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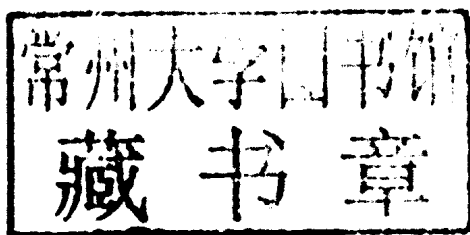
Caroline Plüss
Chan Kwok-bun
Editors

Living Intersections

Transnational Migrant Identifications
in Asia

Caroline Plüss • Chan Kwok-bun
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Living Intersections: Transnational Migrant Identifications in Asia



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Living Intersections: Transnational Migrant Identifications in Asia

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Theorizing and Proving Intersectionality in Transnational Contexts

Caroline Plüss and Chan Kwok-bun

This book articulates new theoretical ideas and provides new empirical evidence to understand how and why the lives of several groups of migrants, in several countries in Asia, combine cultural, social, political, and economic characteristics with roots in different regions and localities. The contributors promote new approaches to intersectionality analysis. Intersectionality analysis examines how a multitude of factors such as race, gender, social class, location, skills, culture, network positions, and age influence each other to worsen, or sometimes improve, people's access to desired resources (Anthias 2001a; Yuval-Davis 2006; Yuval-Davis et al. 2006; Davis 2008; Dill and Zambrana 2009; Ellenmeier 2009). Our approach in this book seeks to go beyond the present forms of intersectionality analysis. It promotes the migrants' identities or rather identifications (the latter emphasizing the processes in identity transformations [Brubaker and Cooper 2000])—that is, how migrants think of themselves and of other people and institutions—as the core indicator of the outcomes of the migrants' attempts to convert the cultural, social, and economic capital they possess (Bourdieu 1984, 1986) into new and desired resources they wish to obtain in the transnational spaces they construct by crossing national boundaries. Taking identities and identifications as the core indicator of the reproduction of the migrants' social inequalities or equalities in their attempts to access new and desired resources by crossing national boundaries, allows for studying why and how the mutual constitutivity and reciprocity of a wide diversity

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of cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics, with roots in diverse places, constitute the lives of the transnational migrants in Asia. This novel approach to intersectionality analysis enables us to formulate new ways of accounting for the fact that a large number of factors, with roots in different regions, *interact with each other simultaneously and in multiple directions* to construct the experiences of the transnational migrants.

Gaining an understanding of the fact that migrants' lives are characterized by such intersections of multiple characteristics with diverse sources, is timely and important to further our knowledge of the ways in which migrants are carriers (and, sometimes, victims) of globalization (Robertson 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Such knowledge not only deepens our understanding of globalization, but also elucidates the costs and benefits for migrants in Asia, who make important contributions to Asia's rising prosperity (Chan 2005b).

Scholarship that takes migrant identifications as the core site to explain the mutually constitutive relations between different forms of inequalities and inferiorizations that the migrants have to deal with, and which applies ideas of capital conversion (Bourdieu 1984, 1986) to intersectionality analysis, has not yet been undertaken in studies of migrants in Asia (Charney et al. 2003; Hewison and Young 2006; Lorrente et al. 2005; Rai and Reeves 2009). Neither has it been developed in studies of transnational migration on a global scale (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002; Khagram and Levitt 2008). For these reasons, our book asks a salient question: what happens to people, cultures, institutions, and societies under conditions of increasing globalization, which are co-created by transnational migration? This book will provide academics, service providers, policy-makers, and students with a deeper understanding of the costs and benefits, opportunities and perils, experienced by migrants. The contributors suggest new ways of thinking about migrant experiences and generate new avenues for research and policymaking.

The book chapters cover the macro and micro levels of societal analysis, drawing on specialist scholarship in sociology, psychology, anthropology, geography, history, and political science. The chapters feature qualitative methodologies and cover a broad range of countries in Asia: China (including Hong Kong), Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Burma, and Singapore, as well as other nations in the world—as nodes of the global migration circuit. The chapters also study a significant number of ethnic and national groups: Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Shans, Singaporeans, and Taiwanese.

