's keynote lecture entitled "When Victims become Rulers" presented new research which foregrounded the tensions between the sufferings of forced migrants and new political and class based alliances in a re-settled context. He drew illustrations from upper-caste Hindu refugees in West Bengal and Tripura displaced from East Pakistan after the partition of the Indian



Shifting embankments (chars) of Assam, northeast India

Photos courtesy of Dr Malini Sur



subcontinent in 1947. The two panels that followed his keynote engaged with force in distinct ways. The first panel interrogated force as latent energy, political action, time and mobility; while the second explored how ambiguous forces that materialise through prolonged waiting, dreams and uncertainties define the refugee condition. The final panel investigated how precarious labour, place-making and cinema reflect the ethics of the urban condition. Prof Itty Abraham summarised the day's discussion. He emphasised that the papers engaged with spaces and times—the former as precarious and the latter as forceful.

Prof Veena Das delivered the second keynote lecture. Drawing on wide-ranging sources, she showed how the durable and the ephemeral are woven together to think

of the idea of "life". A panel on precarious trans-gendered bodies, displacements and the politics of care in Istanbul and Tokyo followed the keynote. The next two panelists investigating Iran's borders with Syria, Turkey, Pakistan and Baluchistan showed how gold and oil smuggling produce speculative exchange and imaginaries that narrated commodities as forces. The final paper explored everyday life, land cultivation and amputated bodies in the landmine regions of Cambodia.

Prof Vineeta Sinha in her summary of the day's proceedings asked whether precarity and force could be used as a methodological and theoretical tool to think about Asia. The Asia Research Institute and the British Academy's Newton Fellowship funded this event.



MULTIRACIALISM IN SINGAPORE

PROFESSOR CHUA BENG HUAT

Singapore is a colonised settler nation. However, unlike the US, Canada and Australia which are also British-colonised settler nations, the majority and subsequently ruling people are not the descendants of the White colonisers but ethnic Chinese or Huaren of immigrant stock, with two visible minority groups, the Malays and the Indians. Also, unlike the three White settler nations, the colonisation of Singapore did not involve the massacre of an indigenous population. The setting up of an East India Company trading post in Singapore was through a negotiated treaty, albeit one that might be, in hindsight, legally problematic.

With separation from Malaysia and political independence, the majority Huaren as migrant stock had no “rightful” claim to the land—similarly for the Indians—while the Malays, who are indigenous to the region, were in the minority. This combined with the geopolitical context then, the newly independent island-nation declared itself a constitutional “multiracial” nation, with Malays recognised as the indigenous people. This was in a sense making a virtue out of necessity, as the new nation could not declare itself a “Huaren” nation in the midst of the Malay world, the Nusantara, and expect this to be accepted with equanimity by the neighbouring majority Malay-speaking nations of Indonesia and Malaysia, especially with Communist China as a distant neighbour. Multiracialism, namely equality of races, was thus instituted as an official policy.

Multiracialism is a mode of governance. Logically, the equality of race is an equality of “groups”, rather than the equality of “individuals”. However, as a modern state, the Singapore constitution also contains the conventional liberal rights and freedoms of individuals, such as rights of expression and belief.

With multiracialism as official policy, “racial peace” and “racial harmony” are raised to the level of “public good”, synonymous with general social and political “stability”.

Thus, where the supposed need to maintain racial harmony is in conflict with the rights and freedoms of individuals, the former is politically allowed to triumph over the latter; racial harmony overrides individual rights.

There are several public policies that embody this principle of groups over individuals: racial quota in public housing allocation, race-based community self-help organisations and compulsory learning of the so-called race-defined “mother tongue” language. As race and religion are co-extensive, such as constitutionally all Malays are Muslims, multiracialism often extends into “multi-religiosity”; thus racial harmony is often synonymous, indeed interchangeable, with multi-religious harmony. The contact points of race and religion are thus points of policing and state intervention. Arguably, these policies treat all three visible races equally. However, the effects of the “equality of groups” are not “enjoyed/suffered” equally by all groups; for example, the public housing quota creates greater difficulties for the Malays and the Indians in buying and selling of their flats.

