

Foreign Workers, Precarity, and the Changing Social Laborscapes of Contemporary Japan

Presenter Abstracts and Biographies — Listed by Panel

Organizers: David Slater, Megha Wadhwa (Sophia University) and Hee Eun Kwon (University of Tokyo)

Panel 1: Policy and Worker Experience

Day One — Friday, June 19, 2:00–5:00 PM

Maximilien Xavier Rehm

Doshisha University

Paper Title

Incremental Change, for the Better? Japan's Evolving Pathways for Lower Skilled Foreign Workers

Abstract

Over the past four-plus decades, Japanese policymakers have consistently denied that the country is admitting so-called 'unskilled' foreign workers, while simultaneously opening up various side door pathways for their admittance. Post-pandemic, successive LDP-led administrations have pursued incremental policy adjustments that could cumulatively serve to realign the framework for lower-skilled labor admittance. These include expanding the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) (ii) residence status, the '400,000 International Student Plan' that focuses more heavily on post-graduate student retention and integration into the Japanese labor market, and the upcoming replacement of the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) by the Employment for Skill Development (ESD) program. This paper aims to deliver an outline of post-pandemic policy outputs through the framework of incremental institutional change, to analyze whether the realigned pathways for lower-skilled workers have the potential to produce better outcomes both for Japan and the workers it admits.

Bio

Maximilien Xavier Rehm, Ph.D., is a postdoctoral assistant at Doshisha University's Graduate School of Global Studies. He holds an MA from Ritsumeikan University and a Ph.D. from Doshisha University. His research focuses primarily on Japanese politics, specifically the policymaking process of migration policy.

Yunchen Tian

Kyoto University

Paper Title

Local-level Migration Policymaking in the Era of the 'Orderly Coexistence Society'

Abstract

Starting with the lead-up to the July 2025 Upper House election, and intensifying with the February 2026 Lower House election, temporary migrant workers have faced increasing scrutiny as part of the 'foreigner problem'. However, at the regional and local levels, competition to attract and retain them has only intensified as the growth of admittance quotas has slowed and labor mobility relaxed. Drawing upon documentary sources and fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2026, this paper argues that national and local discourses have begun to diverge greatly: as national level politicians sensationally discuss foreigners as security threats and challengers to the social order, local discourses continue to adopt technocratic and depoliticized framings focused on local economic needs. The paper concludes that local policies supporting migration will likely continue to proliferate in number, grow in complexity, and display increased diversity even as national policy discourse and policymaking turn towards more stringent enforcement and surveillance.

Bio

Yunchen Tian is Program-Specific Associate Professor at the Kyoto University Faculty of Law. They have been published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Social Science Japan Journal*, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, and *Citizenship Studies*. They hold a PhD in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University.

Naho Yoshikawa

University of Zurich

Paper Title

Vietnamese Trainees' Perceptions on Policy Gaps in Japan's TITP: Total Institution Analysis and Implications for the Employment for Skill Development Program

Abstract

This study examines the subjective perceptions of Vietnamese trainees on Japan's Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). The TITP imports unskilled labor as a side-door in Japan's restrictive immigration policy, revealing significant policy gaps. In 2024, Japan announced the abolishment of TITP, marking a drastic shift in simple labor import to Specified Skilled Worker (SSW (i))-oriented acceptance. Amid the transition, this study analyzes 156 Vietnamese trainees' TITP experience employing Chiavacci's (2024) three layers of extreme regulation: work mobility, migration commercialization, and life options. The results indicate that among the three controls, trainees identified restricted work mobility as a core policy flaw inducing mal-implementation. Results show significant variation in trainees' experience; those under extreme regulatory control experience mal-implementations. The new system reforms some core structures, such as job change prohibition. However, restrictions on job category changes, language requirements, and mandatory service periods stratify trainees: those under more regulatory control remain trapped.

Bio

Naho Yoshikawa is a doctoral researcher at the University of Zurich, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies. Her research focuses on skills, employment, and international mobility. She previously worked at JETRO researching Africa's political and economic policy. She holds an M.A. in Public Policy from International Christian University, Japan.

