
The Affective Dimensions of Child-Raising in Cross-National Families in Singapore

Bernice LOH

Centre for Family and Population Research, National University of Singapore
berniceloh@nus.edu.sg (*corresponding author*)

Brenda S.A. YEOH FBA

Asia Research Institute, and Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

Shirlena HUANG

Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

Wei-Jun Jean YEUNG

Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

Studies surrounding the global circuits of migration have traced an increase in marriage migration and the formation of cross-national families. Contemporary scholarship on cross-national marriages has given attention to marriage migrants' constraints as a result of intertwining social, economic, political and legal disadvantages. In a study of 65 cross-national families across a range of socio-economic classes, this paper focuses on the affective dimensions of child-raising in Singapore. While a conventional class analysis focuses on the financial or material affordances of parenting practices, this paper illuminates how *feelings and expectations* towards parenting are embedded in class, cultural differences and inequalities for a number of spouses. Affect as a generative framework extends discussions about parenting beyond emotions, where evaluations of the self and others are not separable from wider discourses about class, cross-national marriages and ideologies about good parenting. Notably, it also accounts for 'feeling rules', where there are certain ways that one must be invested in and to 'feel' as a parent. The stresses of 'feeling structures' can be observed from the mismatched demands of parenting between certain couples: despite increased financial burdens, there were Singaporean husbands in the study who had preferred their working wives to prioritise their roles as primary caregivers, and migrant women who pointed out that the male breadwinning role while important was inadequate for a child's development. Expected ways of feeling may also present emotional dissonances for spouses, especially for those who have left-behind children or children from previous relationships. While some migrant mothers were contented that their children in Singapore were well taken care of and had received copious amounts of attention from their husbands and grandparents, this engendered guilt towards their children back home whom they had to leave under the care of the maternal family. This paper examines how struggles and investments in parenting are not only undergirded by ideals of 'good' (middle-class) parenting and traditional gender roles and expectations, extended family members also have a critical role to play in establishing parenting competencies for the spouses in cross-national marriages. Affects generated through parenting are often relational and reflect one's position in the Singapore society and within the family.

Bernice Loh is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the National University of Singapore, Centre for Family and Population Research. She is a qualitative researcher on the SGLEADS project, focusing on cross-national families with young children residing in Singapore. Her current research work centres on transnational migration, cross-national families, gender and youth and youth identities.

Brenda S.A. Yeoh FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, as well as Director, Humanities and Social Science Research Office of Deputy President (Research & Technology), National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster in the Asia Research Institute. She was recently awarded the prestigious Vautrin Lud Prize (2021) for her outstanding achievements in the field of Geography. She was also the only Singaporean thus far to be elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy as a Corresponding Fellow. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities

and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics and international marriage migrants. She has published widely in these fields and her recent books include *Asian Migrants and Religious Experience: From Missionary Journeys to Labor Mobility* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018 with B. Brown), *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (Routledge, 2018 with G. Liu-Farrer) and *Student Mobilities and International Education in Asia: Emotional Geographies of Knowledge Spaces* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020 with R. Sidhu and K.C. Ho).

Shirlena Huang is Associate Professor at the Geography Department at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Her research focuses mainly on issues at the intersection of migration, gender and families (with a particular focus on care labour migration and transnational families within the Asia-Pacific region) as well as urbanisation and heritage conservation (particularly in Singapore). She serves on several editorial boards including *Gender Place and Culture*, *International Journal of Population Research*, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, and *Women's Studies International Forum*, as well as book series *Asian Cultural Studies: Transnational and Dialogic Approaches* (Rowman & Littlefield) and *The Intimate and the Public in Asian and Global Perspectives* (Brill).

Wei-Jun Jean Yeung is Provost's Chair Professor of Sociology, Founding Director of the Centre for Family and Population Research, and Research Leader of the Changing Family in Asia cluster in the Asia Research Institute in the National University of Singapore (NUS). She is a leading scholar in demography and family studies, with work published in leading international journals. Prof Yeung has received many prestigious research awards. Her recent publications include books on Singapore family and population and Southeast Asian families; volumes on marriage in Asia; migration and marriage; living alone: one-person households in Asia; long-term care in Asia; and productive aging.