Multiracialism logically also means some level of multiculturalism. Here the government defines the idea of “multi” as a numerical phenomenon, where tolerance of difference between races is essential and mutual understanding is not. This is in contrast to the liberal understanding of multiculturalism as the “hybridizing” of cultures.

Liberal minded Singaporeans are therefore critical of official “multiculturalism” of not only discouraging “real” understanding between races but intentionally keeps the races apart, risking racism against the minority groups. They therefore urge the government to remove the inscription of race on individual citizens and move towards a “Singaporean Singapore”. Well intentioned as this might be, it misses the logic of multiracialism as a mode of governance.

Professor Prasenjit Duara was Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the International Centre for Muslim-non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia, Adelaide, 4-12 July 2015. He also gave 3 keynote lectures: “How Relevant is the Concept of Secularism to Asia? Historical and Comparative Perspectives”, Santander Summer International School “What is Caesar’s, What is God’s”, Kyoto, Japan, 10 March 2015; 4th S. Gopal Annual Memorial Lecture titled “Sustainability and the Crisis of Transcendence: The Long View from Asia”, King’s College, London, 14 May 2015; “How Relevant is the Concept of Secularism to Asia? Questions for a Global Ethics of Diversity”, InterculturAdelaide, Adelaide, 9 July 2015.

Dr Nurfadzilah Yahaya won the Book Prize from Al-Wehdah Arab Association of Singapore on 14 September 2015, for her PhD dissertation “Courting Jurisdictions” which she completed in Princeton University in November 2012.

Professor Brenda Yeoh was appointed Member, Advisory Board, Center for Aging, Research and Education (“CARE”), 1 February 2015-31 January 2020; Editorial Board Member of *Medical History*, 2015-2017; and International Editorial Board Member, *Migration and Development Journal*, 2015-2017. She was also appointed Member, URA Architectural Heritage Awards (AHA) Assessment Committee, Urban Redevelopment Authority (2015-2016); Member, Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) Board (1 April 2015-31 March 2018). On 3 March 2015, she was awarded the Distinguished Visiting Fellowship of the Home Team Academy by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore.

Professor Yeoh also gave 2 keynote speeches titled: “Plural Diversities and the Politics of Migrant Encounter”, at the *Hawke ICAS 9 Distinguished Public Lecture, 9th International Convention of Asia Scholars* Adelaide, Australia, 5-9 July 2015; “Transnationalizing Families, Negotiating Borders: Simultaneities, Rhythms and Rupture”, at *Blurred and Brittle Borders: Transnational Familial and Gender Relations Conference*, International Gender Studies Centre, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and Arizona State University, Oxford, United Kingdom, 23-25 September 2015. She also gave a plenary speech titled “Transnational Care Migration in Asia”, at *Asians on the Move, Asian Population Association Conference*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27-30 July 2015.

THE ISLAM QUESTION IN CHINA'S NEW SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

SECOND MUHAMMAD ALAGIL ARABIA ASIA CONFERENCE

DR NISHA MATHEW

The second annual conference organised by the Muhammad Alagil Chair in Arabia Asia Studies, ARI, on 29 and 30 June 2015 brought together a set of wide-ranging interests and diverse perspectives on historical and contemporary Asia around the theme *Silk Roads, Muslim Passages: The Islam Question in China's Expansion*. The key question driving the discussion was how the Chinese state would engage Islamic networks as it expanded westwards, through Muslim lands and islands. How would China's future action be different from the western history of colonialism and imperialism in the Islamic world as Europe went East towards China?

Academics, diplomats and corporate personalities debated the politics of China's 21st century economic initiatives, while speculating at length on what these could possibly mean for Muslim spaces in Asia. Religiously-sanctioned violence, political instability and issues of energy security in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Central Asia also hinted at challenges in the reverse direction, highlighting the need to address these as complex questions, rather than as one-sided problems.