Mi Moe Thuzar

Societas Research Institute, Hashimoto Foundation, Okayama

Paper Title

Expectation, Precarity, and the Changing Laborscape of Japan: Myanmar Workers under Technical Intern Training and the Specified Skilled Worker Regime

Abstract

Japan's labor migration regime is undergoing restructuring as the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) transitions toward the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) system and, from 2027, the new Employment for Skill Development Program (育成就労制度). Drawing on survey data collected in 2024–2025 from 110 Myanmar migrants and 30 in-depth interviews, this paper examines why workers choose TITP and SSW pathways, how expectations compare with workplace realities, and how these experiences shape long-term stay intentions. Findings show that even when legal status shifts upward from TITP to SSW, increased workloads are not matched by significant wage gains, weakening retention at current workplaces. Limited and unclear career improvement pathways and uneven job satisfaction further complicate settlement trajectories. Meanwhile, Myanmar's political crisis has intensified migration costs, uncertainty, and risk, generating new semi-illegal transit routes through Thailand. Situating migrant agency within Japan's changing laborscape, the paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on precarity, governance, and migration regime transformation.

Bio

A researcher from Myanmar specializing in economic policy, labor economics, migration studies, and Myanmar's macroeconomy. She earned a Ph.D. in Economics from Okayama University (MEXT Scholar). She is a former lecturer at Yangon University of Economics with eight years of teaching experience. Her current research focuses on labor dynamics, migration, and crisis-driven economic resilience.

Panel 2: The Architecture of Precarity — Brokerage, Debt, and Structural Vulnerability

Day Two — Saturday, June 20, 10:00 AM–1:00 PM

Huynh Vu Hong Vy

Waseda University

Paper Title

Collaborative Falsification: The Making of 'Fake Engineers' in Japan

Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of 'fake engineers' (referred to in Japanese media as 偉装技人国 or なんちゃって技人国). Despite holding high-skilled Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services (ESHIS) visas, they work in low-waged blue-collar jobs, violating immigration regulations. Based on interviews with Vietnamese migrants and digital ethnography, the study shows how many arrive unemployed despite brokers' promises of a skilled job after paying \$5,000–\$8,000 in fees. Some are absorbed into labor-intensive sectors, accepting exploitation as survival. These arrangements are normalized through collaborative falsification: brokers, employers, and lawyers fabricate job descriptions to secure visas. As Japan's migration regime intensifies enforcement, previously tolerated practices are reframed as illegal, making these migrants

newly visible and legally precarious. The paper argues Japan's migration regime produces vulnerability not through policy failure but through deliberate neoliberal design—a marketized system that deceives, disciplines, and criminalizes migrants for conditions it structurally enables.

Bio

Huynh Vu Hong Vy is a Ph.D. candidate in International Studies at Waseda University's Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies. Holding an M.A. in Japanese Studies from Sophia University, her research focuses on Vietnamese migration to Japan and Vietnam–Japan relations. She also participates in NPO work supporting Vietnamese migrants in Japan.

Büşra Kuplay

University of Zurich

Paper Title

Community Resilience in Layered Precarity: Migrant-Owned Businesses and Non-Standard Employment among Immigrants from Türkiye in Japan

Abstract

This paper examines how legal insecurity shapes layered and intersecting forms of precarities among immigrants and asylum seekers from Türkiye in Japan, particularly those employed in demolition work and the food sector, as well as the community-based resilience systems they develop. The analysis builds on qualitative data from four years of intermittent fieldwork, including participant observation as a consultant and interpreter, and in-depth interviews. The paper proposes a model of layered precarities centered on legal precarity and its cascading effects across multiple domains. It argues that migrant-owned businesses and community networks function as protection and resilience mechanisms for layered precarities. By highlighting non-standard employment as a complementary form of collective resilience rather than solely a source of precarity, the paper challenges prevailing assumptions in the literature. It contributes to scholarship on migration and migrant labor precarity in Japan through an empirical focus on immigrants from Türkiye, an understudied migrant group.

Bio

Büşra Kuplay is a doctoral researcher at the University of Zurich, examining media framing of immigrants and refugees in Japan. Her research interests include migration, peacebuilding, media framing, everyday peace, and agonistic peace. She holds an MA from Waseda University and has professional experience with governmental organizations in Japan.

