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TOSHIBA
Toshiba International Foundation

Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia

IN-EAST
INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES

Universität Zürich[UZH]

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF EAST ASIAN LABOR MARKETS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL SKILLED MIGRATION

Saturday–Sunday, November 2–3, 2024

University of Tokyo
Institute of Social Science (ISS)

How to get to the workshop venue:

THE WORKSHOP

This workshop seeks to explore changing labor markets in East Asian immigration regimes through international skilled migration. Three East Asian economies, namely Japan, South Korea (hereafter Korea) and Taiwan, similarly undergo an accelerated demographic decline and a labor shortage. These countries are in dire need to attract and secure long-time skilled professionals in order to maintain economic growth, to remain competent in global markets, and counter challenges arising from population decline and the fourth industrial revolution. These three economies have recently introduced new immigration policies to attract skilled professionals.

For example, Korea and Japan have created new visa categories, such as the E-7-S visa in Korea, J-Skip and J-Find visas in Japan, and Taiwan's the Taiwan Employment Gold Card. Previous research dominantly compared these three countries' immigration policies in labor -intensive sectors, comparative research on skilled migration remains scarce. While low-skilled migrants are treated as temporary labour, skilled migrants are often offered pathways to permanent residency. Thus, the acceptance of skilled immigrants might profoundly change the domestic labour market. Through international skilled migration, this workshop hence seeks to better under-stand shifting immigration regimes and labour market conditions in East Asian economies.

Next to skilled migrants the workshop also sheds light on foreign entrepreneurs in innovative sectors and on firms relying on these skilled foreign workers. The focus on the diversifying employment patterns of skilled migrants in these three countries as well as on the meso-level of firms – both foreign-born and domestic – is necessary to understand changing dynamics in the globalizing labor market within the East Asian region. The objective of the workshop is therefore to understand how different actors in the three countries – government, firms, and individuals/employees – shape the transformation of the domestic labor market, adjust to or proactively seek out opportunities in the increasingly internationalizing/ globalizing labor market, and navigate the problems associated with this transformation.

The conference is organized by
Helena Hof (University of Zurich / Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany),
Aimi Muranaka (University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany), and
Kikuko Nagayoshi (ISS, University of Tokyo).

This workshop is funded by the **German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)** and **Toshiba International Foundation**.

Saturday, November 2, 2024

Room 549 (5th floor) at Building 37 (Akamon General Research Building)

9:30–11:00 **Section 1: Changing International Skilled Migration in Asia and Its Policy**

The Social Construction of Skill in International Migration: Perspectives from Asia
Gracia Liu-Farrer *Waseda University, Japan*

South Korea's Policy of Supporting Overseas Employment and the Mechanism for Sending out University Graduates: Interaction between the Government, Support Organizations, Companies, and People Who Want to Move Abroad
Namiko Matsushita *Suzuka University, Japan*

11:00–11:15 Break

11:15–12:45 **Section II: (Limited) Usefulness of Skilled Immigrant Workers from the Perspectives of Employers**

Different Dream on the Same Bed: Mismatch of Interests around Foreign Researchers in STEM fields
Chiho Lee *Science and Technology Policy Institute, Korea*

Japanese Employers' Expectations of Skilled Immigrants: Results of the Employer Survey
Kikuko Nagayoshi *University of Tokyo, Japan*

12:45-13:45 Lunch

13:45–15:15 **Section III: Accumulation and Mobilization of Capital in Smaller Firms and Startups**

Migrant Founders in the Japanese Startup Ecosystem: The Opportunities and Risks of Deviant Entrepreneurship
Helena Hof *University of Zurich, Switzerland / Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany*

Capital Formation Challenges in Korea's Labor Market Field: The Cases of Asian Skilled Migrants in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
Joohyun Justine Park *Inha University, Korea*

15:15–15:30 Break

15:30–17:00 **Section IV: Navigating the Host Society's Labor Market**

The Interplay of Immigration Controls and Employment Practices: Precarity Among Emerging Professional Migrants in Taiwan
Yen-Fen Tseng *National Taiwan University, Taiwan*

Staying as a Stepping-Stone for Upward Career Mobility? Study on the (Im)Mobilities of Vietnamese Skilled Migrants in the IT Sector in Japan
Aimi Muranaka *University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany*

17:00–17:15 Break

17:15–18:45 **Section V: Denying the Narrative of Linear Trajectories in Skilled Migration: Emigration and Return Mobilities**

The Rice-Paper Ceiling Even for Japanese Workers? Self-Initiated Expatriate Japanese Workers' Career Opportunity
Kenji Ishida *University of Tokyo, Japan*

