



## Global Labour Shortages and Rising Demand for Migrant Workers

**15-16 JANUARY 2026**

### HYBRID FORMAT

Online via Zoom  
& NUS AS8-04-04

[www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events/migration\\_regimes/](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/events/migration_regimes/)

Across Asia, countries such as Japan, the People's Republic of China, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand are facing significant demographic shifts: persistently low fertility rates, shrinking labour forces, and rapidly ageing populations. Acute labour shortages in sectors such as healthcare, elder care, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, logistics, and hospitality heighten the demand for low- and mid-skilled migrant labour. Competition among receiving states for migrant workers from within Asia is intensifying, further aggravated by increased demand for migrant labour in other continents.

In response to these pressures, Asian migration regimes are undergoing notable changes. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have relaxed previously rigid migration policies to admit more workers, with Japan and Taiwan now allowing select low-skilled migrants to change their status and stay long-term. The PRC, traditionally closed to low-skilled migrant labour, experimented with a limited "guest worker" programme. Singapore, an established migration society, continues to rely on large numbers of temporary migrant workers, but faces challenges in retaining nurses, a key group of essential workers. Thailand, which depends on many undocumented migrants, has launched regularisation campaigns and formalised bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries. Beyond Asia, other countries are also relaxing migration policies to attract Asian workers.

This workshop provides a timely opportunity to critically examine how Asia's migration regimes are reshaped amid demographic shifts and labour shortages, with effects such as increasing numbers of migrant workers, opening new sectors to migrant employment, diversification of source countries, and new possibilities for extended stays among some migrant workers. Our focus is on low- and mid-skilled (blue- and pink-collar) migrant labour, whose migration is typically temporary and often excludes pathways to family reunification, long-term residency, or citizenship. For a thorough understanding of evolving dynamics, we aim to investigate how state and non-state actors—including governments of receiving states, employers, intermediaries, and migrants themselves—respond to the heightened demand for migrant labour, as these actors collectively shape the pathways, patterns, and conditions of labour mobility.

The selected papers provide case studies and comparative analyses of the various responses to growing demand for and competition over migrant labour in the Asian context, and they help us to understand what is new and distinctive about current developments in Asia's migration regimes. Contributions address, but are not limited to, the following questions and topics:

- What measures are governments of receiving states, regions, and municipalities taking to increase and retain migrant labour (such as adjusting visa categories and skill categories, opening new sectors to migrant labour, diversifying source countries, or introducing long-term pathways for blue- and pink-collar migrant workers)?
- How do the governments of receiving states react to domestic forces critical of increasing the number of migrant workers?
- In the context of growing competition, how do employers in the respective contexts strategise to recruit and retain Asian migrant labour with the desired skills, experience, origin, and background?
- How do intermediaries—including brokers, recruitment agencies, and training or educational institutions—respond to new recruitment opportunities as the demand for migrant labour grows?
- How does the increased demand for and competition over migrant labour influence migrants' decisions regarding where to migrate, their opportunities to secure longer-term residency, and their bargaining power vis-à-vis governments, employers, and intermediaries?

## **WORKSHOP CONVENORS**

**Dr Eva Samia Dinkelaker**

Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**Prof Brenda S.A. Yeoh**

Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

## PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

DATE	TIME (SGT)	PANEL SESSION
<b>15 Jan 2026</b> (Thu)	10:30 – 10:50	<b>WELCOME &amp; INTRODUCTORY REMARKS</b>
	10:50 – 12:20	<b>PANEL 1</b> – Reassessing Asia's Migration Policies Amid Demographic Change
	13:30 – 15:00	<b>PANEL 2</b> – Emerging Destinations of Asian Labour Migration
	15:30 – 17:30	<b>PANEL 3</b> – Reorganising Labour Migration in Different Sectors
	18:30 – 20:00	<b>WORKSHOP DINNER</b> <i>(For speakers, chairpersons and invited guests only)</i>
<b>16 Jan 2026</b> (Fri)	10:30 – 12:00	<b>PANEL 4</b> – Recalibrated Middle Spaces and Increased Competition
	13:00 – 14:30	<b>PANEL 5</b> – Mobility Power as a Driver of Change
	15:00 – 16:30	<b>PANEL 6</b> – Negotiating Settlement in Shifting Migration Regimes
	16:30 – 17:00	<b>SUMMARY &amp; CLOSING REMARKS</b>