Yahya Aoyagi (Almasri) and Saddam Khalid

Kwansei Gakuin University / University of Hyogo

Paper Title

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Rooted in Faith: Mosques and Muslim Migrant Entrepreneurship in Japan

Abstract

This study investigates the intersection of religion and migrant entrepreneurship by examining the role of mosques in shaping entrepreneurial behavior among Pakistani and Syrian entrepreneurs in Japan. The study

undertakes a comparative analysis of entrepreneurs across varying legal statuses, ranging from those of ambivalent legal status — neither legally recognized as refugees nor as foreign workers — to individuals holding long-term resident status or naturalized citizenship. A total of 45 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Kanto and Kansai regions. While focusing primarily on entrepreneurs in the used-car business, some interviews were also conducted with other business owners, such as restaurant owners. Using a grounded theory approach, the research explores how early migrant entrepreneurs in Japan established mosques not only as religious and emotional support hubs but also as informal entrepreneurial ecosystems. These spaces provided social capital, mentorship, and access to business knowledge, influencing newly arrived migrants to replicate existing business models. This research contributes to a broader understanding of faith-based entrepreneurship and suggests policy recommendations for leveraging religious community structures to support migrant business development.

Bio

Yahya Aoyagi (Almasri) is an assistant professor at Kwansai Gakuin University, School of International Studies. His research focuses on migration policy, forced migration, and the contemporary politics of the Middle East and North Africa.

Saddam Khalid is an associate professor at the University of Hyogo, School of Economics and Management. His research focuses on the psychology of entrepreneurship and its sociocultural contexts.

Anh Phuong Le

Waseda University

Paper Title

The Gambling Infrastructure of the Part-Time Job Market for International Students in Japan

Abstract

Japan has long relied on 'side-door' immigration policies to address labor shortages in low- and middle-skilled sectors. International students, permitted to work up to 28 hours weekly, constitute a significant labor channel, yet many exceed these legal limits. Why do students, particularly those in language schools, risk their visa status by violating work hour restrictions? Through interviews with Vietnamese language school students in Japan, this research reveals a 'gambling infrastructure' within the education-migration nexus. This infrastructure enables students and various intermediary actors to collectively assume risks for economic gain. Students gamble on future opportunities while managing immediate financial pressures. This framework illuminates how structural vulnerabilities are systematically produced and exploited, transforming international education into a high-stakes venture where regulatory violations become normalized survival strategies.

Bio

Anh Phuong Le is a PhD student in International Studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, and a student member at the Waseda Institute of Asian Migrations. Her research examines the mobility of Vietnamese students and specified skilled workers in Japan and their social and economic practices.

Panel 3: Belonging, Mobility, and Everyday Labor

Day Two — Saturday, June 20, 2:00–5:00 PM

Anggy Wira Pambudi and Livia Shintiarani

Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang / Independent Scholar

Paper Title

Indonesian Migrant Workers Mobility: Brokerage and Structured Precarity in Japan's Evolving Laborscape

Abstract

Demographic decline and labor shortages have prompted Japan to integrate Indonesian migrant workers into the labor market through various apprenticeship programs. These programs involve a complex network of intermediaries, including local agents in Indonesia, sending companies, supervising organizations, and employers in Japan, forming a complex architecture. However, this architecture has led to precarious conditions for workers, such as uneven mobility, legal insecurity, and workplace vulnerability. Using qualitative data from policy documents and migrant experiences, the preliminary findings of this research show that the precarity conditions experienced by Indonesian workers in Japan constitute a form of structured precarity formed by three layers of brokerage and regulatory interactions, including: (1) a high-cost economy and debt due to recruitment costs that bind workers; (2) legal-economic dependency due to a visa system that binds and limits mobility; and (3) restrictions on activities through surveillance.

Bio

Anggy Wira Pambudi is a researcher in the Department of International Relations at Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia, focusing on international political economy.

Livia Shintiarani is an independent researcher from Indonesia.

