
CLARA News

Changing Labour Relations in Asia

International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden
International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam

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The Changing Labour Relations in Asia programme (CLARA) aims to build a comparative understanding of labour relations in different parts of Asia which are undergoing diverse historical processes and experiences in terms of their national economies, their links with international markets and the nature of state intervention. This understanding will be based on the promotion of inter-Asian cooperation and the cooperation between Asian and non-Asian institutions. This programme is currently supported by the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS), and the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

CONFERENCE/SEMINAR REPORTS

First Annual Conference of the Association of Indian Labour Historians

16 - 18 March 1998, New Delhi, India

The conference took place in New Delhi at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University. On average more than fifty participants attended the nine sessions in which 29 papers and 3 video films were presented and discussed. Five papers dealt with "The State, Labour and Regulations" between 1780 and 1940 (Prabhu Mohapatra, N. Narita, Ajay Mahurkar, Samita Sen and Radhika Singha), six with "Labour Movement and Other Forms of Resistance" in the twentieth century (Blair Kling, Amal Das, Dilip Simeon, Nasir Tyabji, Rana Belal and Balanchandran). Transitions between artisanal, industrial and marginal labour were discussed in nine papers covering the period between 1750 until the present (Nandita Khadria, Ravi Ahuja, Jan Breman, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Sanjay Sharma, Madhavan Palat, Meena Radhakrishnan, Jonathan Parry and Chitra Joshi) and in three films (Janaki Nair, Mukul Manglik and Amar Kanwar). International comparisons covering the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries

were made in two papers (Jan Lucassen and Jim Hagan); two other papers under the theme "Labour Today" were also presented (Vrinda Grover and Indu Agnihotri and Indrani Mazumdar). Concluding remarks in the session on "Perspectives" were given by Ranajit Das Gupta, Marcel van der Linden and Andrew Wells.

The Association of Indian Labour Historians has its roots in the Conference "South Indian Labour: Local and Global Linkages" held at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam from 26 to 28 October 1995. At this conference, the idea emerged of establishing a more permanent organization for Indian labour historians; on 15 and 16 December 1996 a meeting at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi resulted in the foundation of the Association of Indian Labour Historians. This association supports a broad interpretation of labour history: while the initial focus will be on wage work in the modern era (i.e. since c. 1750), expansion to include earlier periods, household labour, forms of slavery and the like are also possible. The association values comparative analyses. In addition to promoting research, the association hopes to salvage research.

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CLARA One-Day Seminar

24 April 1998 - Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Convenor: Ratna Saptari, IISH/IIAS.

The One-Day Seminar took place at the International Institute of Social History, in Amsterdam and was attended by PhD students, post-docs, university staff and researchers. The main aim was to bring together labour scholars to exchange information on ongoing research. Since an increasing number of scholars in the Netherlands are studying work processes, industrial relations, labour migration etc. in Asia, past and present and many of them have not had the opportunity to know of the work of others outside their respective research schools, this seminar was meant to serve this function. The second aim was to look at the diversities in labour relations in different Asian countries. Around twenty-five people attended coming from different disciplines although all were interested in or working on labour studies. The areas covered were China, India, Philippines and Indonesia. Since the topics were quite varied, discussions were more of an informative nature rather than focusing on one common issue. However, as a first attempt such a meeting extremely useful for general exchange. Chaired by Marcel van der Linden, Jan Lucassen gave an introduction on the International Institute of Social History and Paul van der Velde on the International Institute for Asian Studies. The keynote speakers were Rajnavaran Chandavarkar (Dept. of History, Cambridge University) on 'Approaches to Labour Historiography' and Jan Breman (CASA) on 'the Informalization of Labour'. Research presentations were given by Miranda Engelshoven (Amsterdam School of Social Science Research, Univ. of Amsterdam) on 'Labour in the Diamond Industry, India'; Cen Huang (International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden) on "Transnationalism and Labour in China"; Peter Keppy (Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, Amsterdam) on Labour Activism in the 1930s in Java, Indonesia'; and the last speaker was Rosanne Rutten (Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, Amsterdam)

talking about 'Claim-making and labour rights in a Philippine plantation region'. No papers were distributed for these presentations although the abstracts were available. The participants of this one day seminar came from various research institutions in the Netherlands and forms were distributed to expand the CLARA database on researchers working on the theme of labour in Asia.