## 15 JANUARY 2026 • THURSDAY

<b>10:30 – 10:50</b>	<b>WELCOME &amp; INTRODUCTORY REMARKS</b>
	<b>BRENDA S.A. YEOH</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i> <b>EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<b>10:50 – 12:20</b>	<b>PANEL 1 – REASSESSING ASIA'S MIGRATION POLICIES AMID DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>THEODORA LAM</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:50	From Guestworkers to Residents: Developmental Migration States and the Expansion of Settlement Pathways in East Asia <b>YI-CHUN CHIEN *</b>   <i>National Chengchi University</i> <b>SOHOON YI</b>   <i>Korea University</i>
11:10	Multi-level Migration Governance Configurations in Japan's Regions <b>YUNCHEN TIAN</b>   <i>Kyoto University</i>
11:30 <i>Online</i>	Unpacking the Education-Labour-Migration Nexus in South Korea: An Analysis of Policy Changes and the Shifting Positionality of International Students <b>JOOWON YUK *</b>   <i>Kyungpook National University</i> <b>MINKYUNG KOH</b>   <i>Kyungpook National University &amp; Seoul National University</i>
11:50	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>12:20 – 13:30</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
<b>13:30 – 15:00</b>	<b>PANEL 2 – EMERGING DESTINATIONS OF ASIAN LABOUR MIGRATION</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>BERNICE LOH</b>   <i>Nanyang Technological University</i>
13:30	Varieties of Migration Governance: A Comparative Study of Two Guestworker Programs in China <b>ADAM HUANG</b>   <i>Renmin University of China</i>
13:50	Eastern Europe as a New Frontier of Asian Labour Migration: Experimenting with an "Asian Migration Regime" <b>NYIRI PAL</b>   <i>Budapest University of Economics (Corvinus)</i> <b>PAMUNGKAS AYUDANING DEWANTO</b>   <i>Waseda University</i> <b>ANDREW LACSINA *</b>   <i>Ateneo de Manila University</i>
14:10	Building a Destination Reputation: How German Intermediaries Implement Skill Mobility Partnerships in Nursing with Asian Origin Countries and the Effect on Skilled Migrants <b>JOHANNA ULLMANN</b>   <i>University of Osnabrück</i>
14:30	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>15:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>AFTERNOON TEA BREAK</b>

<b>15:30 – 17:30</b>	<b>PANEL 3 – REORGANISING LABOUR MIGRATION IN DIFFERENT SECTORS</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>EXEQUIEL CAMARIG CABANDA</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>15:30</i>	<p>University-Linked Migration Governance in South Korea: New Pathways for Manufacturing and Care Work</p> <p><b>HYUNA MOON *</b>   <i>Seoul National University</i>  <b>MINSEOK KANG</b>   <i>Seoul National University</i>  <b>BORA YEON</b>   <i>Seoul National University</i></p>
<i>15:50</i>	<p>The Evolving Migration State: An Analysis of China's Skilled Immigration Policies across Four Decades and Implications for Future Trajectories</p> <p><b>AENEAS ZI WANG</b>   <i>Nanjing University</i></p>
<i>16:10</i>	<p>Household Preferences and the Emerging Care Migration Regime in South Korea</p> <p><b>JIWEON JUN *</b>   <i>Seoul National University</i>  <b>ITO PENG</b>   <i>University of Toronto</i></p>
<i>16:30</i>	<p>An Exploitative Demand for Middling Migrant Workers: The Deskilling of Chinese Female Corporate Employees in Japan and South Korea</p> <p><b>MEIYUN MENG *</b>   <i>University College Cork</i>  <b>ADRIAN FAVELL</b>   <i>University College Cork</i></p>
<i>16:50</i>	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>17:30</b>	<b>END OF DAY 1</b>
<b>18:30 – 20:00</b>	<b>WORKSHOP DINNER</b> ( <i>For speakers, chairpersons and invited guests only</i> )



