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INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Bequeathing Families: Inheritance, Maintenance, and Change

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THE 'family' – not necessarily the nuclear household as we know it in the modern era, but more broadly defined as a web of relatedness (Carsten 2000) – is arguably the most basic and important collectivity and institution for producing 'humanness' in its biological and civilizational senses.

The family is a mode of transmission of life, a mode of inheritance of things tangible and intangible, as well as a mode of creation and innovation. Through families, genes and traits, wealth and things, name and reputation, contacts and networks, culture, memory, and history, knowledge and skills, rights, debts, and obligations, rituals, everyday practices – in other words, ways of seeing and ways of being and doing – are passed on, though not unchanged, across time.

In Southeast Asia, the form, function, style, reach, and system of the family may vary from one time to another and from area to area (Hayami *et al.* 2012), but the family remains a key institution for accumulating and distributing wealth; for doing politics and business; for organising social and sexual relations; for producing, diffusing, and reshaping culture; for reinforcing, flouting, and rethinking ideas and norms; and for making history, across time and across ever vaster expanses of space.

Families rework and negotiate relations among their members and with the larger community and society. Families are shaped by the geophysical, social, political, cultural, and ideological environments they put down roots in or traverse. Families also play a role in transforming these terrains.

For the family is not simply a historical entity that persists or a line or branch of humanity that comes to an end; it is also a malleable 'idea' or collection of ideas that lends itself to cultural fashioning. What it means, who can claim to belong and who cannot or chooses not to, how it fares, why it is valued or not, whether it survives at all, and what it does in one area, across areas, and in the world more generally are by no means immutable nor even immemorial.

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This issue on *Bequeathing Families* explores the family dynamics of preservation and change. The contributors adopt a variety of critical approaches – historical, comparative, trans-local (Brickell and Datta 2011) – to explore the ways in which the 'family' acts within specific historical and institutional contexts as a vector not only of survival, conservation, and continuity, but also of social, political, economic, and cultural change.

The contributors are well aware of the fact that the family is itself undergoing transformation as ties wrought by blood, marriage, livelihood, and law are forged, dissolved, expanded, and reinvented amidst migrational, economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and ideational processes unfolding at the local, national, regional (both supranational and subnational) and global scales.

The articles are concerned, above all, with identifying the potentials and limits of Southeast Asian families' ability to 'bequeath' their tangible and intangible resources – wealth, political and social networks, recognition and prestige, advantages acquired through education and mastery of knowledge, skills, and techniques, memories, emotions, and 'care' – to their members, and in so doing, ensure the survival of the family and the maintenance if not expansion or new forging of familial connections, fortunes, and power across space and time.

The contributors explore how ideas and practices of what constitutes 'family' may be tested and transformed by strategies of inheritance, maintenance, and change. 'Bequeathing families' – referring both to the family as mode of transmission and to the 'family' as that which, in its variable, mutating form, is transmitted over time – can play important roles in shaping the bodily, discursive, cultural, economic, political processes at work in and beyond Southeast Asia.

The articles look at how the 'family' as idea, practice, and institution draws on, as much as it is interrogated by, new technologies, new economic opportunities, new laws and changing political systems, increased mobility and networking, new ideas and practices, and new forms of relatedness (including publics and communities across borders) that come with nation-building, regionalisation, and globalisation.

Alfred W. McCoy's multigenerational comparison of two family firms in the Philippines and America – the Lopezes and the Piels – pinpoints the forces, settings, and practices that account for the resilience (or otherwise) of family fortunes beyond the proverbial three generations. The Piels saw their family business flourish, but over just three generations, give way to transnational conglomerates as more family members left the business and opted to become professionals. The dynamics of the family-run firm created fissures within the family that interfered with the management of the business. Moreover, the growth of finance capital, the managerial revolution, and the impersonal nature of economic regulation and national security in America have tended in the long run to discourage firms from remaining under the control of a single family (though perhaps the case of the Rockefellers shows that family fortunes can also be

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safeguarded by professional money managers). In the Philippine case, by contrast, McCoy identifies several ingredients that are crucial to the long-term success of one of the country's most prominent families as well as the continuing entrenchment of the oligarchy in the Philippines. The key lies not merely in the ability of successive generations to produce visionary, energetic patriarchs who have relied on the family's pooled resources and capital to seize the economic opportunities afforded by the development of sugar plantations and sugar-milling; the expansion of air, land, and sea transportation networks; the restructuring of public utilities; and the rise of new forms of communication technology. Just as important has been the family's keen grasp of the 'rent-seeking' possibilities afforded by close alliance with a powerful Philippine presidency and participation in the national electoral politics nurtured during the American era and thereafter (see the case studies in McCoy 1993). What McCoy calls the "symbiosis of the family's political influence and corporate growth" has implications for the perpetuation of a strong Filipino oligarchy based on families vis-a-vis a 'weak' Philippine state and the long-term prospects for economic development and democracy. The continued existence of this kind of rent-seeking family-based entrepreneurship undermines public institutions and obstructs efforts at government reform that would have curbed the power of this politico-economic elite.