From Flowing Out to Return Home and Beyond – Taiwanese Returned Talents from China
Yuling Song *National Changhua University of Education, Taiwan*

Sunday, November 3, 2024

Room 549 (5th floor) at Building 37 (Akamon General Research Building)

10:00–12:00 **Discussion and Wrapping up with all the Invited Presenters**

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF EAST ASIAN LABOR MARKETS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL SKILLED MIGRATION

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Helena Hof

Migrant Founders in the Japanese Startup Ecosystem: The Opportunities and Risks of Deviant Entrepreneurship

Abstract: This presentation zooms in on the knowledge-intensive startup sector in Japan, which is simultaneously emerging and diversifying. As part of the Japanese government's policies to develop the local startup ecosystem and to boost innovation new visa policies have attracted aspiring startup founders since the late 2010s, both from within Japan and overseas. The presentation builds its arguments on a qualitative study of the internationalizing startup sector in Tokyo. Findings from ethnographic observations at events of the startup community, expert interviews with officials from municipial (Shibuya) and metropolitan (Tokyo Metrpolitan Government) government and qualitative interviews with 36 migrant founders since 2021 demonstrate how foreign founders' business activities challenge some of the well-established labour market practices and human resource management of Japanese firms. While migrant entrepreneurs deviate from some of the common social and labour market norms Japan's labour shortages in various sectors, including in high-tech fields, open up leeways that might allow migrants to navigate established business practices and push for incremental change. That said, immigration policies, which have become increasingly flexible regarding skilled foreign employees, keep a firm grip on skilled foreign employers, thereby exposing migration authorities' deeply situated notions of foreignness as deviant. Constrained by the lack of social and cultural capital and by their legal status, only migrants with sufficient socialization in Japanese institutions are able to maneuvre the startup ecosystem and to project their businesses' sustainability.

Bio: Helena Hof is a Senior Research and Teaching Fellow in Social Science of Japan at the University of Zurich and a Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Her work lies at the nexus of mobility studies, the sociology of work, skilled migration, gender, ethnicity and race, and global cities and entrepreneurship. As a member of the collaborative research project *Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers*

in Asia she examines foreign entrepreneurs' social and professional incorporation in Japan and Singapore. Among her most recent publications are *Employment as an anchor: The prospects of emerging East Asian skilled migration regimes through the lens of migrants' access to the labor market* (with Aimi Muranaka and Joohyun Justine Park, forthcoming in APMJ) and the book *The EU Migrant Generation in Asia.* (Bristol University Press).

Kenji Ishida

The Rice-Paper Ceiling even for Japanese Workers? Self-Initiated Expatriate Japanese Workers' Career Opportunity

Abstract: Over the past 30 years, the number of Japanese nationals residing overseas has steadily increased despite still representing only around one per cent of the total Japanese population. This trend can be attributed to Japanese companies expanding their operations globally and reducing the reliance on corporate expatriates, as well as the challenging domestic labour market in Japan since the economic downturn of the 1990s. Many young Japanese nationals, known as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), have proactively sought career opportunities in overseas locations like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand.

While SIEs have been able to fulfil the labour needs of Japanese and multinational companies in local societies, they have encountered obstacles in advancing their careers, particularly in Japanese branch firms, due to entrenched Japanese employment practices. This phenomenon, known as the "rice-paper ceiling," hinders both local workers and Japanese expatriates from accessing better career prospects within Japanese organisations.

Against this backdrop, a recent study aimed to quantitatively analyse the rice-paper ceilings experienced by Japanese SIE workers in two contexts: within the local societies they work in and upon returning to Japan. The study, based on a three-wave panel survey of Japanese workers overseas, revealed that SIEs struggled to attain the same level of economic attainment as corporate expatriates and faced precarious employment situations. However, the current labour shortage in Japan may present new opportunities for SIE Japanese workers seeking to return to their home country.

Bio: Kenji Ishida, an Associate Professor working at the Center for Social Research and Data Archives in the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, engages in a variety of quantitative survey research, primarily such as career mobility of Japanese young workers, educational attainment of immigrant children, social networks, and time use. In a recent co-edited Japanese book titled *In Search of Second Chances in a Divided Society: The Possibility of Life Course Reorientation – Evidence from the Japanese Life Course Panel Surveys*, he worked on the heterogeneous second chance by social isolation in job search among the unemployed.

