

## INTRODUCTION

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# Studying Families in Asia

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Families are a central part of Asian societies, a region home to three-fifths of the world's population. Its cultural, economic, and political diversities make it an ideal place to dissect local changes or reinforcements in family patterns and trends. Families in Asia share deeply rooted common features, but specific relations continue to vary across culture, geography, and history in contemporary time. In East Asia, the impact of changing demographic features especially the rise of the aging population as a result of its accelerated economic development, is putting immense pressure on family structures. Family formation is also increasingly being mediated by technology, evident in the growing number of users of dating applications or matrimonial sites for arranged marriages in South Asia. Even in elections in Southeast Asia, families with deep and wide networks continue to dominate other smaller or weaker political families. The influence of these dominant families extends beyond the world of politics and into the economic and

social life of their societies. In making sense of families in present-day Asia, we look at both the effects of rapid modernization of and in Asia and its consequent ideational shifts as well as the persisting sociological and political trajectories that continue to shape family norms in this part of the world. This *Asian Studies* Special Issue on Families in Asia specifically gathers the latest empirical research and informed reflections on the themes of cultural shifts, inequalities, and politics within the family in the region.

### **Cultural Shifts**

The first theme, cultural shifts, explores significant and fundamental changes in how families perceive, behave, and interact with their societies. This relates to the persisting East versus West debate on cultural differences which influences Asian family values. In the article of Syed Imad Alatas, “Compatibility despite Controversy,” he addresses the question of why and how Sunni-Shia marriages take place despite mistrust between the two communities. Looking at interfaith marriages in Singapore, he discusses how values, education, and parenting strategies help in strengthening marital relations.

From examining husband-wife relations, the next work focuses on father involvement (FI). Nanxun Li’s review essay, “What Do We Know About Fatherhood?” shows the conceptual development of FI and how it is used in terms of leave policy implementation. She also proposes approaches to the topic such as paying attention to intra-regional differences and including the mediating role of FI with mother’s involvement. Fatherhood was also a theme in Michael Fast’s essay, “*Pagkalalake at Maka-Diyos*.” The review essay aims to understand how masculinity and religiosity shape Filipino families. Fast looks at how *haligi-ilaw* (pillar-light, where the father is the pillar and the mother is the light) dichotomy influences men’s perception of their responsibilities in the family.

## **Inequalities**

The second theme, inequalities, dissects continuing uneven access to opportunities, resources, rights, or privileges by varied familial groups across Asia. Such uneven access, in the family context, as will be shown in the contents of this special issue, could be based on age, gender, or type of work.

In analyzing colonial and militarized masculinities, Sanjay Sharma, Bhawana Limbu, and Seema Shrestha wrote the article “Relationship in Progress,” which focuses on the Gurkhas and their families. Through interviews, they found that while gender roles and expectations for Gurkha fathers like providing opportunities (migrating to the UK) and financial support for the family were fulfilled, their emotional absence affected their relationship with their children.

Using mixed-method approach, the article, “Determinants of Life Satisfaction among Elderly Filipinos,” by Genny G. Bandoles highlights another relevant topic to family studies. She identified significant health, social engagement, economic, and demographic factors that affect life (dis)satisfaction among the elderly. Bandoles suggests that economic and emotional constraints be considered when designing policies.

In addition to works about transnational military migrants and elderly Filipino, Veronica L. Gregorio’s essay, “From Womb to Laboratories,” explores how siblingship is examined in the context of an increasingly complex family system. It provides a picture of the overall scholarship landscape on siblingship—as influenced by serial monogamy and multiple-partnered relationships vis-à-vis family migration, legal adoptions, and assisted reproductive technology (ART).

## **Politics**

The last theme is politics—in which we analyze not only the interaction and negotiation between families and institutions to shape public policies and influence political systems, but also in terms of claiming and exercising power and authority inside the home. In Haula Noor’s controversial article,

“Perpetuating Loyalty,” she examines the role of parents in creating conditions for children to join terrorist groups. Through key interviews with Indonesian families who are involved in extremist activities and organizations, the article highlights religious upbringing, role of mothers as moral guardians, and engagement in jihadism in making ideological transmission successful.

The works of Sandeepan Tripathy and Cleve V. Arguelles should be read as a pair. Sandeepan Tripathy’s commentary, “The Two Families of Modi,” shows how the rhetoric on the family assisted in Modi’s populist mobilization. The commentary explains how Modi’s “familyless-ness” and identification with Indian diaspora as his extended family were strategically used. Cleve V. Arguelles’ essay, “From Anarchy to Unity of Families in the 2022 Philippine elections,” demonstrates how the Marcos-Duterte tandem positioned themselves as continuity candidates—mobilizing state resources and disinformation campaigns in social media. More importantly, Arguelles discussed how the arranged marriage between the Marcos-Duterte families, networks, and resources led to their victory.

Overall, this special issue reveals how families and the relationships within it can be used as analytical lenses. May it be dyad (husband-wife or parents-children) or generational (among sibling groups or elderly members), family dynamics will continue to evolve.

### **Book Reviews and Travel Narratives**

This special issue also includes two book reviews and one travel narrative. Lily Rose Tope reviewed *The Votive Pen: Writings on Edwin Thumboo* by Sengupta Nilanjana while Juan Ricardo David DC Lejarde reviewed *Media Persuasion in the Islamic State* by Neil Krishan Aggarwal. The former is a biography of a Singapore poet including his ideas on nationhood, multiculturalism, and decolonization while the latter touches on prominent figures in the jihadist movement and how they strengthen their propaganda. The last piece in the issue is a travel narrative by Kim Harold T. Peji. It is about his experiences living in South Korea as a Filipino graduate student.

### **The Production Process**

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