## 16 JANUARY 2026 • FRIDAY

<b>10:30 – 12:00</b>	<b>PANEL 4 – RECALIBRATED MIDDLE SPACES AND INCREASED COMPETITION</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<a href="#">EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER</a>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>10:30</i>	Path-Dependency and New Forms of Precarity: Cross-Border Labor Recruitment Practices in Changing Labor Migration Regimes <a href="#">GRACIA LIU-FARRER</a>   <i>Waseda University</i> <a href="#">PAMUNGKAS AYUDANING DEWANTO *</a>   <i>Waseda University</i> <a href="#">FIRMAN BUDIANTO</a>   <i>Waseda University</i>
<i>10:50</i>	Competition within the Middle Space of Migration: The Case of Migrant Nurses <a href="#">YASMIN Y. ORTIGA</a>   <i>Singapore Management University</i>
<i>11:10</i>	Uzbekistan's Emerging Migration Regime: Balancing of Dependency and Diversification <a href="#">BHAVNA DAVE</a>   <i>SOAS University of London</i>
<i>11:30</i>	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>12:00 – 13:00</b>	<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>
<b>13:00 – 14:30</b>	<b>PANEL 5 – MOBILITY POWER AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<a href="#">ANNA TRIANDAFYLLIDOU</a>   <i>Toronto Metropolitan University</i>
<i>13:00</i> <i>Online</i>	Reverse Bargaining Power: Migrant Agency in Choosing Destinations under Global Labour Shortages <a href="#">AKM AHSAN ULLAH</a>   <i>University of Brunei Darussalam</i>
<i>13:20</i>	Migration Infrastructures as Means and Objects of Contestation: A View from Thailand <a href="#">STEPHEN CAMPBELL</a>   <i>Nanyang Technological University</i>
<i>13:40</i>	Mobility of Labour as Method <a href="#">RUTVICA ANDRIJASEVIC</a>   <i>University of Bristol</i>
<i>14:00</i>	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>14:30 – 15:00</b>	<b>AFTERNOON TEA BREAK</b>

**New Dynamics in Asia's Migration Regimes:  
Global Labour Shortages and Rising Demand for Migrant Workers**  
15-16 January 2026 | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

---

<b>15:00 – 16:30</b>	<b>PANEL 6 – NEGOTIATING SETTLEMENT IN SHIFTING MIGRATION REGIMES</b>
<i>Chairperson</i>	<b>YOGA PRASETYO</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>15:00</i>	From Extended to Permanent Temporariness: Navigating the Specified Skilled Worker Program in Japan <b>ANH PHUONG LE</b>   <i>Waseda University</i>
<i>15:20</i>	“Anak Kita” and Spaces of Intimacy: Indonesian Migrant Family-Making in Taiwan’s Labor Migration Regime <b>TZU-CHI OU</b>   <i>National Chengchi University</i>
<i>15:40</i>	Dynamics in “Guest Worker”-Regimes Then and Now: Migrant Practices in Post-World War II West Germany and Contemporary Taiwan <b>EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>16:00</i>	<b>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</b>
<b>16:30 – 17:00</b>	<b>SUMMARY &amp; CLOSING REMARKS</b> <b>BRENDA S.A. YEOH</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i> <b>EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER</b>   <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<b>17:00</b>	<b>END OF WORKSHOP</b>

**From Guestworkers to Residents:  
Developmental Migration States and the Expansion of Settlement Pathways in East Asia**

**YI-CHUN CHIEN**

National Chengchi University  
ychien@nccu.edu.tw

**SOHOON YI**

Korea University  
yisohoon@korea.ac.kr

---

Across Asia, acute demographic pressures—shrinking workforces, low fertility, and rapid ageing—are reshaping migration regimes. While many countries in the Global North are closing off settlement pathways, East Asia presents a striking divergence. Taiwan and South Korea, historically restrictive and ethnically homogeneous, have recently opened new legal routes for formerly temporary, blue-collar migrant workers to transition into long-term or permanent residency. This paper situates these policy shifts within the framework of developmental migration states, highlighting how migration policies are instrumentalized not only to fill immediate labour shortages but also to secure long-term demographic resilience and social stability.