International Convention of Asia Scholars - Panel on 'Changing Industrial Labour Relations in Asia'

26 June 1998 - Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands
Convenor: Ratna Saptari, IISH/IIAS.

This panel consisted of four speakers who highlighted the diversities shaping the varying scenarios for labour relations in Asia. Bernard Thomann (Institut d'Asie Orientale, Lyon) focused on changes in the Japanese style management as a result of economic recession. In the past the Japanese economy was based on a unique form of regulation between the interests of the labor and those of the capital based on a "micro-corporatist" compromise. This Japanese-style "micro-compromise" can be characterized as creating job stability but with flexible labor conditions; promoting identification of workers' interests with those of the employer. Secondly, there is a large peripheral workforce which is excluded from the micro-corporatist compromise and therefore can be easily adjusted to help preserve the job stability of the core workforce. Thirdly, the labor movement has been dominated by enterprise unions which only defended the interest of the core employees and were not able to develop a horizontal solidarity and a class struggle ideology. However with the oil crisis and the more recent monetary crisis, some very careful reforms of the Japanese style management are taking place to adapt the system to those new challenges. The question is what this would mean for labour relations.

Sun Wen-Bin (Centre for Asian Studies, Hongkong) particularly looked at labour disputes in South China. Labour disputes have increased dramatically since the beginning of the economic

reform in 1987. According to the data from the Ministry of Labour in China, in 1996 there was a 264 percent increase in labour disputes compared to the previous year's figure. In examining the working conditions in Shenzhen, there should be more disputes on dangerous working conditions, long working hours with extremely low pay and harsh work regulations and punishments. But, these are seldom the causes for the registered labour disputes. Wen Bin discussed this phenomena in the light of institutional constraints (institutional settings), official understanding of economic development as well as worker's choices.

Karin Kapadia (Christian Michelsen Institute, Norway), focused on the changes occurring within the synthetic gem industry when the domestic-oriented gem industry in Tamil Nadu, India became marginalized by the rapidly expanding export-oriented manufacture. These changes were most tangible in the changing composition of the workforce. Bonded labour force consisting of evenly divided men and women aged between six to sixty were replaced by a preponderantly young female workforce aged between fifteen to twenty three and coming largely from lower middle class families. Explanations of this change in the labour force are among others: unstable markets requiring a flexible workforce, new technology and the transformation of caste and kinship relations in the local labour supplying areas.

Ratna Saptari (International Institute of Social History/International Institute for Asian Studies) focused on the dilemmas of resistance in the Javanese cigarette industry and the nature and form collective action which may be coloured by collaboration and accommodation at the same time. This condition reflects the national and workplace level dynamics, as well as the historical background of the industry in the area. Contradictions emerge because of the competition between companies, the local labour markets, and the nature of cigarette employment, which on the one hand is exploitative but on the other hand provides a better source of income than other jobs in the locality. Therefore these structures may serve as constraint for the emergence of regular and continuous collective action, but at the same time they may provide social and political space for women workers. In response to these papers, discussions particularly focused on the nature of capital which constitutes different

interests and which in the past tended to be looked upon as homogeneous; and on the nature trade unions that could exist taking into account the fragmented labour force and the flexibility often linked to uncertain markets.

Workshop on 'The Economic Impact of the Crisis on Labour'

Convenors: Indrasari Tjandraningsih (Akatiga); Ratna Saptari (CLARA) and Jan Breman (CASA)

13 - 14 July 1998 – Bandung, Indonesia.

The workshop, which was financially supported by The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was held with three aims in mind, namely: a) to bring together concerned scholars and socially committed activists so as to come to a better understanding of the direct and indirect impact of the current economic crisis in East and Southeast Asia. The focus should be on workers social and economic conditions in the various sectors; b) the workshop should serve as a preliminary step towards a more in-depth research on various dimensions of the crisis; c) to think of strategies to improve the bargaining position of workers in the urban and rural areas.

