

Conversations and Collaboration among Population Experts and Institutions in Asian: A New Beginning

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The “Colloquium on Innovations on Teaching and Research in Demography in Asia” held on 10 November 2021 provided a forum for sharing of experiences/ opinions among institutions and scholars on how to forge ahead with innovations and collaboration in the field of demography and population studies in Asia. The Colloquium was conducted by APA in partnership with UNFPA APRO, hosted by the Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, and coordinated by the APA Secretary-General (Nimfa Ogena) and two APA Council Member (KS James and Yeung Wei-Jun Jean) as well as Wassana Im-Em (UNFPA). It was open to the public, i.e., not limited to APA members. The colloquium was attended by 135 participants, consisting of 93 APA members and 42non-members, mostly from Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka.

In his welcome remarks, Director of UNFPA APRO, Bjorn Andersson, expressed the importance of the colloquium in laying another solid platform to leverage closer consultation on how to strengthen collaboration among the key population institutions in the region.

In welcoming the participants to the colloquium, the President of APA, Aris Ananta, cited the paper of Peter McDonald in 2018¹ on the history of development of institutions on demography and population studies in Asia. Noted in the paper was the mushrooming of population and demographic institutions in Asia during the 1960s and 1970s because demographic analysis was very relevant to the global development issues at that time. The growth of these institutions was attributed to the existence of generous international financial and political support as well as the provision of demographic expertise, especially from the US. The political issue at that time was that large and rapidly growing numbers of population in Asia were a burden in economic development efforts. Therefore, family planning was seen as the solution and topics on reducing fertility and increasing contraceptive use were dominant in demographic research and teaching.

¹ See McDonald, P. 2018. 'The development of population research institutions in Asia', in Zhao, Z. and Hayes, A. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Demography*. Middle Park, Abington: Routledge.

The APA President underscored that if we are to learn from the past, there is a need to make demography/ population studies relevant in a changing world. For example, demographic analysis needs to respond to the current triple crises, from COVID-19 pandemic/ endemic, climate crisis, and digital technology. We need to be able to relate all our work to current and future development issues. Furthermore, as development issues become much more complex, demographic studies need to work more closely with other disciplines, and not limited to working with social scientists. Studies on demography may for example need knowledge on physics and chemistry to understand climate crisis. Studies on demography may need to work with big data to analyze people mobility during a pandemic/endemic. In the same manner, studies on demography may need the knowledge of digital technology to understand and anticipate changing economic and social behavior during the digital era.

To focus the discussion during the colloquium, some questions were put forward: Are there new kinds of data sets needed? Do we need different analytical techniques? Is there any special characteristic of “Asia” in demographic teaching and research? Can we show the heterogeneity of “Asian” teaching and research in demography? What kind of collaborations will we have? With the online technology, is it possible to better conduct collaboration among institutions and scholars in teaching and research?

Held virtually, the colloquium had two parts. The first part was a panel discussion with five invited speakers while the second part was an open discussion among colloquium participants in four breakout groups specifically devoted for training, research, training needs, and collaboration.

The panel discussion was moderated by Wassana Im-Em. It started with a brief narration by Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi on the beginnings of the APA in 2004 and how it was eventually formalized in 2007. This was followed by each panelist who briefly presented their academic and research programs, how they evolved through the years, and innovations implemented in response to changing demands on the discipline. Some of the innovations cited are the expansion of the teaching into the undergraduate level and offering of 'bit-size courses' such as the micro-credential courses for population analyst, policymaker, or specialist in the health, education and social care professions at ANU, which are tailored to various demands in the demographic field, the move from teaching ‘demography’ to ‘population studies’, engaging in multi-disciplinary research to address contemporary issues such as the effect of the Covid-19

pandemic on the population. The panelists opened many different issues even beyond the themes mentioned above such as the need for a demographic thought as basis for a unifying identity of demographers when engaging in cross-cutting and multi-disciplinary issues like food security as well as population, health and environment (PHE); and the inclusion of 3Ps (public demography, political demography, and policy design) in demographic teaching in the region, among others.

The open discussion in the breakout rooms revealed more issues on teaching and research on demography in Asia, as well as mechanisms for collaboration. The group for teaching discussed issues such as the expansion of the scope of demographic teaching to cover multi-disciplinary aspects; collaborations through student exchanges, online sharing of experiences of demographic institutions, and formalizing these collaborations; and updating with new methods and techniques, development of software for data analytics and big data.

Another group further discussed the need for training on indirect techniques for population projections, especially relevant for small areas; data quality assessment for adjusting and evaluating census data; how to do modules for the shift on online teaching as a result of the pandemic; household projections (e.g., APA-NUS training in January 2022); how to communicate for advocacy in dealing with parliamentarians/policy makers; human resource gap as most demographers have retired so young demographers have to be trained; applied demography; big data (how to collect, how to analyze, make meaningful analysis).

The group that discussed possible research collaboration in Asia identified four broad subjects: 1) changing family in Asia with many dimensions to it (extended to nuclear as people move to the cities, increasing childlessness, infertility related to delay of first births including sexual behavior of young people, effects of the pandemic on families as more children are left without parents); (2) population mobility, migration, refugees, forced migration (impact of climate change on population mobility, rising sea level, social integration of migrants esp int'l migrants, impact on domestic workers); (3) health (birth weights and nutrition); and (4)-economic (demographic dividend, labor supply in the context of population ageing).

Finally, the group that discussed mechanisms for collaboration cited the possible offering of short courses or summer seminars focusing on research techniques/methodology; online sharing of videos on demography topics that cater to graduate students as not all demography departments have expertise in their departments; making the courses interactive, appealing to young generation to get them interested in demography; and how to evaluate the participants.

