



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN

CFP: Rural-Urban Dynamics and Emergent Forms of Labor in India and China (Göttingen, February 22-23, 2016)

University of Göttingen, Germany
CeMIS – Centre for Modern Indian Studies
CeMEAS – Centre for Modern East Asian Studies

Rural-Urban Dynamics and Emergent Forms of Labor in India and China

In recent decades, economic reforms in India and China have changed the adaptability, speed, and direction through which capital flows in the global market economy. Accelerated growth in the two economies has been facilitated by increasing mobility and emergent forms of labor situated between agriculture, industry and services.

These developments reveal the fluidity and dynamism of the division between rural and urban, creating ambiguous interstitial spaces and networks through which new forms of labor arise. They are entangled with transformations in the regimes of production and land use, as well as with changes in the organization of kinship relations. In turn, they give rise to new subjectivities and aspirations.

Cities absorb large numbers of rural migrants aspiring to join the ranks of the urban middle classes. Illegal practices combine with legal forms of work, while private corporations and land-holding entities blur the boundary between public and private domains. The informalization of work and flexible labor practices facilitates the world's growing demand for low-wage labor at the cost of unmaking former working-class communities already facing the retrenchment of state-sponsored benefits and social services. The weakening of traditional labor unions and the limited integration of migrants into public service provision means that migrants have to rely on their capacity to secure support networks through kinship and bottom-up labor organizations. Precarious employment also pushes migrants to experiment with new entrepreneurial practices: individuals need to become competent self-starters with flexible skills and business acumen.

These processes not only transform the livelihoods of individual migrants but also the conditions of local communities in the wider sending and receiving areas. Emerging peri-urban areas take many shapes. In mega-cities, former urban cores expand and shrink, thereby cultivating dynamic spaces which serve as gateways for migrant workers in search of affordable housing and employment. Lower tier cities and so-called “urban villages” pop-up as quickly as urban cores disappear.

Indeed, perhaps the most prominent features of development in China and India today are the increasing levels of social, economic and environmental violence in these interstitial zones, which, at the same time, gives rise to individual and collective aspirations, hopes, and imaginations for a better life.

Proposals

- We invite contributions from the fields of cultural studies, labor studies, geography, political science, urban planning, sociology, anthropology, and related disciplines that address the entangled social and spatial aspects of these transformations. We encourage applicants to explore, evaluate, and debate the workshop themes by contributing empirical case studies and theoretical considerations within comparative Asian contexts.
- The questions we are interested in addressing include:
- Which new forms of labor and labor organization develop through these rural/urban dynamics?
- To what extent are interstitial zones aspirational spaces?
- Which factors facilitate, allow, and limit rural-urban migrants' upward social mobility in these interstitial zones?
- How do the experiences of migrants who float in and out of these zones challenge their gendered, ethnic, religious, and class-based self-identifications?
- How are developing transnational economic ties influencing and transforming existing institutional structures (i.e. of labor relations and production regimes)?
- How can workers interests be represented in the expansion of second- and third-sector employment in China and India? What role do old and new forms of worker organization and labor unions play in the process?
- How do rural-urban migrants and urbanites organize social security in the absence of effective, state-organized social protection?
- How do opportunities for education/skill-formation influence social mobility and employment relations? What roles do governments, enterprises, and labor unions play? Is the established state of labor market segregation along ethnicity, gender, and other lines challenged by new transnational economic ties and emerging peri-urban landscapes? How, if at all, are these transformations likely to impact on social mobility?
- How are the costs and benefits of migration distributed between the urban and rural areas?
- How do the boundary-making practices that take place within these interstitial zones articulate with national identifications, state governance, and cross-cultural encounters?

Submission of Proposals

Paper proposals should include a title, an abstract (250 words maximum) which states:

- The objective and rationale of your project
- The methods/sources used for writing the paper
- A brief personal biography of 150 words.

Deadline for abstract submission is January 4, 2016. Please send all proposals to [assist\(at\)cemeas.uni-goettingen.de](mailto:assist(at)cemeas.uni-goettingen.de).

We are applying for funding to finance travel and accommodation costs for workshop participants. For further information, please contact Ms Katja Pessl via [cemeas\(at\)uni-goettingen.de](mailto:cemeas(at)uni-goettingen.de).

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application as soon as possible after the closing date.

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