A note of welcome by Prof Prasenjit Duara and opening remarks by Mr Muhammad Alagil were followed by a roundtable discussion chaired by Prof Engseng Ho, who indicated that the silk threads that have historically tied China to the Muslim world are now transforming into steel pipelines. Hence the need to think how and through what kinds of connections the Silk Route was made,

whether it was an enterprise of state and empire or one created by low-lying networks of people. Prof Wang Gungwu noted that relations between Islam and China in history were devoid of war, unlike those between the West and Islam, suggesting that the tensions underlying China-Islam relations were linked to the adoption of western categories in the shaping of Chinese politics. Prof Bai Gao outlined the imperatives underlying China's expansion, and Prof Wu Bingbing stressed the benefits of co-operation with Muslim countries, with the potential for "win-win" situations. From the American perspective, Prof Khong Yuen Foong explained that US concerns were focused on whether China would emerge as a rival hegemon, while Mr Umej Bhatia, Singapore's Ambassador to the UAE, thought China was providing a new narrative of global power. The Arab Gulf countries were still trying to understand this new narrative.



Mr Bhatia suggested that in addition to silk and steel, silica—the chips and the cables—would be an important part of the new story. Prof Prasenjit Duara sounded a note of caution on the multipolar world of actors that China has inherited, insisting that it has to work with a strategy of enmeshment, co-ordinating this complex in very responsible terms. NUS President Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, drawing an analogy from the field of medicine, added that these different players had to intervene in the contemporary order under conditions of imperfect information, much like doctors themselves.

The first panelists for the day, shifting the speculative focus away from the future, presented a considered past, characterised by trade as well as exchange of cultural and religious ideas between China and the Muslims in Persia. Revealing the deeper historical connections that bound Islamic ethnic groups and shaped their identity narratives in relation to the changing dynastic regimes in China, the papers by Prof Kenneth Dean and others addressed Islam as essentially a constitutive feature and not a rival to Chinese-ness. Southeast Asia and its relations with China and Arabia, in a triad of sorts held together by Islam, formed the larger theme of the next panel with papers viewing such relations from spaces in Arabia and the Middle East. An important highlight of the day was a conversation with Mr Syed Alwi Aidid, a Singaporean trader of Arab and Chinese descent, with family and commercial lineages drawn through these geographies and mediated through Muslim networks. The conference opened the following day with Central Asia in focus,

bringing to the fore questions around both local trading communities and transnational communities of Muslims in the region. Mr Serkan Yolacan suggested that in a place like Xinjiang, formed as it was through centuries of interconnections, China would do well to allow and direct those connections, rather than suppress them. In this, it could take lessons from Turkish and Azerbaijani models of transnational Islamic networks, combining political order with trade dynamism. If transnational networks of Muslims could be trusted with self-regulation, the next two panels, set in the Indian Ocean, illustrated mechanisms of regulation across Africa-Arabia-South Asia by which the British empire, as well as contemporary states such as Dubai, adapted to devolve such responsibility to networks. Material and genealogical ties in the Indian Ocean that China is drawing on to legitimise its contemporary investments in East Africa and to push for legislation and securitisation was a significant contribution made by Dr Jatin Dua.

The conference concluded with some interesting observations and a call for publication of the proceedings. Prof Bai Gao called for the need to develop a new analytical framework to make sense of the emerging world order with China at the forefront, while Mr Ameen Lutfi emphasised the usefulness of China's playing the role of empire with multiple sovereignties and power configurations across Asia in this order. Johan Mathew's appeal to look at Muslim lands not as passages but as destinations in themselves ended the conference with the promise of a different future for research and policy on the Islam question in China's expansion.



PERSPECTIVES ON MARITAL DISSOLUTION: DIVORCE BIOGRAPHIES IN SINGAPORE

DR SHARON QUAH EE LING

**This article has been published in The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) newsletter, Nexus, and ARI's Asian Family Matters Research Brief.*

The book presents a sociological account of marital dissolution that engages with and extends theorisations on individualisation and the contemporary organisation of personal relationships to discuss how the experience of divorce might not be all debilitating but on the contrary, could provide opportunities for productivity, self-responsibility and relationship formation.

Instead of seeing divorce as an isolated legal act or a crisis event, I come up with the framework of divorce biography to suggest adopting a biographical approach in understanding divorce. Using empirical data collected through in-depth interviews with 35 Singaporean divorcees, my study explores how divorcees shape and construct their divorce biographies within the contexts they are located to end their unsatisfying marriages, cope with the crisis, negotiate the associated risks, organise post-divorce personal communities and make future plans. The project examines the conditions that facilitate or hinder the pursuit of productivity in different facets of their post-divorce lives.