The workshop brought together a good mix of activists and scholars from Indonesia and the region, namely Malaysia and the Philippines. Although initially our plan was to invite not more than 25 activists and researchers, ultimately we ended up with a total of 43 participants from Indonesian NGOs, Universities and Scientific Institutions, from Asian NGOs and Research Centres and from International Agencies. Representatives from the Indonesian, Dutch and United States governments were also present. Seventeen papers were presented in the two-day sessions. Because of the large number of participants and the limited time available, after the introductory and general overviews the sessions were divided into two working groups. The language spoken was Indonesian and English; three translators were available mainly to help those who could not comprehend Indonesian. Whenever possible introductions and summaries were given in English.

The major bulk of the programme was spent to identify the issues and problems faced by the researchers and activists alike, who worked in the

urban and rural areas of Java, North Sumatra and Eastern Nusa Tenggara. The presentations showed commonalities but at the same time, differences in experiences and responses of the urban/rural poor in Indonesia; and the organizations facilitating them. Considering the complexity of the issues it was felt that there was too little time to compare notes and to reflect on each other's experiences. The breaking up of the workshop into two groups helped to slightly focus the issues. It was felt that many more discussions were needed to tackle each point raised.

Since the crisis in Indonesia for the working classes is experienced primarily in high food prices and the dramatically high level of unemployment, or underemployment, discussions on workers' situation concentrated on what the crisis has meant for levels of consumption and employment and how workers have reacted to the situation. Studies on labour relations therefore cannot be divorced from studies on strategies of survival. This has also significant implications for organization.

The comparisons with other countries in the region (i.e. Malaysia and the Philippines) showed that the effect of the crisis was not the same. Not only the nature of each country's integration into the global market, but also the internal workings of the state, differed. In the Indonesian case, it could be seen how the higher degree of state corruption and political repression in Indonesia exacerbated the nature of the crisis. This effected also the kind of civil society that has emerged which is quite different from Malaysia and the Philippines. The issue of migrant labour brought up the problem not only of distinct government policies regarding immigration and emigration but also of the commonalities and differences among Asian migrant labour, in this case Philippine and Indonesian. It also brought up the integrated nature of village level dynamics, government policies and international markets. The drastic increase in unemployment raised the issue of return migration and its impact on the village economy; also the extent to which the village economy can support those without an income. Therefore the nature of urban - rural links and how this has developed in the economic crisis was another issue we knew too little about as organizers and as researchers.

Workers' activism varied in the different regions and there was no clear analysis on how and why these variations existed. Should this be linked to

the nature of the labour market in the respective areas, the nature of workers' organizations existing prior to the crisis, or the level of repression enacted by the local apparatus? There was still no knowledge of sectoral differences in industrial workers' plight. Do we know enough of the diverse community structures to formulate appropriate strategies for mobilization or provide recommendations for policy makers? The discussion on the rural areas brought the same kind of questions. In the rural areas, although protests occurred against village heads, no parallel level of activism could be found. This brought up the question of social institutions available in the village. After 30 years of Suharto's top-down rule, what are left of village institutions that could provide some form of social security for rural people? From these discussions, the need to bridge the gap between researchers and activists was also felt as activism cannot be well planned and formulated if knowledge of an issue or an area is based on superficial information; on the other hand research cannot be useful enough if not sensitized and put into perspective by political activism.

EUROSEAS Conference - Panel on 'Changing Labour Relations in South- East Asia'

4 - 5 September 1998, Hamburg, Germany.
Convenor: Ratna Saptari (IISH/IIAS)

This panel consisted of 11 speakers coming from Australia, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands respectively. Their research covered Java, South Sumatra, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and of South East Asia as a whole. Although there were 11 presentations with diverse foci, four overlapping themes could be discerned. The first focused on the nature of labour. Thus Jonathan Rigg (University of Durham, U.K.) gave a broad picture of changing labour markets where the rural-urban divide became less sharp, where non-farm employment has become much more significant and 'household strategies' put into doubt. Amarjit Kaur (University of New England Armidale) focused on the different conjunctures shaping labour demand in the mining and plantation systems resulting in an ethically and gender-differentiated labour force in these respective systems deriving initially from the colonial system.

