

Panel proposal (single session) to 2017 EuroSEAS conference, Oxford University

Title

Transnational migrations and gendered mobilities between Europe and Thailand.

Conveners

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*The conveners will act as **discussants** as well.*

Brief description of the panel

In the past 20 years, research on transnationalism has challenged the assumption that the nation state should be the given unit of analysis of migration research and it has instead shifted scholarly attention to the multi-stranded relations that people build between sending and receiving societies (Basch et al. 1994; Levitt and Glick Shiller 2004). This body of work has been pivotal in broadening the scope of analysis to include the importance of home-country connectedness which takes place simultaneously to network-building in the recipient country. Despite its strengths, research on transnationalism has left several scholarly challenges unaddressed. The papers which are part of proposed panel aim to engage constructively with two specific gaps in the literature of transnationalism: its relatively scant attention to the gendered underpinnings of flows and connections that constitute the lived experiences of transnational migrants; and its limited understanding of how and to what degree transnational mobilities have influenced relationships of care and intimacy in both the sending and receiving country. The papers offer to do so by providing theoretical and empirical analyses of transnational migrations between Thailand and Europe. Over the last decades highly selective and gendered migration flows between Europe and Thailand have developed in the forms of increasing mobilities for retirement, care, and intimacy as well as the global outsourcing of reproductive labour in the service economy. As such, these migrations provide excellent cases to study the gendered ways in which mobility informs individual life chances and choices. The papers presented in this panel are in a strong position to provide a 'balanced story' of transnational connections because the authors have been engaging in transnational research and scholarly collaborations for a long time. The papers thus draw from the expertise of researchers originating from different cultural and academic starting points and can therefore contribute to a richer understanding of the cross-border connections between Europe and Thailand and its gendered implications for individual life chances and life choices.

Title and abstract of each paper

'Late-life European migrants in Thailand. Gendering 'successful' ageing, community, and belonging'

Sarah Scuzzarello, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex & Christina Vogler, Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Austria.

Thailand has become a preferred destination for late-life Europeans who, as they are ageing, seek somewhere they can have a 'good life' and age 'successfully'. This article draws on 18 semi-structured interviews with Europeans late-life (over 55 year-old) migrants who live more than six months of the year in Thailand. We discuss how the pursuit of 'successful' ageing in Thailand is strongly gendered, sustained by global inequalities of power, and informed by postcolonial continuities in relation to the country, its people and the practices adopted by Europeans' daily lives in Thailand. Further, our article studies how our participants' strategies to achieve a 'good life' affect and mediate their ties with their home country and the family left behind.

Gender and Work in Thai Health and Wellbeing Tourism

Sirijit Sunanta; Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University

In recent years, Thai health and wellbeing tourism has grown rapidly contributing a significant income to the Thai economy. Thanks to systematic support and promotion by the government, Thailand has become a leading destination for health and wellbeing tourism, attracting global travellers who seek new lifestyle and experience to improve, restore and rejuvenate the mind and body. This paper adopts the feminist concept of the 'global care chain' to analyze the development of the Thai health and wellbeing tourism, arguing that this trend of global mobility is embedded in the global transfer of care and reproductive labour from wealthier economies to less wealthy ones. This paper aims to highlight the perspectives of Thai frontline care and service workers whose physical and emotional labour contributes to the growth of Thai health and wellbeing tourism. Based on an ethnographic study of five spa establishments in Bangkok, the paper analyzes 'intimate' and 'bodily' labour provided by Thai spa therapists who are predominantly working-class/lower-middle class women. The paper underscores the intersection of gender, class, and race in shaping Thai spa therapists' experiences, aspirations and access to social and economic mobility through their participation in Thai health and wellbeing tourism.

The Search for a Better Life: How Partnerships with 'Older' Westerners shape Thai life chances, social relationships and development

Paul Statham, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex & Dusita Phuengsamran, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

This study examines the social relationships produced by Thai-Western partnerships, their impact on Thai individuals, their extended families, and socioeconomic development in rural communities. First, partnerships importantly shape individual life chances and wellbeing. They can improve life chances by providing a route out of poverty and the sex industry, or lead to exploitation and trafficking. Second, partnering produces new 'family' structures that cut across generations, cultures and religions, and build transnational links between Thailand and the West. Third, partnerships can impact on the socioeconomic development of a Thai's homeland region, e.g., if remittances are sent to support the extended family, or the Westerner pays for family members' healthcare insurance or education. The study uses

the best available official statistics and interviews to estimate the scale and form of Thai-Western partnerships. The main empirical basis of this article are detailed semi-structured biographical interviews with Thai women and gay men who are in partnerships with older Western men 'Farang'. Unlike other studies, we examine relationships from the Thai perspective, focussing on life course events that led to a relationship, how a relationship works as a partnership (e.g., 'care' relations, financial exchange), the role of mobility and migration in sustaining a relationship, what sustains wellbeing for Thais (e.g., social capital) in a relationship, and the opportunities for individual social mobility and supporting extended Thai families that a relationship provides. A particular aim is to determine the degree and forms of transnational and intercultural exchanges carried by this type of relationship. The interview material is supported by a discourse analysis of Thai women's and gay men's internal collective discussions of their Western partners on their own social media platforms.

'Thai Way' or 'My Way'? A Qualitative Study of Integration and Well-being among Long-Term European Migrants in Thailand

Pattraporn Chuenglertsiri, Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex & Manasigan Kanchanachitra, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

Thailand has been a popular destination for Western migrants for many decades. Europeans come to Thailand for a variety of reasons and differing length of stay. In this paper, we seek to explore how European long-stay migrants (i.e. more than three months) integrate in the Thai society, as well as how the level of integration affects their perceived well-being. Results are based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 33 European informants who are currently living in Thailand with different purposes. Our findings indicate that integration is not a strategy actively pursued by the majority of our informants in Thailand and it does not adversely affect their daily living standards. From the four aspects of integration inspected, namely structural, cultural, social and emotional, we find that structural and social integration play a more important role in determining the level of well-being of our European informants living in Thailand, particularly under catastrophic circumstances such as illness, economic misfortune, family conflict, corruption and crime.