My theoretical concept of divorce biography consists of four main elements: assertion of individuality; importance of personal communities, pursuit of productivity; and diversity and complexity of post-divorce trajectories.

Assertion of individuality

By engaging with theories of individualisation, I concur with the position that individuals exercise subjective agency in designing their biographies and managing personal relationships. Divorce happens when expectations and needs are not met, and individuals make the decision to leave an unfulfilling, sometimes destructive, marriage.

Although each of the respondents had a different story to tell about why they decided to end their marriage, their stories revolved around themes concerning the pursuit of authenticity and assertion of individuality. Contrary to common perception that divorce is a selfish, individualistic and careless decision, the divorced participants in my study took a considerable length of time to contemplate before arriving at the decision to call the marriage quits and reclaim their sense of self.

Continuing salience of personal communities

However, my research findings show that while the Singaporean divorced participants were trying to regain control of their lives, they also made decisions in consultation with their personal communities—close network of family and friends, sometimes including co-workers and neighbours. Many turned to their circle of “people who matter” for advice, discussion of solutions and validation of decisions. It is almost taken for granted that divorce does create breaks in personal relations between spouses, relatives, friends and even neighbours. Yet, my study demonstrates that divorcees move on to build new forms of kin, solidarity and personal community, and that social ties and relationships remain salient in their lives. Family values did not erode and the significance of family relationships did not decline. In fact, in some instances, their relationships with kin and friends became even stronger or closer than before, following the renegotiation of familial relationships and friendships. The recognition and affirmation the Singaporean divorced respondents received from their personal communities were especially important and much needed in a social environment where divorce, though becoming commonplace, is still not widely accepted or supported.

Pursuit of productivity

The recurring theme that emerged from the narrative accounts of my Singaporean respondents, including both female and male divorcees, is their unwillingness to stay divorced—they were eager to get that second chance in life, to get their lives back and feel good about themselves again. Their narratives revealed that they conscientiously worked through obstacles and re-orientated themselves to their new, post-divorce lifestyles, living arrangements, social identities and personal relationships. This is not to say that there was no pain, sorrow, regret, disappointment and despondence from time to time as they worked out their divorce biographies. However, at the same time, the desire to pick themselves up, start over again, and move on to pursue a productive life was pronounced.

Not a single story

The divorce biography is not just a single story of destruction, debilitation and woes as commonly assumed. Family research has typically focused on the painful aftermath of divorce, thereby promoting the poor perception of divorce and its supposedly destructive impact on community and social order. Indeed, it could even be argued that such research has helped to legitimise the lack of support for divorced families so that society is not seen as encouraging divorce.

My findings challenge negative discourses associated with divorce and offers a more nuanced perspective by discussing both the precarious and productive aspects of the experience. This book reveals that there is not just one divorce biography but many divorce biographies. What the study has done is to explore the diversity and complexity of Singaporean divorce biographies and examine the interplay of individualisation, relationality and context in their post-divorce trajectories.

Possibilities for policy review

The narrative accounts of Singaporean divorced respondents in my study have shown that post-divorce support must first come in the form of removing social stigma attached to unconventional family forms. As long as non-mainstream family arrangements remain unacceptable and disapproved by various authorities in Singaporean society, individuals, including both adults and children, in such family settings would continue to face systemic alienation and exclusion in different aspects of their everyday life. In some instances, limited access to public services, lack of supportive resources and inflexible administrative procedures in fact produce more complications and obstacles for divorcees and their families in the midst of the crisis and in their post-divorce lives. Post-divorce support in different areas such as housing, legal aid, financial assistance, flexible work arrangements, childcare services and child support and maintenance rendered by the community could be more effective and comprehensive, especially when divorcees and their children fail to receive crucial help from their personal network of kin and friends. Existing policies and public programmes could also reflect greater sensitivity to their unique and challenging circumstances.

For more information and book purchase, please visit: <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789812874641>

The author conducted a public lecture and book launch at the ARI Asia Trends series on 18 September 2015, 7 pm at National Library Building The Pod.