Chiho Lee

Different Dream on the Same Bed: Mismatch of Interests around Foreign Researchers in STEM Fields

Abstract: Triggered by the recent population decline by low fertility rate and escalating global competition for technological leadership, the Korean government is making great efforts to attract outstanding foreign researchers in STEM fields. However, despite the efforts, employment of foreign researchers including professors in university has increased only at a slow pace and the possibility to attract foreign researchers still has not been verified carefully. In this paper, we investigate the interests of each player around attracting foreign researchers: employee (foreign researcher), employer (university, institute, and enterprise), and government. Based on in-depth interviews, it is found that there are significant mismatches of interests among those players largely originated from communication ability in Korean. Employers are still reluctant to hire foreign researchers regarding high communication costs utilizing them and abundant supply of Korean researchers at the present time. They do not think foreign researchers as candidates for key personnel with long retention. Many foreign researchers are concerned that their lack of Korean language skills and the cultural difference will limit their opportunities in the organization. As a result, they tend to consider Korea as a stepping stone towards a career in the global researcher market that they can communicate in English. Although Korean government is eager to attract foreign researchers to local, small and medium-sized enterprises, those enterprises suffers further from high communication costs, and foreign researchers are reluctant to work in small and medium-sized enterprises because of their low wages and future prospects.

Bio: Chiho Lee is an Associate Research Fellow in Science and Technology Policy Institute (STEPI) of Korea. He studied at Tokyo Institute of Technology and The University of Tokyo and worked as an engineer at SK Hynix. Subsequently, he earned a Ph.D. in labor economics from Seoul National University. He recently concentrates on qualitative researches for education and labor market in STEM fields, but his recent interests span labor economics, urban economics and applied microeconomics by quantitative approach.

Gracia Liu-Farrer

The Social Construction of Skill in International Migration: Perspectives from Asia

Abstract: Skill-based selective migration policies are a dominant contemporary form of migration governance in labor receiving countries. Researchers have critiqued these policies, noting discrepancies between their intended goals and the actual labor market outcomes for immigrants. The social construction of skill thesis offers a sociological interpretation of this migration phenomenon, emphasizing that skills and their categorization in international migration are intrinsically political. It problematizes the skill categories established by governments primarily in the Global North to manage and control migrants primarily from the Global South and emphasizes the processes of skill construction in the sending countries, transnational contexts and post-migration experiences. The social construction of skill thesis can therefore be understood as an effort to recenter migration studies and extend research attention from migration practices and migrant experiences in Europe and white-settler-dominated societies in North America and Oceania to the rest of the world, making room for insights that foster a critical understanding of the practices and implications of international skill mobility and labor migration. In this presentation, I review scholarship that explores these dynamics from Asian perspectives. It identifies the various positions Asian countries occupy in skill mobility, and highlights the critical issues related to both outbound and inbound skill migration as well as intra-regional mobilities, including the ascriptive inequality innate in its evaluation and utilization, the deskilling phenomenon, and the relationship between skill construction and transnational migration.

Bio: Gracia Liu-Farrer is a Professor of Sociology at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, and Director of the Institute of Asian Migration at Waseda University, Japan. Her research examines immigration into Japan, transnational labor and student mobilities in East Asia as well as between Asia and Europe. Her most recent books are *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (with Brenda Yeoh, Routledge, 2018), *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and Belonging in an Ethno-nationalist Society* (Cornell University Press, 2020), and *Tangled Mobilities: Places, Affects, and Personhood across Social Spheres in Asian Migration* (with Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Berghahn Books, 2022)

Namiko Matsushita

South Korea's Policy of Supporting Overseas Employment and the Mechanism for Sending out University Graduates: Interaction between the Government, Support Organizations, Companies, and People Who Want to Move Abroad

Abstract: Japan and South Korea signed an agreement in 2000 to actively promote the exchange of IT engineers between the two countries' governments. However, for around 20 years before that, there had already been an exchange of IT engineers between Japan and South Korea in the private sector. The 1997 IMF currency crisis dealt a heavy blow to South Korea's economy. Many people were laid off, and the doors of the labor market were closed to young job seekers. To overcome this situation, the Korean government came up with a policy to train unemployed people in Korea as IT personnel and send them to Japan. And the managers of IT companies that came to Japan in the 1980s and later started their own businesses in Japan and employed the job seekers, trained in Korea, in Japan.

It is not easy for Koreans who do not have a Japanese university degree and whose Japanese language ability is not as high to find work in Japan straight away. What worked well in this situation was the existence of Korean IT companies in Japan. Since the 2000s, the Korean economy has recovered, and in recent years, starting salaries in Korea have exceeded those in Japan. As a result, talented students and those who want to earn more money are no longer choosing to move to Japan. At present, many young people through overseas support agencies moving to Japan are those who want to live in Japan, or those who were unable to find employment from the company they wanted in Korea.