Focusing on Taiwan's 2022 Foreign Mid-Skilled Worker Program for industrial workers and caregivers, alongside South Korea's gradual expansion of E-7-4 visa scheme, the paper asks: *Why do East Asian states, under conditions of global immigration resistance, selectively expand settlement opportunities for low- and mid-skilled migrants?* We argue that these reforms represent a distinctive response to structural labour shortages, designed to reconcile economic imperatives and ageing societies with ongoing pressures to preserve national identity. Unlike liberal settler states, permanent residency in Taiwan and South Korea functions less as an avenue of multicultural nation-building and more as a pragmatic developmental tool.

Empirically, the study draws on policy documents, demographic data, and civil society debates, with particular attention to how state logics intersect with employers' labour demands and migrants' aspirations for stability. By foregrounding these dynamics, the paper contributes to the workshop's central question of what is "new" in Asia's migration regimes: namely, the emergence of selective settlement pathways for blue-collar migrants. This trajectory not only challenges longstanding assumptions of temporariness in East Asia but also illustrates how developmental migration states adapt to intensifying regional competition for labour.

**Yi-Chun Chien** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Toronto and was previously a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Ottawa's School of Political Studies and the Research Chair in Taiwan Studies. Her research examines the politics of international migration and social welfare, with a regional focus on East Asia. Her current projects explore the intersections of migration governance, demographic decline, and care regimes in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Her work has appeared in journals including *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Critical Sociology*, and *Asian Journal of Social Science*. She is also co-editor of *Emotions, Community, Citizenship: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (University of Toronto Press, 2017).

**Sohoon Yi** is Associate Professor in the Division of Global Korean Studies at Korea University and previously undertook fellowships and employment at Rice University, the University of Toronto, the University of Sydney, and Kyungpook National University. She conducts action research, focusing on migrant subjectivity at the intersection of gender, immigration laws, precarious labour, and the informal market. She has published articles in various academic journals, including *Citizenship Studies*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Social Politics*, and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. She is currently pursuing new research projects on new forms of racialization from Asian Studies perspectives, paying special attention to Muslim migrants and Islamophobia, and colourless racialization and implicit racism in South Korea.



## **Multi-level Migration Governance Configurations in Japan's Regions**

**YUNCHEN TIAN**

Kyoto University  
yunchentian@gmail.com

---

Historically frontiers and springboards for imperial expansion, Japan's borderlands today are peripheralized regions only tenuously connected to neighboring states. However, Japan's largest and most inhabited borderlands regions, Hokkaido and Okinawa, increasingly depend on the governance of migration in sectors such as agriculture, seafood production and processing, nursing and care work, and tourism to offset a slowing domestic economy, demographic decline, and shrinking public-sector budgets. Drawing upon policy analysis and fieldwork conducted in Okinawa and Hokkaido between February and September 2025, I use a process-tracing perspective to argue that the development of migration governance regimes in Japan's borderlands needs to be understood in the context of Japan's broader shift towards decentralized and neoliberalized governance. I comparatively trace the trajectory of policies that continue to incentivize the recruitment and retention of foreign migrants in Japan's borderlands, rather than its urban cores, alongside a range of projects aimed at promoting the migration of Japanese citizens from core areas to the borderlands. The use of policy tools such as National Strategic Zones (NSZs), subnational bilateral agreements for foreign migrant recruitment, and the promotion of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the governance of both foreign and domestic migrants show how the state has shifted autonomy and responsibility for development and regional revitalization in Japan's borderlands onto prefectural and municipal governments, which in turn must cooperate heavily with semi-public and private partners to compensate for limited resources and capacity. I conclude by setting Japan's migration governance regime into context with its regional neighbors.