Hee Eun Kwon

Tokyo College, The University of Tokyo

Paper Title

Commodified Difference: Ethnic Capital and the Reconfiguration of Koreanness in Contemporary Japan

Abstract

As Japan's migration regime expands and diversifies, the Korean population in Tokyo and Osaka occupies shifting positions within urban labor and cultural economies. This paper examines the layered coexistence of older-generation Zainichi Koreans and the newer generation, consisting of younger Korean Japanese and recently arrived Korean nationals on working holiday and student visas. Across these groups, 'Koreanness' operates as a form of ethnic capital that is unevenly converted into economic mobility. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in two ethnic neighborhoods, Ikuno Koreatown and Shin-Okubo, as well as in-depth interviews and digital ethnography, this paper analyzes how ethnic capital is mobilized within the global circulation of Korean popular culture. While earlier Zainichi Koreans navigated a long history of exclusion and marginalization, the newer generation encounters markets in which Korean language skills, aesthetic styles, and cultural competencies are leveraged within food, retail, beauty, and platform-based economies. This conversion, however, remains stratified by legal status, generational position, and urban context, delineating who benefits from commodified multiculturalism and who remains structurally excluded. While Koreanness

may function as a celebrated cultural marker, it continues to signify difference, revealing the enduring tensions around precarity, recognition, and belonging in contemporary Japan.

Bio

Hee Eun Kwon is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Tokyo College, The University of Tokyo. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California San Diego. Her research examines how migrants construct a sense of belonging, particularly within extreme or exclusionary contexts. Her current project, based on extended ethnography and content analysis, compares the consecutive world expositions in Osaka, Japan and Dubai, United Arab Emirates, to investigate how cosmopolitanism operates as a social performance to conceal everyday inequalities.

Oscar Wrenn

Kobe University

Paper Title

Everyday Movement and Techniques for 'Keeping Going' for Agricultural Technical Intern Trainees in Upland Japan

Abstract

This paper examines everyday mobilities of technical intern trainee farmhands in one upland village in Nagano prefecture, and techniques used to 'keep moving' despite various limitations. Specifically, it will look at different scales of movement that define trainee life: everyday rhythmic mobility through fields to keep on top of agricultural work, despite being unable to drive and farmers scaling up farms in response to unstable crop prices and depopulation; movement within and beyond the village to shops, reliant upon their employees and limited public transport; and movement required to maintain wider networks with other trainees in other parts of the country. The paper argues that a contingent, creative orientation towards 'keeping going' is demanded by their working situation, both to make agriculture in the precarious and rapidly changing agricultural landscape possible, but also to maintain meaningful social connections. This contingent orientation, however, limits their ability to plan for futures beyond the farm.

Bio

Oscar Wrenn attained his doctorate at Kobe University. His research focused on agricultural labourers in upland Japan, specifically looking at how agricultural livelihoods and upland landscapes are maintained through creative practice, and despite the precarity of their social and material environment. He is currently a Research Fellow at Kobe University.

Yu Ai

Tohoku University

Paper Title

From Campus to the Labor Market: Muslim Women and the Uneven Path to Professional Inclusion in Japan

Abstract

This paper examines how Muslim women international students in Japan encounter social and professional precarity as they transition from university to the labor market. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Muslim

women, it identifies the student-to-employment transition as a critical site where the promises of skilled migration confront everyday constraints. During their studies, participants describe supportive academic environments where they are recognized as part of the university's international profile and their religious practices are largely accommodated. Yet this sense of inclusion does not translate into professional integration. As they enter the labor market, Japanese language proficiency requirements and occupational licensing systems restrict access to skilled positions, while workplace cultures premised on homogeneity recast visible religious markers as professionally incompatible. By centering the intersecting axes of religion, gender, and migrant status, the paper shows how precarity emerges within pathways framed as professional advancement, revealing the uneven and stratified incorporation of foreign workers in Japan's contemporary laborscape.

Bio

Yu Ai is a Specially Appointed Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Information Sciences, Tohoku University. She holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Tohoku University and Leiden University. Her research focuses on Muslim women migrants, migrant incorporation, and racialization in contemporary Japan.

