

# Intercultural Community Formation in East Asian Contexts

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## 1. Overview

This joint research project explored the potential of intercultural contacts as a site of social transformation and community formation in contemporary East Asia. Each of the three investigators used a case study to explore the problems of intercultural community formation in a particular context.

- Yoshino conducted an ethnographic study of the formation of intercultural collectivities and networks in Asia focusing on the role of Malaysian cultural intermediaries who engage in the English-medium private higher education industry.
- Wank examined internationalization in China from the perspective of educational exchange, focusing on the “foreign expert” policy that invited foreign specialists to teach their Chinese counterparts.
- Farrer examined the dilemmas of intercultural community formation by studying the development of an expatriate community in Shanghai, focusing on the educational strategies of Shanghai expatriates trying to raise bicultural and cosmopolitan children.



Wank with his informants in Shanxi (above)

Analysis conducted by Farrer using NVIVO software (below)

## 2. Research Methodology

The methodology used in this project was ethnographic fieldwork employing interviews and on-site observations. Each collaborator accomplished 2-5 months of overseas fieldwork for this project. Analysis was conducted based on grounded theory principles.

## 3. Findings and Outcomes

In this research project we used ethnographic case studies to develop concepts of “intercultural community formation,” “cultural intermediaries,” “transnational ethnicity,” “internationalization,” “grounded cosmopolitanism,” and “intercultural contact zones” in the East Asian context. These findings, though preliminary, highlight the importance of ethnographic studies of intercultural contact. They also produce sociological analyses of intercultural interaction that take into account structural and historical factors while also incorporating an account of individual agency. As our ethnographic studies show, individual actors have a great deal of autonomy in constructing intercultural communities. Indeed, as both Yoshino’s and Wank’s studies points out, intercultural actors play an essential role in managing larger structural processes of globalization or “internationalization.” As Farrer’s study shows, individual agency in intercultural interactions is also structured by a larger context of post-colonial urban history and racial and ethnic identity formation.

We have engaged in several joint workshop, conference and publication projects that have allowed us to discuss and develop our ideas, disseminate the preliminary findings and build up the resources of Sophia University as a center for the study of intercultural contact. Through the Sophia Institute of Comparative research unit on “Asian Multiculturalism” we have organized yearly workshops and symposia related to the goals and themes of our project.

- “The Right to Move? Debating the Ethics of Global Migration” (Sophia Symposium co-sponsored with the Carnegie Council on Ethics in International Affairs) Dec. 12-13, 2009 (published in *Policy Innovations* Jan. 2010)
- “Sexual boundary crossings and sexual contact zones in East Asia” Oct. 2, 2010 (published in *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*. There was also a follow-up conference in Dec. 2011)
- “Migration and Multicultural Coexistence in East Asia” (co-sponsored with Korea University. Feb. 19, 2011, and published as working papers and then as a book from Ashgate in 2013)
- “Migrant Communities in Japan in the Aftermath of the Tohoku Earthquake” February 18, 2012
- “The Challenges of Highly Skilled Migration in Asia and the Pacific” March 6, 2013 (with plans for publication)

The output of these conferences goes far beyond the conferences, as we have also used this opportunity to create ties with scholars around the world whose research focuses on intercultural issues. Through these connections we have endeavored to increase Sophia’s profile as a center for studies surrounding intercultural contact zones, intercultural community formation, multiculturalism and migration in East Asia.