Daniel Arghiros shows the rapid changes in the labour composition of the brick-making workforce and the export-industries located in Thailand. The changes in the brickmaking industry particularly came about as a response to changes in the local labour supply. Labour at first was composed of local landless and land-poor, this then consisted mainly of migrant workers from the Northeast and later became illegal immigrant workers. Xavier Oudin, looked at the role of the Vietnamese state in shaping labour markets.

The second theme concerned the nature of labour relations itself as found in specific industries or specific localities. Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander focusing on the export-oriented furniture industry in Java, Indonesia examined the extent in which the commercial interests of the furniture industry redefined kin-based relations and terms and vice versa, how kin-based relations utilized relations of production. Arghiros examined also changes in systems of labour control in the workplace following the changes that the brick-making industry underwent.

The third theme was on workers politics and the trajectories of trade unions (the two not necessarily analogous to one another). Becky Elmhirst (University of Brighton, UK) referring to the Lampungese women migrants who went to the factories of Tangerang, West Java, showed how relations outside the workplace, rather than in the workplace itself influenced the political behaviour of the Lampungese women workers. The ethnic and kin-based Lampungese social network in exercising its moral supervision over young migrant women in Tangerang also curtailed their possibility for political participation. Ratna Saptari highlighted the contrasting phenomena of labour politics in two diverse industrial cities in East Java. Labour activism in Surabaya and non-activism in Malang in this period of economic crisis should not be explained by modern-traditional dichotomies or by locational differences. Explanations should be sought in the interplay of various factors but particularly of state and NGO intervention, industrial structure, and community-level dynamics. Irene Norlund (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Denmark) looked at the changing perceptions of the Vietnamese state on the definition of workers.

The fourth theme concerns the issue of the construction or categorization of labour. Focusing

on child labour, Ben White (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague) pointed out the selective nature of the international discourse on children's work and how this contrasts with the reality of children's work. Since such a discourse is exercised in policy-making circles, it very strongly shapes the legal definition of child labour and children's work and the political positioning of government and non-government organisations regarding this issue – irrespective of whether it reflects children's realities and needs.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

Women Workers in Industrialising Asia –
2-3 December 1998, Armidale - Australia
Convenor: Dr Amarjit Kaur (University of New
England, Australia)

WORKING PAPER SERIES

No 1. Prabhu Mohapatra, Andrew Wells, Samita Sen, *Asian Labour: A Debate on Culture, Consciousness and Representation*,

No. 2 Jan Breman, Otto van den Muijzenberg and Ben White, *Labour Migration in Asia*).

No 3. Jan Breman,

Forthcoming

No. 4 Xin Meng,

LABOUR STUDIES AT OTHER INSTITUTES

School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR) - University of the Philippines Quezon City, Philippines

The School of Labor and Industrial Relations of the University of the Philippines (SOLAIR) was

founded in 1954 as the Labor Education Center (LEC) with the objective of educating Filipino workers and trade union leaders on their rights and responsibilities. In 1958, LEC was transformed into the Asian Labor Education Center as it extended its training services to cover workers in other Asian countries. By 1975, ALEC offered graduate studies in the field of labor and industrial relations. In 1988 it changed its name into SOLAIR.

SOLAIR now has 350 graduate students (which include some foreign students also) enrolled in the Master of Industrial Relations (MIR) program. Various symposia have been organized by the school. On March 14, 1998 "The State of Labor Relations and Employment in the Philippines" was organized which resulted in a consensus on the need to revise and amend the Philippine labor code (laws), to provide for protection to victims of labor market flexibility. On March 25, 1998, a symposium on "Public Sector Labor Relations" was held where union leaders in the government agencies and participants emphasized the need for amendments to the laws covering public sector labor relations, to allow for disputes settlement, an agency to review and recommend compensation adjustments for government employees, and provisions for the exercise of the right to strike. On March 28, 1998 a forum on "Saving Jobs, Downsizing and the Currency Crisis" was held in Cebu City. The Mactan Export Processing Zones in general have increased employment, but individual firms are downsizing. Participants were mostly interested on searching for legally feasible solutions to the consequences of downsizing.

