

Call for Abstracts:

Aspirations of young adults in urban Asia

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This is a Call for Abstracts to contribute to an ethnographically-informed edited volume on the aspirations of youth and young adults in urban Asia (target publication: 2019). We are particularly interested in contributions from early career scholars. As our aim is to make this edited volume to go beyond Western-centric appraisals and present a truly global portrait, we particularly encourage local scholars from Asian communities to contribute.

As of 2008, over half of the world's population lives in cities. Asia is home to some of the world's largest metropolises. These urban societies are often marked by a redefined role of the nation state, mobility and (global) migration, a high rate of socio-cultural heterogeneity, issues of power and representation, socioeconomic tensions, and changing relations to nature, amongst others. As such, they are excellent sites to study the socio-cultural, economic and political aspirations that individuals hold.

This volume will explore some of these intricacies by analysing the aspirations of youth and young adults who are trying to find a home, make a living, and construct a life in different cities in Asia. By bringing together contributions of scholars studying different contexts, and by inviting scholars to read and reflect on each other's work, we aspire to create a broader theoretical framework for the study of economic, socio-cultural and political aspirations of youth and young adults in urban Asian contexts.

For more information on the topic of the volume, please refer to the overview below. You may send your proposed title, abstract (between 300 and 500 words), name, and affiliation to Dr. Mariske Westendorp (m.westendorp@maw.ru.nl) by November 15, 2017.

URBAN ASPIRATIONS

Following anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2004), we regard aspirations as cultural capacities, oriented towards the future, related to wants, preferences, choices and calculations.¹ They include ideas about, "life and death, the nature of worldly possessions, the significance of material assets over social relations, the relative illusion of social permanence for a society, the value of peace or war" (ibid., p. 68). As economist Debraj Ray points out, aspirations emerge within the framework of larger ethical and metaphysical ideas and, as such, are not merely individual but formed in interaction with social life, or "the cognitive neighbourhood of [a] person" (2006, p. 409).² The constructed ideas determine a person's wants and wishes for 'commodities', which are both material (e.g., property and work) and immaterial (e.g., leisure, respectability, and friendship).

¹ Appadurai, Arjun (2004). The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. In Vijayendra Rao & Michael Walton (Eds), *Culture and Public Action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

² Ray, Debraj (2006). Aspirations, Poverty, and Economic Change. In Abhijit Banerjee, Roland Bénabou & Dilip Mookherjee (Eds), *Understanding Poverty* (pp. 409-421). Oxford, US: Oxford University Press.

While Appadurai and other scholars write mainly about the aspirations of the poor or marginalised members of society, we recognize the potential of using the concept of aspirations when also focusing on members of middle and upper classes. Significant socio-cultural, political and economic changes and challenges of rapid urbanization and development are not exclusive to those of lower socio-economic means, but are felt in varying ways across all sections or classes of society.

In addition, until recently academic debate surrounding aspirations focused mainly on the link between class and economic aspirations. While this link is clear, little attention has been paid to how aspirations are intrinsically related to people's political and socio-cultural notions, values and beliefs, and how even economic aspirations may be political or socially guided and/or framed. A recent volume by Henrietta Moore and Nicholas Long (2013) addresses a similar argument, however not specifically related to Asian urban contexts.³

For these reasons, we regard 'aspirations' to be a useful concept to bring together different studies that focus on urban youth and young adults in Asia. It can help us to "get away from the static connotations of the concept of 'identity' that tends to fix people to what and where they are rather than to what and where they aspire to be" (Van der Veer, 2015, p. 4). An edited volume focusing on aspirations will help to further develop this concept.

In order to do this, possible questions that contributors could relate to are:

- How are lives in cities constructed in the face of urban (un)certainities and (un)happiness?
- How does culture change arising from urban environments play out in the aspirations of young adults (e.g., tensions between traditional expectations and opportunities that did not exist before)? And, who are these youth and young adults in Asia today?
- Is there anything specific about aspirations in Asia? And, what does a study on aspirations tell us about life in Asian cities?
- How are changing aspirations influencing social relationships within the family and beyond? And, how do young people negotiate their personal aspirations with their obligations towards their families?
- Does the context of the urban environment produce aspirations which are more individualistically or economically based, compared to other contexts?
- To what degree are aspirations influenced by international forces and media compared to the local context? And, can aspirations based on international media consumption be ill-fitted to the local context?
- Are aspirations informed by ideas of pan-Asianism (or associated ones, such as the ASEAN community), or are they formed in the context of nationalist or individualist concerns?

BOOK FORMAT

The edited volume will ideally hold a collection of ethnographically inspired studies on the aspirations of youths and young adults in different East, Southeast and South Asian cities. The collection will entail an introduction, written by the editors of the book; 12-15 ethnographic contributions of young anthropologists; and an epilogue written by a more senior scholar in the field. Chapters will involve descriptions and analyses of political, economic, and/or socio-cultural aspirations of young people living in Asian cities, and the ways in which these aspirations are pursued. The contributing chapters will be written by young, aspiring scholars, pursuing an emic

³ Long, Nicholas and Henrietta Moore (Eds.) (2013). *The Social Life of Achievement*. New York: Berghahn Books.

understanding of life in urban Asia. Each of the chapters will provide a different understanding of aspirations across various urban contexts. By bringing the chapters together, and by involving contributors in reading and reflecting on the other contributions to the edited volume, we aspire to create a theoretical framework for the study of urban aspirations in Asia.

CHAPTER FORMAT

Each chapter will be between 5,000-7,000 words. A standard format will help ensure coherence.

Title	
Abstract	500
Introduction to the chapter	750
Context, current state of the field, concepts and methods	1,000
Substantive discussion	2,500 - 3,000
Conclusion: contribution to research theme	750 - 1,000
Bibliography	
Citation style	APA / Chicago 15 th

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

Once all abstract proposals are received, the editors of the book will invite selected scholars to write their chapter. When all chapters are in, a digital discussion forum will be created in which contributors are asked to read each other’s chapters, comment on them, and then revise (sections of) their own chapters in light of discussion and feedback. This way of working-together will ensure a coherent volume, and will help us develop an overarching theoretical framework for the book.

Submission of abstracts	November 15, 2017
Notification of inclusion in volume	January, 2018
Submission of manuscripts to digital discussion forum	March 31, 2018
End of discussions in forum	June 30, 2018
Revised manuscripts to assigned editors	August 31, 2018
Revised manuscripts	January 1, 2018
Consolidate complete manuscript	March 1, 2019