Panel 4: Exclusion, Race, and Legal Vulnerability

Day Three — Sunday, June 21, 10:00 AM–1:00 PM

Naoto Higuchi and Nanako Inaba

Waseda University / Sophia University

Paper Title

Pathways and Barriers to Mobility: Human Capital, Social Networks, and Labor Segregation among Peruvians in Japan

Abstract

Latino employment in Japan has been concentrated in precarious temporary factory work, although increasing numbers have recently secured permanent positions or established ethnic businesses. Who achieves upward mobility, and why? This paper tests three hypotheses—economic assimilation, generational assimilation, and polarization—using data from 534 interviews with Peruvian workers conducted in Peru and Japan between 2011 and 2021, generating 2,139 job records. Logistic regression results do not support the economic assimilation hypothesis: length of residence in Japan alone does not predict upward mobility. The generational assimilation hypothesis is supported, as 1.5- and second-generation individuals educated in Japan are more likely to attain improved employment outcomes. The polarization hypothesis shows the strongest explanatory power: Japanese language proficiency (human capital) and relationships with Japanese nationals (bridging social capital) significantly increase the likelihood of upward mobility. In contrast, those unable to accumulate such capital remain confined to temporary employment. These findings highlight structural barriers to capital accumulation within segregated and demanding labor environments, limiting mobility among South American workers in Japan.

Bio

Naoto Higuchi is a Professor of Sociology at Waseda University, Japan. His research draws on sociology of migration and social movements to examine migration systems, ethnic businesses, integration of the second

generation of Latino migrants, migration policies, xenophobia, and social mobility of migrants in Japan. His main focus has been ethnic migration of Japanese South Americans to Japan.

Nanako Inaba is a Professor of Sociology at Sophia University, Japan, and a board member of the Anti-Poverty Network. She conducts fieldwork on social movements opposing social exclusion. Her recent research focuses on movements of marginalized populations resisting neoliberalism, such as the anti-G8 and anti-Olympics movements, as well as on undocumented migrants in Japan.

Nanako Inaba

Sophia University

Paper Title

Paradoxical Experience of Undocumented Migrant Youth

Abstract

Undocumented migrant youth in Japan encounter a paradoxical path shaped by the state's fragmented governance. As of 2025, about 70,000 undocumented migrants live in Japan, including roughly 3,000 provisional releasees who cannot be deported. While children ordinarily gain autonomy as they grow older, undocumented youth under provisional release lose independence as legal restrictions intensify once they reach high-school age. This produces a structural contradiction: immigration authorities function as agents of social exclusion, whereas schools serve as key sites of social integration. Educational institutions allow youth to build relationships and participate in civil society, even as immigration policies simultaneously exclude them from it. This study analyzes how institutional arrangements hinder the development of undocumented youth through the lens of educational access. It further illustrates how young people mobilize everyday practices and social ties to navigate and resist these exclusionary structures.

Bio

Nanako Inaba is a Professor of Sociology at Sophia University, Japan, and a board member of the Anti-Poverty Network. She conducts fieldwork on social movements opposing social exclusion. Her recent research focuses on movements of marginalized populations resisting neoliberalism, such as the anti-G8 and anti-Olympics movements, as well as on undocumented migrants in Japan.

Francis Peddie

Nagoya University

Paper Title

Beyond the TITP: Evidence of Visa Change and Mobility among Blue-Collar Migrant Workers

Abstract

This presentation draws on data collected between 2021 and 2024 from structured interviews with 102 current or former technical interns, of whom 96 were in Japan. Within this sample group, of the 96 in Japan, 41 had already completed the Technical Intern Training Programme and attained a new visa status, with 26 having transitioned to Specified Skill Worker visas either directly after completing TITP or after a period outside Japan. The data will be used to explore questions such as changes in satisfaction levels among 18 former technical interns who provided comparisons, awareness of other visa options and intention to continue in Japan among

current technical interns, and the paths used by respondents to change their visa status. Discussion of the implications of the replacement of the TITP with the Employment for Skills Development programme in 2027 and the current migrant exclusionary turn in Japanese politics will conclude the presentation.