The family as a mode of political inheritance is the subject of James Ockey's study of Thai politics, where nearly one-third of the elected members of parliament since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy share a surname with at least one other member of the parliament. Ockey suggests that political families can be fruitfully analysed as a form of 'occupational following'. Political families pass down their 'brand' names, wealth, job skills, and contacts to their ambitious progeny, and family support can be helpful in getting younger and female candidates elected. In Thailand, too, there is a symbiosis of business and politics: the practice of politics is a kind of business investment, a way of protecting and preserving the family's business assets, even as increased economic competition has intensified political competition among powerful families. Ockey's study finds the family assuming the function of providing effective organization because of the absence of strong political party organizations, but argues against reducing the impact of political inheritance to questions of corruption and nepotism (cf. Day 2002: 38-89, for a historicization of the relationship between state and family in Southeast Asia). The fate of these political families and the political inheritance they pass on to their heirs depend on the nature of the evolving electoral system and the relative strength of political parties.

While McCoy and Ockey provide compelling evidence of how some families are able (or unable) to maintain their power, wealth, and influence over time and the challenges they face in adapting to socio-economic and political change, the two other articles in this issue focus on the question of how the family itself, as sociological fact and as "imaginative construct" (Hunt 1992: 196), may be

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reaffirmed as well as reinvented in the very process of its persistence as a cultural unit across time.

Tiger Mother as Ethnopreneur focuses on Yale law professor Amy Chua's bestselling memoir detailing her efforts as a "Chinese mother" to raise her daughters to be high achievers. Drawing on her own experience of being brought up by strict Chinese-Filipino immigrant parents in America, Chua purveys a brand of 'Chinese' parenting that plays on the fear of family decline after the third generation, decline that she attributes to the "laziness, vulgarity and spoiledness" promoted by what she terms 'Western' parenting. The dichotomy that Chua establishes between 'Chinese' and 'Western' cultural values belies the fact that Chua herself is an example of the kind of hybrid Anglo-Chinese who historically flourished in the Asian regional system under British and American hegemony. Moreover, this 'Chinese' vs. 'Western' parenting plays on the fear of national decline, tapping into American anxieties over the waning of American power in the face of the rise of China, while offering the promise of national rejuvenation through the figure of the immigrant, aspirational American whose hybridity re-infuses America with the values of discipline and ambition it is in perennial danger of losing. The reception of Chua's memoir in mainland China is revealing, however, of a different set of anxieties on the part of mainland Chinese mothers. The dichotomy of 'Chinese' vs. 'West' is recoded by mainland Chinese mothers as a dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' China. In their repudiation of strict parenting as a vestige of 'traditional' practice, the kind of 'enlightened' parenting favoured by these mainland Chinese mothers is one that, in its emphasis on English-language acquisition, is patterned after the upbringing of the Southeast Asian 'Anglo-Chinese' whose historical background Chua shares. Chua practises a form of ethnopreneurship that traffics in cultural signs, offering largely personal, family-mediated, and provincialised versions of 'Chineseness' to a variety of publics across nation, region, and world to simultaneously promote nation-building, regional identification, and global cosmopolitanism.

Whereas Amy Chua relies on the power of print to propound so-called 'Chinese' child-rearing practices for consumption and emulation by a variety of reading publics across nations and regions, Kathleen M. Adams looks at how family dynamics have assumed trans-local dimensions with the advent of new social media like Facebook in the age of globalisation, and how cyber-technologies enable the 're-imaging' as well as reconstitution and negotiation of family ties and ethnic identities across local, regional ('region' understood here in both subnational and supranational senses), and national spaces. A death in a Toraja family member can bring far-flung kin spread out across Indonesia and Asia together, both virtually and physically, in ways that engender new imaginings of both selves and families, heightened understanding of ethnic 'heritage', and re-crafting of ritual to affirm relatedness and belonging and assert both family and ethnic identities. Adams' study emphasises the continuing importance of the 'house' not only as organising principle of physical space and property (both material

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and immaterial), but also as a mnemonic device for encoding memories and enforcing social distinctions. Toraja families engage in acts of 'curating' that result in renewed efforts at research, care for, and display of artefacts relating to their own families and to the Toraja homeland, proof enough that the family remains one of the most resilient and flexible forms for negotiating survival, continuity, and change in Southeast Asia and the world more generally.

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