In her closing remarks, the Deputy Director of UNFPA APRO, Annette Sachs Robertson, concluded that the colloquium has provided an excellent opportunity to reflect on good practices and challenges faced in teaching and research on population, but also to forge partnerships and collaboration among the population institutions in Asia. The extraordinary insights, experience, and expertise shared by heads of the population institutions in Asia together with inputs and contributions from the APA members who are both users and products of the population development field have been thought provoking and inspiring.

Initially conceived 17 years ago and 14 years since the inauguration of the establishment committee to create APA, the Colloquium is a new beginning as it recharged the spirit of conversations, and provided an opening of future discourses, sharing, and collaboration among experts and institutions in Asia towards the sustainability of the fields of demography and population studies. Hence, we look forward to the implementation of more active collaborations, especially in partnership with the UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office.

Finally, Premchand Dommaraju, Vice President of APA, closed the colloquium by expressing his deep appreciation to all the speakers, chairs and moderators, and participants. On behalf of APA, he thanked UNFPA and Mahidol University for their support to the event. The event would not have been possible without their strong support and the hard work of the APA secretariat. It was heartening to note that the colloquium continues a discussion that was started 17 years back. He was happy to note that the colloquium has provided a platform to continue sharing, collaborating, and working together on teaching, research and training needs related to demography in Asia.

Below is more information on the colloquium.

Colloquium on Innovations in Teaching and Research in Demography in Asia
(Virtual Mode)

10 November 2021, 13.00-16.00 Bangkok time

Background

There have been considerable demographic changes sweeping across countries of Asia in recent decades. At the same time, the pace of demographic changes and the current levels of demographic achievements are distinctly different among nations in the region. Demographic changes have differential impact across countries. In addition to this, the COVID pandemic has affected all

spheres of life in the continent. The demographic effects of the pandemic have been subjected to deep investigation in many countries although there were no attempts to bring them together for a unified understanding as well as to bring it part of the teaching and research across countries of Asia.

The demographers, undoubtedly, have an important role to reflect upon the scope and future of the discipline as well as the changes necessary in teaching and research given nearly negligible collaboration across Asian demographic institutions. As a result, the sharing of knowledge across countries of Asia as well as several Asian specificities do not come as part of the curriculum of demographic teaching as well as research. For instance, the demographic transition pattern in many parts of Asia has been significantly different in terms of many theories particularly challenging the demographic transition theory. However, such models have not been part of any demographic teaching in Asia.

At the same time, it is important to note that demographers as a community significantly adjust to the changing reality in their teaching research. For instance, the HIV AIDS epidemic has resulted in innovations in the field resulting in developing several courses in this area. The age structure transition and ageing has also led to considerable change in the teaching and research focus on demography in the last few decades. As most demographers are consumers of grand theories and try to apply the knowledge in empirical reality, it is appropriate that the teaching and research also adapt to the contemporary reality and more importantly bring together the knowledge base created in respective countries.

With the pandemic inflicting all aspects of life, it is important for the demographic community to make every effort to examine and chart potential changes in teaching and research considering a new world which will be significantly different from what we have been living in the past. The teaching and research programs, therefore, will need to cater to the increasing demand for demographers for the future world which is expected to be different. At the global level, IUSSP and PAA organize such discussions to understand the ways in which demographic teaching and research need to move in the future, but such discussions are more important at the regional context.

Focus of the Colloquium

This colloquium will bring together scholars of demographic institutions in Asia to leverage closer consultation on how to strengthen collaborations and exchanges among the population institutions in the region. It will explore mechanisms for cooperation across institutions in demographic research across countries than can be incorporated in the teaching curriculum in Asia. It will also ultimately help in better partnership and exchange of ideas through possible North-South-South Cooperation on population training and institutional capacity development.

Timing and Method of the Colloquium

The colloquium will be held on 10 November 2021 immediately before the APA General Assembly using an online mode given the current pandemic situation. The three-hour colloquium

will consist of a panel discussion and break-out groups on teaching, research, training needs and collaboration among Asian institutions.

Leading experts from academic institutions with long-standing international masters and/or doctoral demography degree programs in Asia will be invited in the panel discussion. Each one will discuss challenges they faced in offering demography degrees, conducting population-related research, and innovations they implemented to keep the teaching of demography and population research relevant and thriving given emerging issues affecting the population such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, population ageing, etc.

The four break-out groups after the panel discussion opens the floor for other Asian institutions to recommend concrete activities that APA may pursue in the next 2-3 years. The four topics for discussion will focus on teaching, research, training needs and collaboration among academic institutes in Asia.

Programme

Time	Session	Speakers
12:45	Zoom opens	
13:00	Opening Remarks	APA President, Aris Ananta UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Director, Bjorn Andersson
13:10	Panel Discussion	<u>Chair/Moderator:</u> Wassana Im-Em, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO) Panelists: 1. Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, University of Tehran 2. Edith Gray, Australian National University 3. Turro Wongkaren, Universitas Indonesia 4. Ram B Bhagat, International Institute for Population Sciences 5. Sureeporn Punpuing, Mahidol University
14:00	Open forum	
14:30	Break-out groups 1. Teaching 2. Research	<u>Chair:/Moderator</u> K S James, International Institute for Population Sciences Peter McDonald, Australian National University

	3. Training needs	Grace Cruz, University of the Philippines Population Institute
	4. Collaboration among Asian institutes group	Bussarawan Teerawhitchainan, National University of Singapore
15:00	BREAK	
15:15	Report of each break-out group	<u>Chair/Moderator:</u> APA Secretary-General, Nimfa B. Ogena
15:55	Closing Remarks	UNFPA APRO Deputy Regional Director, Annette Sachs Robertson APA Vice President, Premchand Dommaraju

Master of Ceremonies: Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, APA Council Member