Bio

Francis Peddie is an associate professor in the Peace and Governance programme of the Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University. His current research focuses on blue-collar migrant labour in Japan, multicultural coexistence in policy and practice, as well as Afghan forced migrants in Japan.

Kirara Biyanwila

University of Tokyo

Paper Title

Racial Experiences of Sri Lankan Migrants in Japan: Intersecting Colonial Complexes and Racial Formation in Asia

Abstract

Japanese migration studies have historically centered on ethnicity, whereas sustained engagement with race has only recently begun to gain momentum. Yet despite this growing attention, research focusing specifically on migrants from South Asia remains strikingly limited. In 2024, Japan saw its first lawsuit challenging the constitutionality and legality of racial profiling in police questioning, and one of the plaintiffs was of South Asian origin. This presentation focuses on the rapidly growing Sri Lankan population in Japan. It combines a review of existing scholarship on race in Japanese and South Asian migration studies with an analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with five first- and second-generation Sri Lankans in Japan. As discussions of Japanese colonialism have largely focused on East Asia, how might South Asian migrants—whom Japan did not directly colonize—be racialized in Japanese society? Moreover, how do South Asia's own colonial histories shape these processes? This presentation offers a tentative approach to racial formation in Asia by exploring the intersection of colonial mindsets rooted in both Japanese society and South Asia through the concept of the colonial complex.

Bio

Kirara Biyanwila is a second-year doctoral student at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tokyo. Her research is in migration studies and focuses on Sri Lankan migrants in Japan from a sociological perspective.

Panel 5: Care, Aspiration, and Migrant Agency

Day Three — Sunday, June 21, 2:00–5:00 PM

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Sachi Takaya

Princeton University / University of Tokyo

Paper Title

The Paradox of Care: How Filipino Caregivers in Japan Experience Precarity as Dignity and Skill

Abstract

Japan's growing demand for care labor has been met in part through Filipino migration. This paper explores how Filipino caregivers experience and interpret their work by focusing on the two distinct groups: long-term residents and newly arrived workers. It argues that long-term residents—many of whom previously worked as entertainers and/or factory workers—tend to view care work as a source of dignity and social recognition. In contrast, newly arrived workers, often positioned within more vulnerable legal frameworks, regard care work as skilled labor that enables upward mobility. Despite their different social locations and trajectories, both groups articulate positive understandings of care work. These interpretations stand in tension with the dominant characterization of care labor as precarious, as well as their relatively poor working conditions, which raises a question of 'precarious' for whom. Based on interviews with caregivers and related actors as well as institutional observations, this paper argues that migrant caregivers' experiences reveal a paradox of care—one in which vulnerability and agency coexist and are mutually constituted.

Bio

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is Doris Stevens Professor in Women's Studies and Professor of Sociology and Gender and Sexuality Studies at Princeton University.

Sachi Takaya is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo.

Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka and Hoang Khanh Linh

Ritsumeikan University / JICA-Vietnam

Paper Title

Young Vietnamese Women Careworkers in Japan: Migratory Aspirations and Negotiations and Strategies of Transnational Mobility

Abstract

Recently in Japan, care for aging adults is becoming increasingly 'international' and 'multicultural' in its workforce. The influx of foreign caregivers from Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, especially women, ameliorate the acute lack of health care labor in Japan. The majority who migrate to Japan sojourn with myriads of hopes and aspirations for economic and social mobility. Their images of a better life are often constructed by online media; but upon arrival many encounter a reality with challenges such as language and cultural barriers, workload, difference in lifestyle, and subtle but present discrimination. Young Vietnamese female care workers, the focus of this study, describe multifaceted hardships, but also their stories reveal conscientious choice and autonomy. This paper's argument is threefold: First, Vietnamese female caregivers who bring their culturally embedded interpretations of caregiving contribute to the transformation of care labor as 'emotional labor' that emphasizes a familial-like 'care culture'. Within a 'multi-ethnic/multicultural' space, they must conform to formal communication mannerisms, rigid working environments, and professional interpersonal relationships with co-workers and clients in line with the host country; but simultaneously they also actively negotiate between languages, dialects, accents, cultural mannerisms, habits, practices, and workstyle. Second, Vietnamese female care workers expand their care capacity transnationally as they provide periodic support for family members across borders. Regardless of actual need, they feel empowered that they can and are able. Third, the development of technology, specifically online media, is an indispensable tool to maintain ties with family and friends, for building and nurturing network ties within their ethnic as well as care

community throughout Japan, and emboldens them within an international information hub to seek higher economic and social mobility elsewhere.