1.1 Intersectionality in Migrant Identification

Our contributors take migrant identifications as the core indicator of the intersections that result from the characteristics of the Asian societies to and from which the migrants move; and the cultural, social, and economic capital migrants bring with

them while on the move, which they try to convert to access desired resources in multiple places. The resources the migrants bring with them upon exit from their places of departure include their savings (economic capital); skills, values, beliefs, worldviews, emotions of loyalty and allegiance, intelligence, flexibility and creativity, and even ideologies (cultural capital); and social networks (social capital). The new resources the migrants wish to access in places of arrival include educational and professional qualifications, and language skills (cultural capital); friendships, emotional support, and access to information about housing, health care, business contacts, loans, or employment, all gained by making entry into new networks (social capital); or money (economic capital). Access to political resources pertains to the migrants' relations with the supra-individual regulators of the convertibility of these three different forms of capital within the larger fields that are constituted by (the intersections of) national and other political (such as civil society) characteristics. Studying the mutual constitutivity of cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics, which have their roots in different places, enables our "identity approach" to intersectionality analysis to account for the fact that the multiple and various intersections of characteristics constituting transnational contexts, provide the transnational migrants with different degrees of recognition of their characteristics (Kloosterman and Rath 2001). The *differences* between the migrants and the people and institutions in the societies to which the migrants have moved often result in devaluation of the migrants' characteristics, and in the exclusion of the migrants from access to the very resources they desire (Chan 2005a, 2008; Lan 2006; Bauder 2008).

To attempt to decrease such exclusion, and to increase acceptance by people and institutions controlling access to desired resources, the migrants need to signal "legitimate competence" or new cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Plüss 2011)—that is, they need to attempt to convert the cultural, social, economic, and political resources already in their possession into recognition of legitimate competence or new cultural capital, in order to be given access to desired resources. Attempts to forge new cultural capital change migrant identification because doing so involves adopting new cultural characteristics or de-emphasizing cultural characteristics they already have. For example, migrants from India in colonial Hong Kong attempted to increase their acceptance by Hong Kong's colonial administration by presenting "English" identities and by de-emphasizing the relevance of their other ethnic characteristics (Plüss 2005). Attempting to undertake capital conversions in transnational contexts, more often than not, can lead to two likely and grim outcomes: hiding one's newly gained creativity as a result of having adopted elements from different cultures in order to "pass" in a Goffmanian manner (Chan, Chaps. 2 and 4 in this book) to signal conformity and sameness; and de-creolization or losing one's creativity and cultural hybridity altogether in order to conform to gain acceptance and approval of the local people (Stewart 2006). Chan (2011a, [Chap. 2]) calls such required cultural change the downside of cultural hybridity.

Adopting the ideas of cultural capital and attempted capital conversion in transnational contexts, while taking migrant identities and identifications as the core indicator of the outcome of attempted capital conversions in transnational

contexts, provides several methodological and theoretical advantages for intersectionality analysis:

1. Intersectionality analysis has been criticized for focusing too much on how race, gender, and social class act on each other to create inequalities (Davis 2008; Ellenmeier 2009). The high degree of abstraction of identities and identifications, and of Bourdieu's ideas of cultural, social, and economic capital, allow for a study of how a much wider variety of factors, including political ones, interact with one another to construct the migrants' experiences, for better *and* for worse.
2. Intersectionality analysis has not yet resolved the problem of identifying the levels (micro or macro) on which different factors influence each other (Yuval-Davis 2006). Bourdieu's ideas about capital conversion, and taking identities and identification as the core indicators of the outcomes of attempted capital conversions, allow us to discern, distinguish, and analyze multiple levels of intersections of characteristics with roots in different places (such as between identity and social class, identifications and social closure, nationality and identifications, identifications and gender roles, etc.) by showing their relative relevance to the migrants' (non-) accumulation of desired cultural, social, and economic capital.
3. The high degree of abstraction of the idea of the convertibility of capital enables us to study how migrants carry out their life projects in transnational contexts; that is, how they use the resources they already have to attempt to construct new capital in a new place of abode—seldom as individuals acting alone, but as families and kin systems since migration is often a “family affair” (Chan [1997] 2005a, b).
4. Our analytical framework proposed here, able to deal with the fact that several forces with roots in different places influence one another simultaneously to define the lives of migrants, is especially apt to account for the fact that simultaneous connectedness to several places is regarded as the key characteristic of transnational contexts (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). The idea of capital conversion allows us to show that many transnational migrants are “transmigrants,” that is, people “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across national borders and whose public identities are configured in relation to more than one nation-state” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995, 48). Generating such knowledge about migrants in Asia has important implications for the creation of emigration and immigration policies. These policies often fail because they do not account for the fact that the characteristics of migrants, as individuals and as members of collectivities, particularly as families and kin networks (Chan [1997] 2005a, b) stem from the intersections of characteristics that have their roots in several places (Castles 2004).