Bio: Namiko Matsushita is a Professor at the Faculty of International Studies, Suzuka University, Ph.D. (Sociology). Her specialty is global labor migration in the Asia. In particular, she is researching the process that young people go through after graduating from university and entering the labor market. She is focusing on the phenomenon of international labor migration of people with specialized or technical skills who have graduated from university or higher. Her current research interest is in global labor migration caused by the spread and expansion of higher education. She is studying international labor migration that occurs when many people with university degrees enter the labor market. Email: n-matsushita@suzuka.ac.jp

Aimi Muranaka

Staying as a Stepping-Stone for Upward Career Mobility? Study on the (Im)Mobilities of Vietnamese Skilled Migrants in the IT Sector in Japan

Abstract: International skilled migrants have often been touted in the literature as being globally mobile, and they are able to access the labour market without many obstacles, as numerous host societies, including emerging immigration countries like Japan, are interested in recruiting them. However, recent studies have shown that these workers encounter challenges in accessing jobs and pursuing upward career mobility in the host society. Focusing on skilled migrant workers in high-demand sectors, like the IT industry, this study examines how they undergo job/career (im)mobilities in the host society. Using the conceptual framework of "navigation", this study seeks to unravel how these workers not only manage their situation by mobilising their various resources, but also actively opt for immobility to realise their eventual career mobilities. Drawn from interviews with Vietnamese IT professionals, the findings of this study are as follows: despite different entry channels into the Japanese labour market, Vietnamese IT professionals often pursue further job mobilities within Japan, while strategically using their relatively longer-term work visas. Additionally, while some are able to seek partial upward career mobility, they need to keep staying in contact with local Japanese partners/networks to pursue further career mobility. While some Vietnamese IT professionals are able to experience upward career mobility in Japan, this study argues that they simultaneously undergo stagnation and immobilities in their professional lives in the host society.

Bio: Aimi Muranaka works as a Post-doc at the Institute of East Asian Studies in the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany. She now works for a collaborative research project *Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia* (QuaMaFA) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Her research interest focuses on marketisation of international migration, skills/qualifications in migration and brokerage in Asia. Her most recent publication is a co-edited book *Immigration and Quality of Life in Ageing Societies. How Attractive for Migrants are Japan and Germany?*

Kikuko Nagayoshi

Japanese Employers' Expectations of Skilled Immigrants: Results of the Employer Survey

Abstract: As employers are positioned on the demand side of the labor market, the international labor market has been created by the activities of employers who look for workers in that labor market to fill their labor demand. Why do they choose to use the international labor market instead of the domestic one? What do they expect to skilled immigrant workers? This presentation aims to answer these questions. From the former analysis of the employer survey data we conducted in 2023, I found that employers tend to use domestic labor market when they look for "competent" workers regardless of their nationality. In contrast, employers tend to use the international labor market when they look for workers with foreign human capitals. Most of these employers use the referral from oversea branches and business partners. Employers tend to use (international) employment agencies not only when they need workers with foreign human capital but when they face severe labor shortage. In our interviews with employers, I found that even when they need workers with foreign-related human capitals such as foreign language skills, they prefer the domestic labor market and advertise a job opening on domestic job search sites. Especially since the mid-2010s, they can fill in their labor demand by skilled immigrants who already live in Japan. Employers tend to use the international labor market when they find some additional reasons for it: lowering labor costs or strengthening ties with oversea branches.

Bio: Kikuko Nagayoshi is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo. Her research is centralized on three areas: public opinion toward immigration and immigrants, integration of immigrants, and social stratification. She is well published in international journals including *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *International Migration Review* and *International Sociology*. Her recent article, *Intersections of gender and immigrant status in Japan: Analysis of the 2020 Basic Survey on Wage Structure*, was published in *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*.

Joohyun Justine Park

Capital Formation Challenges in Korea's Labor Market Field: The Cases of Asian Skilled Migrants in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Abstract: This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by Asian skilled migrants working as non-regular employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Korea. In response to demographic decline, regional depopulation, and a shrinking working-age population, the Korean government has actively promoted policies to attract and retain skilled and semi-skilled migrants for the long term. However, the reality of the dual-structure labour market often contrasts with the government's objectives. Most skilled migrants with a bachelor's degree or higher are employed as non-regular workers in SMEs, and despite their specialized knowledge and qualifications, they encounter structural challenges such as unstable employment conditions and issues with visa renewals. These factors further exacerbate their precarious socio-economic status. Based on interviews with Asian skilled migrants employed in SMEs across Seoul and other regions, this study seeks to shed light on the difficulties they face in accumulating new forms of capital and skills necessary in the Korean labour market and to understand the reasons behind these challenges. By utilizing Bourdieu's concept of the field, this paper examines how the specific conditions of the Korean labour market field affect the reformation of capital for skilled migrants. Furthermore, it explores how such experiences ultimately influence their job and life satisfaction, as well as their future intentions to remain in the country. The findings of this study provide significant insights into the gap between South Korea's skilled immigration policy objectives and the realities of its labour market.