Event details can be found at: http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/upload/events-pdf/20150918_MaritalDissolution_AT.pdf



Dr Silvia Mila Arlini has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster with effect from 5 May 2015. Her research interests range from macroeconomic issues to social economic and policy issues, including human capital development related to population, migration, employment and also education.



Dr Linda Rae Bennett has commenced a 3-month appointment as Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster with effect from 13 July 2015. While at ARI, Dr Bennett will explore how reproductive mobility is central to the adoption of "left behind children" by infertile Indonesian couples; and how the strict regulation of assisted reproductive technologies in Indonesia impacts on regional patterns of reproductive tourism.



Dr Marie Gibert has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster with effect from 15 July 2015. Her research deals with the dynamics of public and private spaces in the development of Asian cities today, as well as with vernacular architecture and the practices of city dwellers in postcolonial cities. At ARI, she pursues her research on place-making and expressions of the collective realm in Southeast Asian cities.



Dr Christopher Courtney has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanism Cluster with effect from 20 July 2015. He examines a range of issues, including the popular religious understanding of the environment and changing patterns of Chinese hydraulic governance since the Republican period. While at ARI, he will be continuing his work on flooding and also engaging in a new research topic examining the social history of the environment in the city of Wuhan, 1911-2015.



Dr Chen Lang has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Connections Metacluster with effect from 15 July 2015. She studies religious moral discourses and their modern transformation. While at ARI, Dr Chen will focus her research on the interaction between nation-building and the religious—especially Buddhist understandings of evil/violence in the early 20th century Asia.



Dr Li Luzhou Nina has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cultural Studies Cluster with effect from 28 July 2015. Her research and teaching interests include digital culture, global media and cultural industries, media and cultural policy, media history and political economy, popular culture, television studies, gender and/in popular media, and China studies.



Dr Abhijit Visaria has commenced a 1-year joint appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Changing Family in Asia Cluster and the Centre for Family and Population Research with effect from 4 August 2015. While at ARI, Dr Visaria will pursue research related to the measurement and implications of sex selection in Asia, particularly in the context of declining fertility desires.



Dr Ko Pei-Chun has commenced a 1-year joint appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Changing Family in Asia Cluster and the Centre for Family and Population Research with effect from 2 June 2015. Her research interests include intergenerational relationships, grandparenting, productive ageing, social networks, multilevel analyses and cross-country comparisons.



Dr Catherine Scheer has commenced a 2-year appointment as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster in ARI with effect from 27 July 2015. While at ARI, Dr Scheer will work on the Religion and NGOs in Asia project. Her research concerns the collaboration between UNESCO Bangkok and a US-originated Protestant NGO to elaborate recommendations on multilingual education. She aims to explore the role played by the Christian development actors in the production of knowledge on the conservation of linguistic diversity.



Assoc Prof Kim Korinek has commenced a 9-month joint appointment as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow in the Changing Family in Asia Cluster and the Centre for Family and Population Research with effect from 12 August 2015. While in ARI, in addition to continuing her core research themes, she will initiate research that investigates migration in the life course as it influences life course transitions in young adulthood, in particular union formation and child bearing.



Dr Catherine Smith has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Science, Technology, and Society Cluster in ARI and Tembusu College with effect from 1 July 2015. While at ARI, she will develop her research into global public health in the region, by examining shifting patterns of malaria as a means through which to explore health, social inequality and shifting state formations in the region.



Dr Nisha Mary Mathew has commenced a 1-year appointment as Muhammad Alagil Postdoctoral Fellow in Arabia Asia Studies within the Asian Connections Metacluster with effect from 12 June 2015. She researches the complex interface of commodity, capital and community across the Indian Ocean from the 19th to the 21st century. The contributions of such activities as smuggling and counterfeiting to the trajectory and discourse of global urban capital in 21st century Dubai also form a key aspect of her research.



Dr Aga Zuoshi has commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster with effect from 1 July 2015. She is interested in indigenous religion, vernacular development experiences, and the social construction of money. Her geographical area is southwest China, particularly the Yi. While at ARI, she plans to investigate two contrasting and yet interconnected approaches (by NGOS and Bimo, the local non-institutionalised religious practice) to treating drug and alcohol addiction in Liangshan.