**Yunchen Tian** (or just Tian for short) is Specially Appointed Associate Professor at the Kyoto University Faculty of Law. They hold a PhD in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University. Their research focuses on the governance and discursive construction of labor migration policies in Japan. Tian's work has been supported by grants from American Councils and the Japan Foundation. Their work has been published in *the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Social Science Japan Journal*, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, and *Citizenship Studies*. They were recently awarded the 2023 ISS/OUP Prize in Modern Japanese Studies for their article "Workers, Neighbours, or Something Else? Local Policies and Policy Narratives of Technical Intern Training Program Participants". Outside of academic journals, they have been published in *Foreign Affairs* and have spoken on immigration issues in Japan with both foreign and Japanese media sources. Tian is a member of the International Studies Association, the American Political Science Association, the Japanese Association for Migration Policy Studies and the Japanese Association of Migration Studies.

## **Unpacking the Education-Labour-Migration Nexus in South Korea: An Analysis of Policy Changes and the Shifting Positionality of International Students**

**JOOWON YUK**

Kyungpook National University  
joowon.yuk@gmail.com

**MINKYUNG KOH**

Kyungpook National University & Seoul National University  
koh.geo54@knu.ac.kr

---

The number of international students in South Korea has increased rapidly over the past two decades, reaching over 260,000 by the end of 2024. This trend has been strengthened through the government's *Study Korea 300K Project*, which aims to recruit 300,000 international students by 2027 while promoting their employment and long-term regional settlement. Against this backdrop, this study examines how the policy positioning of international students has been reconfigured within South Korea's education and migration regimes.

Drawing on critical policy analysis, the study examines key immigration and higher education policies, government statistics, and official policy documents to trace how international students have been reconstituted from temporary 'students' into 'student-workers' and, more recently, into prospective 'regional resident-workers'. The analytical framework of the Education-Labour-Migration Nexus is employed to illuminate how state policies structure international students' migration trajectories, labour participation, and conditions of stay, situating them at the intersection of population policy, regional development strategies, and labour market governance.

The findings show that international students are increasingly mobilized as instruments to address structural challenges faced by the Korean state, including fiscal pressures on universities, labour shortages, and regional depopulation. However, these developmentalist policy calculations often diverge from social realities. Efforts to channel international students into depopulating regions are constrained by mismatches between students' aspirations and regional labour markets, limited employment opportunities commensurate with their qualifications, and insufficient social and multicultural infrastructure. The study argues that, reflecting the Korean state's long-standing tendency to 'outsource' structural problems to migrants, international students are more likely to function as selectively mobilized labour reserves than as genuine long-term regional settlers.

**Joowon Yuk** is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Minorities and Human Rights at Kyungpook National University, South Korea. She received her BA from Seoul National University and her MA and PhD from the University of Warwick, UK. Before joining Kyungpook National University, she held a postdoctoral fellowship at the National University of Singapore. Her research examines the cultural politics of race, gender, and class, with particular attention to migration, citizenship, and the arts. Alongside her academic work, she is deeply engaged in social justice initiatives, collaborating with civil society organisations on diverse issues. One of her recent projects involves ethnographic action research on the politics of belonging and bordering, focusing on the Daegu Mosque conflict. She is currently based in Cambridge as a 2025–26 Harvard-Yenching Visiting Scholar. During her time at Harvard, she will investigate the entanglement of race and religion in Korea, especially the Christian influences of the early 20th-century colonial period, with the aim of theorizing race from both Korean studies and broader Asian studies perspectives.

**Minkyung Koh** is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography Education at Kyungpook National University and conducts collaborative research with the Center for Asian Migration Studies, Seoul National University. As a critical human geographer, she asks: how can critiques of our social, political, economic, and cultural environments offer insights into how to produce change? How are people governed and enrolled in a wide range of societal projects? Based on these questions, her research revolves around international migration, mobility, gender, and regional development. She is currently interested in how international student mobility has been mobilized as an alternative to revitalize non-metropolitan areas including universities where the school-age population is rapidly decreasing.