Bio: Joohyun Justine Park is a Research Professor at Inha University in the Republic of Korea and a member of the BMBF collaborative project, *Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia* (QuaMaFA). Joohyun Justine Park is a director of the Community Collaboration Center at Inha University's Convergence Institute for Multicultural Studies. She previously served as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt and earned her Ph.D. in Education at the University of Auckland. Her research interests focus on multicultural local community collaboration and various aspects of migration, including adaptation, integration, sense of belonging, racism, and well-being.

Yuling Song

From Flowing Out to Return Home and Beyond – Taiwanese Returned Talents from China

Abstract: Over the past decade, the brain drain in Taiwan has been narrowly construed as "brain drain". However, in the era of globalization, the multidirectional and endless flow of talent has become a normal state of affairs. However, the migration of Taiwanese talents to China reveals the complexity of intra-Asian migration. China's close proximity to Taiwan is politically threatening, but it offers a vast labor market that is both attractive and challenging for young Taiwanese talent. Under this premise, this study focuses on Taiwan's talented people who have returned or remigrated from China. This study attempts to discuss the process of Taiwanese talents' return or remigration from China through the accumulation of personal capital, social networks of knowledge and emotions, and the geometry of power, and what types of talents are shaped by their different transnational experiences in China. A total of 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Taiwan professionals who had returned or remigrated from China. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the study. According to this study, the main perception of talent is that "the Chinese market is full of opportunities and high risks". In the spatial relationship between Taiwan and China, due to the success or failure of knowledge transfer, personal capital exchange, and value balance, different characteristics of talents are formed: all-round talents and embedded talents. This study provides a typology of intra-Asian talent migration in the context of geopolitics, spatial asymmetry, and the intersection of personal capital and emotions.

Bio: Yuling Song is a Human Geographer currently teaching in the Department of Geography at National Changhua University of Education (Taiwan). Her specialties include migration, gender studies, and rural development. She currently focuses on the migration of Taiwanese young talent into China and Southeast Asia, as well as their return to Taiwan, and has presented *Upward social mobility? The capital accumulation of Taiwanese talent in China* at Population, Space and Place. Future research will be developed on the migration of Taiwanese talent to Japan and the United States. Email: yuling@cc.ncue.edu.tw

Yen-Fen Tseng

The Interplay of Immigration Controls and Employment Practices: Precarity among Emerging Professional Migrants in Taiwan

Abstract: To address Taiwan's declining population, the government has relaxed the qualifications for foreign graduates of Taiwanese universities to obtain professional work permits and provided them with a pathway to permanent residency. My study examines the employment experiences and settlement prospects of these emerging professional migrants based on thirty-six in-depth interviews. It explores how the interplay between immigration controls and employment practices shapes employment and migration outcomes. The research reveals that work permit regulations limiting skilled migrants' access to the labor market, along with critical aspects of Taiwanese employment practices, often compel migrants to accept less favorable terms of employment. As a result, many experience precarious working conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity. Achieving permanent residency could break the cycle of employment restrictions tied to work permits and reduce precarity. However, compromised employment weakens their wage bargaining power, making it difficult for many to meet the income threshold required for permanent residency applications. As the Taiwanese government increases immigration targets to retain more international students and private enterprises show growing interest in hiring them, the number of skilled migrants in this group is expected to rise. The employment challenges and limited settlement prospects these migrants face warrant greater attention from policymakers.

Bio: Yen-Fen Tseng is a Professor at the Department of Sociology of the National Taiwan University. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interest is migration within Asia and immigration policy, focusing on skilled migration to and from Taiwan. Her recent publications include *Settlement Intentions among Taiwanese Skilled Migrants in Tokyo and Hong Kong*, *Becoming Global Talent? Taiwanese White-Collar Migrants in Japan*, *How Do Identities Matter? Taiwanese Cultural Workers in China*, and *Shanghai Rush: Skilled Migrants in a Fantasy City*. She is currently studying skilled migration from Southeast Asia to Taiwan, on the gap between skilled immigration policy and lived migratory experiences among skilled migrants.