

[Health Infrastructure and Asia's Epidemiological Transitions: Historical Perspectives](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

October 31, 2021

Location:

Singapore

Subject Fields:

Southeast Asian History / Studies, Public History, Public Health

This workshop is jointly organised by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, and the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo.

The contemporary syndemic of infectious diseases, chronic health conditions, poverty, rising heat, and the lack of access to education and information has brought into focus the fragilities of existing health care systems primarily based on medical centers and reliant on a small core of professionals. This suggests a need to investigate the historical evolution of not only health care systems but also the infrastructures that underlay them; how they have succeeded or failed to cope with epidemiological and other transitions in the long twentieth century that brought us to the present moment.

"Infrastructure" in Science and Technology Studies draws attention to institutions, materials, spaces, routines, and conventions that come together to shape and enable systems. Sociologists of health have adopted the concept of "care infrastructure" to engage with the interactions between material and social elements of present-day home care and selfcare practices against the backdrop of the perceived transition from the age of pestilence to the age of chronic non-communicable diseases. "Health infrastructure" can also broadly encompass historical variations of the socio-technical relations behind all kinds and scales of routine and emergency health services, with an emphasis on integrating those relations within the larger forces of changing demographics, inequality, environmental conditions, political claim making, and state-society as well as international relations.

This workshop will investigate Asian experiences, and in particular those of East and Southeast Asia, in crafting health infrastructure over the long twentieth century. Asia has long been stigmatized as a source of global contagion, yet relatively little research about the fallout of epidemics in the region is available for an English readership. There has also been relatively little historical examination of the everyday health challenges faced by communities in Asia. With many lower- and middle-income countries in the region having faced epidemiological transitions, especially also due to the increasing impact of climate change, and its extensive internal and international migration and trade networks, Asia provides important ground for the comparison of different health infrastructures, their developments, and their ability to cope with crises.

The workshop seeks to bring together scholars with different geographic foci within Asia to engage in

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a comparative and connective dialogue, and produce new ways of understanding the dynamics of health and disease under the processes of decolonization and development, but also with an eye to drawing lessons from the past that could lead to formulating better health policies in the present.

Participants are encouraged, but not limited, to using historical studies and ethnography to discuss the following thematic questions:

- Are there particular types or elements of health infrastructure that we can characterize as more common or characteristic of this part of the world, and if so, what were their historic drivers and outcomes?
- How was health infrastructure shaped by the political claims and rights of different social groups (e.g., migrants, minorities)? How has it been influenced by demographic and epidemiological shifts and complexities?
- How have forces operating at a global level influenced the construction and operation of local health infrastructures?
- How did encounters between indigenous and foreign medical knowledge and methods of health provision reshape the meaning of health infrastructure in postcolonial Asia?
- How have health infrastructures developed under decolonisation, the Cold War, geopolitical tensions, the rise of Third Worldism, and neoliberal globalisation?
- What health conditions were highlighted within Asian health infrastructures and how were they measured? What do those choices tell us about assumptions about the health issues that were of importance and relevance in Asia?

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Submissions should include a title, an abstract of no more than 250 words and a brief biography including name, institutional affiliation, and email contact. Please note that only previously unpublished papers or those not already committed elsewhere can be accepted. By participating in the workshop, you agree to participate in the future publication plans of the organisers.

Please use the [paper proposal form](#) and send it in doc/docx format to Sharon at arios@nus.edu.sg by **31 October 2021**. Successful applicants will be notified by **end November**. Once accepted, a completed draft paper (5,000-8,000 words) will be due by **13 March 2022**. These drafts will be circulated to fellow panelists and organisers in advance. Drafts need not be fully polished. We expect that presenters will be open to feedback and willing to revise their papers for potential inclusion in a special issue submission (in collaboration with the workshop organisers and other participants).

COVID-19 related note: We intend to hold this workshop on location in Singapore. Accepted participants will be provided a subsidy for a round-trip economy-class airfare to Singapore, lodging, and some meals. But under some circumstances remote participation may also be a possibility. Should travel to Singapore be impossible due to the virus, we plan to proceed with the workshop remotely.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

[Assoc Prof Kavita SIVARAMAKRISHNAN](#), Associate Professor in Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

[Dr Dongxin ZOU](#)

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