Our book features migrant identification as the overall indicator of the results of the migrants' attempted capital conversions. This is because there are close links between migrants' attempts to construct new cultural capital, that is, their signaling and display of “socially desirable” characteristics that other “powerful” people with different characteristics consider as legitimate competencies; the outcomes of these attempts; and the migrants' identifications. To conform (to local norms), thus de-creolizing oneself and putting one's creativity to burial, or not to conform (which includes the Mertonian options to withdraw, innovate, even rebel)—that is the question (Chan and Chan, [Chap. 5]).

1.2 Understanding Culture and Globalization

Our chapter writers contribute to the current debate on how cultures (which are expressed in identities and identifications) change under conditions of increasing globalization (Berger 2002). The chapters are grouped into four sections, which emphasize analyses of distinct topics that are important in explaining the transnational experiences of the migrants in Asia.

In *Explaining Mobility and Inequality*, Chan Kwok-bun reflects on the life experiences of return migrants and migrants, mostly on Hong Kong Chinese return migrants who returned from Canada to Hong Kong. He concludes that these returnees must situate their identifications in transnational spaces because living in either society cannot fulfill *both* their instrumental (economic) and expressive (emotional) needs. In his subsequent chapter, Chan theorizes the types of adaptations poor immigrant families from Mainland China undergo in Hong Kong. He finds that only flexibility in constructing and doing family and gender roles can lead to positive intersections of societal expectations, and family members' wish for self-fulfillment, and upward social mobility. Philip Kelly examines the implications of the transnational and domestic migration of Filipinos upon transforming identifications and the meaning of social class in a village in the province of Cavite in the Philippines.

Nation States, Social Networks, and Emotional Spaces features Chan and Chan's analysis of Hong Kong return migrants' transnational and transcultural behavioral patterns, resulting from what are often failures in their attempts to convert capital. Using Robert Merton's social strain theory, the authors construct a typology of migrant adaptation, which has implications for theory and research. Selina Lim studies the disjunctures and intersections between the spaces formed by the nation states of Singapore and of Australia, and the emotional spaces of Singaporeans living in Perth, Australia.

In *Transnational Positions and Cultural Capital*, Caroline Plüss explains that the high amounts of cultural and economic capital that highly-skilled and middle-class Chinese-Singaporean repeat migrant women possess, explain their mostly positive identifications with Western societies, and their relatively high access to desired resources. Yoonhee Kang studies how traditional mother roles of Korean educational migrants in Singapore intersect with the mothers' lack of certain forms of cultural capital, and how such intersections paradoxically help their children to become more cosmopolitan world citizens. Gracia Liu-Farrer examines the transnational identifications of PRC immigrants in Japan and throws light on the fact that intersections between ethnicity and access to desired resources are the reasons why they do not wish to become Japanese nationals.

Locating Transnational Identifications features David Chapman's reconstruction of the intersections between changing nationality and identifications in the history of the Ogasawara Islanders: they eventually disidentified from nation states in order to opt for more stable identifications with their geographical space. Amporn Jirattikorn's study of Shan migrants in Chiang Mai in Thailand shows that they construct different types of public spaces by intersecting emotional, commercial, and political spaces. In her analysis of the identifications of Hong Kong Chinese return