**Varieties of Migration Governance:  
A Comparative Study of Two Guestworker Programs in China**

**ADAM HUANG**

Renmin University of China  
chulinhuang@126.com

---

This paper examines how newly emergent guestworker programs in China govern low-skilled labor migrants, focusing on two regions: Dehong (Yunnan province), bordering Myanmar, and Chongzuo (Guangxi province), bordering Vietnam. China's recent demographic transition and tightening labor markets have prompted local governments in these frontier regions to experiment with formal channels for recruiting and regulating foreign workers, even as national immigration policy remains highly restrictive and prioritizes high-skilled talent. Drawing on policy documents, quantitative data, and fieldwork observation, this paper advances three arguments. First, in both Dehong and Chongzuo, the implementation of guestworker programs marked a shift from ad hoc border control and deportation campaigns to more institutionalized regulatory frameworks that seek to legalize and manage foreign labor. Second, these programs experienced a persistent tension between central and local priorities: while the national state emphasizes border security and social stability, local authorities mobilize the language of "labor shortages" and "combating illegal immigration" to secure room to maneuver, but in practice use foreign labor primarily as an instrument of local development and investment promotion. Third, the empirical evidence shows that the link between national-level labor shortages and the expansion of foreign migrant labor is mediated by local implementation. The number of labor dispatch agencies and manufacturing firms tracks policy cycles rather than the underlying demographic need. And court data suggest that guestworker schemes did not reduce, and may have coincided with increases in, unauthorized migration. By comparing these two cases, the paper argues that migration policy in contemporary China is not simply a top-down product of central design but is co-produced, repurposed, and sometimes subverted by local state actors operating on the ground.

**Adam Huang** holds a PhD in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University and he is currently an assistant professor at the School of Labor and Human Resources, Renmin University of China. His research interests include labor, migration, and development, focusing on the transnational movements of capital and people and their implications for labor relations and worker wellbeing. His dissertation examines Chinese agricultural investments in Africa through an ethnographic study of two commercial farms in Zambia. His second strand of research focuses on international migration. His current research project studies the emerging undocumented labor migrants in China. He also has ongoing research on immigrants' labor market outcomes in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America.

## **Eastern Europe as a New Frontier of Asian Labour Migration: Experimenting with an “Asian Migration Regime”**

**NYÍRI PÁL**

Budapest University of Economics (Corvinus)  
Pal.nyiri@uni-corvinus.hu

**PAMUNGKAS AYUDANING DEWANTO**

Waseda University  
pdewanto@aoni.waseda.jp

**ANDREW LACSINA**

Ateneo de Manila University  
alacsina@ateneo.edu

---

Since the mid-2010s, Asian labour immigration to East Central Europe<sup>1</sup>, previously a trickle limited to the ethnic economy, has become a massive and highly visible flow. In Poland, Hungary, Romania, and elsewhere, over a million workers from Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal work in factories, warehouses, farms, hospitality, and as bicycle couriers. In Hungary, for example, 29 thousand Vietnamese, 12 thousand Filipinos, and 8 thousand Indians possessed work permits in 2023, accounting for over one-third of all work permits held by foreigners. In Poland, the region's largest economy, Filipinos were in second place in the statistics of newly issued work permits in 2024 with almost 38 thousand, followed by Indians with 34 thousand, Nepalis with 31 thousand, Uzbeks with 27 thousand, Bangladeshis with 18 thousand, Turks with 15 thousand, and Indonesians with 14 thousand permits. Together, they accounted for nearly half of all new permits. Since the Covid pandemic, nationals of the same Asian countries had made up the largest groups other than Ukrainians and Belarusians. In Romania, by the end of 2024, out of 146 thousand individual work contracts for non-European Union (EU) nationals, the largest numbers were held by Sri Lankans, Nepalis, Bangladeshis, and Indians. All other Eastern European EU member states have similarly experienced growing inflows of labour migration from Southeast, South, and Central Asia.

In this paper, beyond drawing attention to this dramatic yet underresearched development, we suggest, first, that the rise of Asian contract labour in Eastern Europe, coming at a time of increasing anti-immigration sentiment, may herald Europe's shift to something more like an “Asian migration regime” that restricts individual migrants' freedoms in favour of agency mediation and state-to-state agreements; and, second, that for Asian workers, contracts in Eastern Europe may nonetheless provide an expansion of freedoms compared to traditional destinations such as East Asia or the Gulf.