Apart from these symposia, SOLAIR is organizing ongoing seminars on "labor relations and collective bargaining". Dr. Ofreneo and Dr. Maragtas Amante are doing a brief study on the following: 1. "Skills training in the Philippines: Review of policy reforms" 2. "Review of tripartism as a state policy in the Philippines. Other studies being implemented are: (1) "Wage distortions as a result of legislated wage order s: review of cases and policy recommendations"; (2) On April 29, activities in honor of labor leaders in the 1950s, who were founders of the Congress of Labor Organizations (CLO), as part of the "Labor Centennial Celebrations". Some of these labor leaders have already died.

By May or June 1998, the 1997 issue of *the Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations*, a SOLAIR journal, will be off the press. It contains articles about the industrial relations aspects of the privatization of the Metro Manila Waterworks and Sewerage system, employee stock option plans in the Manila Electric Company, labor management cooperation schemes in a shipping company, non-union policies at the Mactan Export Processing Zone, an article about "convergence on labor policies in South Korea and the Philippines". This particular issue is supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of Germany.

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The Scalabrini Migration Center Quezon City, Philippines

Established in the Philippines in 1987, the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) is a research institute dedicated to the study of human mobility. SMC attempts to meet this objective through its research program, specialized publications, a documentation and resource center, and the holding of conferences and other educational activities. The most recent research completed by the Center, in cooperation with the International Migration Organization, was on "Pre-Departure Information Programs for Migrant Workers" (December 1997). The publication program includes the Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, a scholarly quarterly; *Asian Migrant*, a quarterly magazine targeted at policy makers and advocates; and special volumes and research reports on different aspects of migration. The most recent initiative in information dissemination on migration is the Asian Migration News, an electronic posting sent bi-monthly to scholars, policymakers, advocates and students of migration. Over 2,000 volumes and 40 periodicals are housed at the documentation and resource center. Through its various activities and

programs, the Center has established links with academe, NGOs and other organizations in Asia and worldwide.

On 14-15 May 1998 The Center will hold a research conference (in cooperation with ILO, IOM, UNFPA and others) concerning the migration implications of the economic crisis. Invited speakers are researchers from 10 countries - Malaysia (+Sabah), Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Bangladesh. The proceedings will be published in a special issue of APMJ - plus there will be a booklet which we will publish within a month. We'll keep you posted. We also did a primer on the Rights of Migrants and their Families (including a poster on the ratification of Asian countries of UN and ILO conventions related to migrants).

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Several larger research programmes have been investigating various types of industrial development, and part of this research has focussed on labour relations and human resource development. a number of researchers have been engaged in studies which in various ways are related to labour studies.

In Denmark one of the research projects carried out by Peter Wad at the Department of Intercultural Communication and Management, Copenhagen Business School, concerns the dynamic efficiency of enterprise unions in comparative perspective. The project analyses specifically the development in Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. A pilot project has moreover been undertaken in cooperation between the same institute and the Centre for International Studies at Aalborg University under the title of "Business in

Development". Among other studies, Peter Wad will investigate the automobile industry in Malaysia.

At Roskilde University, a programme has existed with the title "Institutions and Industrial Development". Also this programme has a broader focus than labour studies. The focus is the industrial development strategies, but includes studies of the industrial organisation as well. One of the themes is the division of labour inside and across the firm. Particularly Daniel Fleming and Henrik Soeborg is investigating the human development in foreign enterprises in Malaysia, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries, and Laurids Lauridsen has investigated the labour institutions in Taiwan and Thailand.

At Nordic Institute of Asian Studies a project has been carried out to investigate the role of trade unions and the labour regime in Vietnam by Irene Norlund. Other researchers at NIAS are partially working on labour studies and are linked with researchers all over the Nordic countries.

Gothenburg University has for a longer period had a section for labour studies at the Department of History, headed by Bernt Schiller. Thommy Svensson has recently returned to the department and will follow up on activities related to labour studies. The main focus used to be the Scandinavian and European countries, but now studies of non-european societies have been started. In 1996, the 5 Nordic conference of working life was organised.

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The Institute of Social Change and Critical Inquiry

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The Institute of Social Change and Critical Inquiry in combination with members of the Faculty of Commerce and members of the

University of Newcastle (in NSW, north of Sydney) have submitted a National Key Centre for Research and Training application. It is designed to research and teach social transformation in the Asia-Pacific Region. Labour markets, Labour regulation, Migration and Science and technology policy are its central concerns. Funding is at \$AUD 400,000 per annum for four years. Wollongong (and Newcastle) University have had to commit similar amounts in staff time and facilities.