Dr Nurfadzilah Yahaya has commenced a 2-year appointment as Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster in ARI with effect from 1 July 2015. Her research interests include history of piracy, Indian Ocean, law and religion, religious slaughter of animals, gender, and legal pluralism.

CULTURAL STUDIES IN ASIA CLUSTER

DR SUN JUNG

In April and June, the Cultural Studies in Asia Cluster organised two documentary film screenings which was part of the Cluster's monthly seminar series.

29 APRIL 2015: "MY SPACE" (IMMANUEL MOONCHIL PARK 2013)

Shot over seven years and spanning three generations, "My Place" is a tenderly crafted love letter charting the personal journey of a family re-discovering themselves and their connection to one another. Born in Canada, two siblings spent their early childhood in Toronto before migrating back to their homeland of South Korea where they were raised in a more traditional society. While young Emmanuel adjusts easily to his new surroundings, his younger sister has a more difficult time. Feeling lost and frustrated, Peace struggles to assert her identity and eventually returns to Canada. But life becomes infinitely more complicated for the entire family when Peace becomes pregnant. Eager to embrace single motherhood, Peace decides to have the child despite her parents' concerns. As the family prepares to welcome a new baby into their midst, they must also reconcile the differences that have long divided them.

17 JUNE 2015: "THE SOUND OF OLD ROOMS" (SANDEEP RAY 2011)

Filmed over 20 years, "The Sound of Old Rooms" traces the life of Sarthak, an Indian man who juggles his desire to be a poet with the practicalities of raising a family. As a college student he had time to drink with friends and discuss his writings; now with work commitments, he struggles to continue his dream. The crumbling home where he was raised and still lives with his nagging but affectionate mother, wife and young son is extremely cramped; he sleeps, as he has since a child, surrounded by books. Sarthak leads us through Kolkata's bars, apartments and alleyways as he tries to understand life and find meaning in his work.

METACLUSTER: HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF ASIAN CONNECTIONS

ASSOC PROF TERESITA CRUZ-DEL ROSARIO

The Metacluster continues to bring together a group of scholars with wide-ranging interests in the broad topic of Asian connections with a focus on history and social change as an overarching theme. In the past several months, the Metacluster members engaged in vigorous discussions via monthly reading groups. The readings included: *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Matthew W. Mosca); *Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on Earth* (John Bellamy Foster, et al.); *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History* (Teshale Tibebu); *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Thomas Piketty); *Spain, China and Japan in Manila, 1571-1644* (Birgit Tremml-Werner); *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (Thomas S. Davies); and *The Graves of Tarim* (Eng Seng Ho).

Two events have been recently concluded: a preliminary *Workshop on Comparative Religious and Trade Networks in Southeast Asia* under the leadership of Prof Kenneth Dean, and the second annual Muhammad Alagil Arabia-Asia Conference on the broad theme *Silk Roads, Muslim Passages: The Islam Question in China's Expansion*.

An offshoot of the Metacluster is the Arabia-Asia Nexus reading group which brought together seven researchers and scholars from different backgrounds and institutional affiliations. Under the guidance of Prof Ho Eng Seng, these scholars are pursuing their research interests on varied themes such as gold in Dubai and Kerala, and China-Egypt relations during the Ottoman Empire.

Finally, a publication entitled *Beyond Regime Type: China and India Compared*, edited by Elizabeth Perry and Prasenjit Duara based on the ARI conference on 30-31 May 2014 and co-organised with the Harvard-Yenching Institute, is being prepared for submission to Harvard University Asia Center publications.



ARI congratulates Professor Brenda Yeoh, Cluster Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster of ARI, Dean of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Professor, Department of Geography, NUS, who was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Silver) at the National Day Awards 2015.

