



WORKSHOP TITLE

**Neoliberal Globalization and Governmentality:  
State, Civil society and the NGO Phenomena in Asia**

WORKSHOP DIRECTOR

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It is widely assumed that the growth of the NGO sector signals a deepening of democracy and citizen empowerment and is the quintessential symbol of mature liberal democratic nation states. Countries in postcolonial Asia are often held up as exemplars of this particular mode of democratization – that is, via the NGO sector – and a model to be emulated by the new states of Central Asia. While Asia has been witness to the incredible growth of the NGO sector, critical and comparative research on the NGO phenomenon in the region is extremely limited.

The workshop invites new research from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East to develop a more theoretically complex understanding of the relationship between states, NGOs and global political economic arrangements. In addition to sociological analysis of NGOs as development organizations, we are interested in the study of NGOs as political and cultural formations legitimating particular practices and discourses of democracy, citizenship, participation and empowerment. Framing the inquiry in this manner we hope to draw insights from a wide number of disciplines that include cultural studies, anthropology, critical geography, and political science. Though not a comprehensive list, we suggest some broad thematics that are relevant to this line of inquiry:

- In what ways do NGOs represent a new logic and apparatus of neoliberal governmentality? Studying NGOs in terms of governmentality, i.e. as a form of modern power characteristic of advanced capitalist societies moves away from the oppositional dyad of state versus NGOs towards a study of new discourses of power emergent in the neoliberal postcolonial context. How are civil society *and* state transformed in this process? Does the postcolonial developmentalist context mutate governmental rationality and mark them in ways distinct from advanced capitalist societies?
- The representation of NGOs as autonomous actors, separate from state and market has been critiqued by scholars as normative liberal conceptions of state and bourgeois civil society specific to “Western” political theory. A dialectical and historical analysis of NGOs as representing new modes of governance operative in a global economy lends itself to an examination of NGOs simultaneously as objects and subjects of governance. How are

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NGOs regulating and being regulated by the law and market rationalities that operate at national and international levels? In what ways are normative and legal assumptions about citizenship, democracy and rights being formulated in this process?

- The international aid infrastructure is exceptionally influential in shaping the institutional forms and practices of national and local NGOs to the extent that national and region specific issues are rearticulated in universalist terms such as gender equity and human rights. How do NGOs resituate certain domestic political issues while excluding others such as religion, caste, ethnicity and class and what implications does this have for national and international politics?

The workshop is an opportunity to develop a more theoretically rich and critically engaged body of scholarship on NGOs, state and civil society that provides insights into the cultural politics of the new Asian century. The term NGO is applied to a wide variety of civil society organizations that work on a range of social and policy issues and operate at different scales of the local, national and international. The workshop will provide a forum for scholars who study different kinds of NGOs across different scales and sectors to construct a more comprehensive and comparative picture of the “power effects” of NGOs in the region.