Bio

Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka, Ph.D., is a tenured lecturer at Ritsumeikan University and the project director of 'International Collaborative Research-Networking Talk Series.' She researches minority women and intersectionality, women and hate speech, and aging foreigner residents in Japan.

Hoang Khanh Linh is a project assistant at the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Vietnam.

Shah Sardar Ahmed and Yusy Widarahesty

University of Hyogo / Ritsumeikan University

Paper Title

Between Labor Force and Entrepreneurship: Understanding the Diverging Pathways Among Indonesian and Pakistani Communities in Japan

Abstract

Japan has been focusing on expanding its skilled labor migration programs, yet it also offers self-employment-based residence permits, notably the 'Business Manager' status. At the end of June 2025, almost 80% of Indonesian migrants were either on the 'Technical Intern Training' or 'Specified Skilled Worker' labor visas, compared to merely 0.6% for the Pakistani migrant community. Conversely, almost 9% of Pakistani migrants were on the 'Business Manager' status, with negligible representation from the Indonesian migrant community. Using a comparative and theoretical framework, this paper aims to explain how community formation, social networks, and human capital manifest in forming a divergence between migrant employment and entrepreneurship, subsequently creating various forms of solidarity practices within migrant communities in Japan. In doing so, it contributes to comparative migration and migrant entrepreneurship literature by focusing on how policies interact with migrant and community agency to result in distinct migration pathways.

Bio

Shah Sardar Ahmed is a Specially Appointed Assistant Professor at the University of Hyogo, School of Economics and Management. His research and teaching interests include labor migration, sustainability, globalization, and comparative policy analysis. He holds a Ph.D. in International Public Policy from the University of Osaka.

Yusy Widarahesty is a Senior Researcher at the Asia Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University. Her research interests include Japanese studies and Japan-ASEAN studies with particular focus on migration, mobility, and human security. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Ritsumeikan University.

Megha Wadhwa

Sophia University

Paper Title

From Northeast India to Japan: Race, Recruitment, and Care Work

Abstract

Japan is grappling with a rapidly ageing population, while India faces demographic pressure and limited employment opportunities despite becoming the world's fourth-largest economy in 2025. With low GDP per capita and intense labour market competition, many young Indians seek work overseas. This contrast positions India as a potential labour source for Japan's expanding care sector. Early recruitment patterns show that Japanese agencies initially preferred workers from Northeast India, often citing their physical appearance and perceived resemblance to Japanese people. Although recruitment has since expanded, these patterns show how racialised ideas about appearance shape access to migration opportunities. Focusing primarily on workers from Northeast India, the paper asks how recruitment to Japan's care sector is organised in practice, and how those involved navigate its demands and constraints. Drawing on conversations with agents and workers, it examines the pressures of language training, visa regulations, limited leave, night shifts, and remittance responsibilities. By situating these accounts within broader debates on migration and care, the paper reflects on what it takes to sustain this cross-border arrangement and what it reveals about the uneven burdens carried by those who move to support ageing societies.

Bio

Megha Wadhwa is an Assistant Professor at Sophia University Japan. She is an anthropologist and author of *Indian Migrants in Tokyo: A Study of Socio-Cultural, Religious and Working Worlds* (Routledge, 2021). Her recent publication is a book chapter, 'Contesting Invisibility: Stories of Indian Migrant Women in Japan', in *Empirical Art: Filmmaking for Fieldwork in Practice*, eds. Andy Lawrence and Martha-Cecilia Dietrich (Manchester University Press, 2025). Trained in visual ethnography, she has directed several films: *Daughters from Afghanistan* (2019), *Indian Cooks in Japan* (2020), *Finding Their Niche: Unheard Stories of Migrant Women* (2022), and *Home in the Making* (2025); *Home, Elsewhere* is forthcoming in 2026.

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