A \$AUD18,500 UMAP Grant (University Mobility in Asia Program) has also been obtained to support staff and student exchanges with the University of Indonesia. The institute's links are with FISIP (Social and Political Sciences Laboratory, UI) and the Australian Studies Centre at UI. The institute has been reorganising Research Programs in the Institute to bring together its labour and social historians and its Asia-Pacific scholars; consisting of a team of about 12 scholars (and 6 PhD students) with industry and or country expertise. Seminars in 1998 will be held to ensure that people from different traditions and disciplines work cooperatively together. This research program - Asia-Pacific Labour and Social History (ASPLASH) has \$AUD25,000 funding for 1998 with possibly an additional \$5-15,000.

The Institute is also funding a research program on Migration and Citizenship under the leadership of Professor Stephen Castles and Dr Ellie Vasta. This program also coordinates the UNESCO-MOST (Management of Social Transformation) project.

A working paper series has been established in each research program of the Institute and currently the Institute is negotiating a book series with an Australian publisher (Halstead Press). The first volume will specifically be looking at the relationship between traditional Australian Labour Historiography and that in South East Asia.

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Centre of Asian Studies - The University of Hong Kong

The Centre of Asian Studies was established in November 1967. It functions as a Centre in which all departments of the University with interests related to Contemporary and Traditional Chinese studies, Hong Kong studies and East and Southeast Asian studies may bring together their research and their post-graduate students in interdisciplinary and other seminars. Its other functions include: serving as a Hong Kong base for overseas scholars in these fields; supporting doctoral and post-doctoral research; publishing and sponsoring the publication of journals and the results of research in the field of Asian Studies; and engaging in other activities in the promotion of East and Southeast Asian Studies.

A team of researchers comprising a Director, Deputy Director, three Research Officers and two Post-doctoral Fellows conducts independent research within the Centre's prescribed field of interest. Research activities of the Centre also include the projects of many University staff who have been appointed Centre Fellows. At present there are forty Centre Fellows. In addition, there are at all times a number of local and overseas scholars holding honorary appointments at the Centre, and engaged in research related to topics of interest to the Centre. The research work and other activities of the Centre are supported by eleven administrative and secretarial staff members.

Current materials from China and Southeast Asia are housed in the Centre's Library. A collection of reference materials essential to scholarship is being built up, and these include the FBIS Daily Report from the PRC, Xinhua News Bulletins, Asian Studies journals and newspapers. Many of these materials are not readily available elsewhere. The publications of the Centre include a Monographs and Occasional Papers Series, A Research Guides and Bibliographies Series, the Journal of Oriental Studies and the East Asian Tertiary/Quaternary Newsletter. The Centre also publishes its bi-monthly Newsletter, which aims to network the Centre's scholars and to keep the readers informed of the on-going Centre activities.

The centre's research work is heading towards two directions. One is on the drastic changes of the PRC since the beginning of the reform in 1978,

which includes research on the development of Chinese entrepreneurship, business tradition and changing labour relations in China. The on-going study on labour relations focuses on the issue of labour disputes and the status quo of the Chinese working class in Post-Mao China. By collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in the Chinese mainland, the research is trying to examine several major enquires: 1) individual and collective bargaining over wages and various social welfare benefits; 2) workplace regulations and grievance procedures; 3) internal cleavage and differential reward practice within enterprises; 4) informal social ties among workers, 5) the role of trade unions; and 6) the role of government. Related to this, the Centre's fellows have been doing research on the impact of legislation on trade unions in Hong Kong, and the development of labour relations in Hong Kong (labour's responses to industrial development and the transformation of industrial structure). The other direction of research is on the study of China and ASEAN countries. It is aimed to link institutes in China and Southeast Asia to stimulate cooperative projects, collaboration in data collection, wider regional research and to encourage research in this area in Hong Kong. The Centre is holding an annual China-Asean Academic Conferences and is going to publish a quarterly -- China-Asean Review. The Centre also has experts running projects on Hong Kong Studies both in historical and contemporary perspectives. It is under the process of establishing an area of excellence on Hong Kong history and culture studies.

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