CHANGING FAMILY IN ASIA LIVING ALONE: ONE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS IN ASIA

This special collection, edited by Wei-Jun Jean Yeung and Adam Ka-Lok Cheung, published in June 2015, adds new knowledge about the fastest growing type of household in Asia—one-person households (OPH). The 11 papers in the collection examine OPH in 15 countries in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines) and South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan). The collected papers analyse the historical trends, the policy implications and impact on individual well-being of OPH. They were first presented at the *Living Alone: Single-Person Households in Asia* conference convened by the guest editors at ARI on 21-22 November 2013. This collection is the first body of literature that systematically investigates one-person households outside of Western societies. OPH will continue to increase in Asia in the next few decades due to rapid ageing, declining marriage and fertility, and increasing divorce and migration. The papers use data from censuses and large-scale household surveys, many with longitudinal or comparative analyses. Together, they provide an excellent basis for international comparison and future investigation. They illustrate both similarities to and differences from Western societies and the papers also reveal significant inter- and intra-national heterogeneities among those living alone in Asia.

All papers are accessible at
<http://demographic-research.org/special/15/default.htm>

ASIAN URBANISMS CLUSTER

PROF MIKE DOUGLASS

The *International Symposium on The Rise of Progressive Cities East and West* was held at Paris Sorbonne Université on 11-12 May with scholars from NUS and the Sorbonne. Cases from Asia, Europe and the US were presented in this second meeting of the group supported by a joint NUS-Sorbonne research grant. Research continues with the next meeting to be held in Seoul in October. Research focuses on four areas of inclusion, distributive justice, conviviality and environmental well-being.

The Disaster Governance Asia (DGA) project supported by an MOE Tier 2 grant held the *Workshop on Disaster Governance: From Research and Experiences to Teaching and Training* on 15 June. Led by Professor Karl Kim from the University of Hawai'i, who is also the Chair of the FEMA National Domestic Preparedness Consortium, the event was organised to bridge gaps between research, education and practice. The next DGA event is the *Workshop on Post-Disaster Resilience* in Chengdu on 17-18 September that is hosted by the Chinese Academy of Urban Design and Planning, and the Government of Chengdu.

At the *ICAS 9 Conference* in Adelaide from 6-9 June, Mike Douglass represented the AUC team working with the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (IIAS, Leiden) by presenting on our book project on *Cities by and for the People*. Bringing together research from 9 cities in Asia, the focus is on grassroots mobilisations in producing alternative spaces for livelihoods, social life, food production and political reform.



IN THE PURSUIT OF "FINDING SINGAPORE"

SIMONE SHU-YENG CHUNG
POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW

"Finding Singapore", an ARI Asia Trends public outreach event organised by the Asian Urbanisms Cluster, pursued a bimodal format of audience engagement via the screening of Eng Yee Peng's short film "Diminishing Memories I" (2005) followed by a panel discussion with Ms Braema Mathi, President of human rights group MARUAH, Prof Ho Kong Chong from the Department of Sociology, NUS, and Dr Imran bin Tajudeen from the Department of Architecture, NUS. Held at The Substation Theatre on 14 July 2015, the event recorded a positive turnout of close to 100 people in attendance, comprising tertiary students, members of academic institutions, professionals from both the government and private sectors as well as representatives from third party organisations.

Despite some minor technical glitches during the screening, the filmmaker's panegyric to her childhood home in the village of Lim Chu Kang and its community, which was displaced in the 1980s as part of state-planned urban development, resonated with the audience. At its heart, the notion of identity and belonging are universally grasped constructs. What followed seamlessly was



Dr Tajudeen's instructive presentation on the etymologies of "kampong" and "chu kang" to insert a historical context on the morphology of traditional settlements in Singapore. Meanwhile, Prof Ho highlighted the dynamic feature of pre-resettlement communities, how thriving neighbourhoods were contingent on the network of relationships derived out of their mixed-use, live-work arrangements and a vital point to consider in present day community bonding initiatives. Ms Mathi, conversely, viewed such necessary destruction as an opportunity to extend or instigate connections beyond one's confined space; as a mechanism, it can bring different interest groups together to defend social human rights. As moderator, ARI's own Senior Research Fellow Dr Rita Padawangi was commendable in managing the tempo of the discussion and fielding questions from the audience. Issues touched upon during the Q&A session, ranging from state penetration, conservation and heritage to contemporary lifestyles, echoed the concerns of Singaporeans and those living in Singapore. The lively exchanges engendered over the course of the afternoon testified to the saliency of the event's topic and its timeliness on the eve of the country's landmark anniversary.