The paper focuses on the case of Hungary and is based on ethnographic fieldwork among migrant workers and interviews with supervisors, recruiters, and government officials at multiple locations in Hungary, as well as Java and Lombok in Indonesia and Manila in the Philippines in 2024 and 2025. In total, we have conducted in-depth interviews with around 20 Indonesian and 30 Filipino informants including current, former, and aspiring migrant workers, embassy and government officials, and recruitment agencies. Dewanto and Lacsina also collected information from the digital world, particularly YouTube and Facebook, recording qualitative information from videos and blogs. In addition, Dewanto conducted five days of fieldwork in Poland where he stayed with Indonesian migrant workers in Warsaw.

---

<sup>1</sup> Defined here as the Eastern European states that joined the EU in or after 2004.

**Nyíri Pál** is a professor at the Institute of Global Studies, Budapest University of Economics (Corvinus). His research focuses on the international mobility of China's middle class and on Asian immigration to Hungary. His most recent books are *Reporting for China: How Chinese Correspondents Work with the World* and (edited with Danielle Tan) *Chinese Encounters in Southeast Asia: How People, Money and Ideas from China are Changing a Region* (both University of Washington Press, 2017).

**Pamungkas Ayudaning Dewanto** (or just "Yudha" for short) is MIGMOBS post-doctoral researcher at Waseda Institute of Asia Pacific Studies as well as a lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. His research focuses on transnational networks of Indonesian labour migrants in Asia and Europe. Yudha earned his doctoral degree in social anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. Together with several international organizations, he has developed various materials that are essential for the protection of migrant workers' rights. Yudha has published with *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* and various academic blogs.

**Andrew Laccina** holds an MA in Sociology with a specialization in Global Social Studies from Corvinus University of Budapest. Currently, he is a part-time lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Department of Development Studies at Ateneo de Manila University. He is also working as a research assistant at the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University. His main research interests focus on migration, financial management, ties of relatedness, and remittances.



**Building a Destination Reputation:  
How German Intermediaries Implement Skill Mobility Partnerships in  
Nursing with Asian Origin Countries and the Effect on Skilled Migrants**

**JOHANNA ULLMANN**

University of Osnabrück  
jullmann@uos.de

---

In the global competition for skilled workers governments have recently established new skill mobility partnerships and increasingly adopted bilateral recruiting agreements. These policies and programs promise mutual benefits and fair, ethical and transparent labor migration ("Triple-Win" approach). In the literature, the partnerships are controversially discussed as innovative policy instruments or forms of (neo-) colonial governance. In this article, I propose to understand skill mobility partnerships (SMPs) as symbolic state interventions to strategically build a reputation as 'caring destination'. My argument is based on the analysis of respective partnerships between Germany and three Asian origins (India, Indonesia, and the Philippines). Germany represents a newly emerging destination in the Asian region with a highly proactive state-led approach to attract (medium-)skilled migrants. Conceptually, I refer to intermediary and migration infrastructure approaches and literature on destination reputation. I draw on rich empirical data with various stakeholders on the German side, including 28 interviews with intermediaries, policy-makers and employers, official policy and program documents and interviews and group discussions with 13 skilled migrants in Germany. The paper reveals that intermediaries involved in SMPs actively contribute to the symbolic production of a destination reputation. I shed light on three interrelated dimensions: 1) To shape a positive reputation as ideal destination with highest standards, intermediaries engage in making good offers that balance economic and development/ethical interests; 2) To practically realize more balanced power relationships with origins and skilled migrants, intermediaries search for compromises and concessions (but face challenges in doing so); 3) To sustain and expand partnerships, intermediaries work towards restoring traditional power relations and advocate again for the interests of the German private sector. The overall favorable treatment in SMPs result in high satisfaction among its participants. Despite high and visible state-investments, the majority of privately recruited skilled migrants continue to experience common challenges.

**Johanna Ullmann** is a sociologist and post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies at the University of Osnabrück (Germany). Her research focuses on labor migration, gender, forced migration and global inequalities. She currently works in the international joint research project "Link4Skills" funded by Horizon Europe. In this project, she investigates skill mobility partnerships and coordinates the qualitative empirical fieldwork of 14 transnational migration skill corridor cases among 12 countries (Global north: Austria, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland; global south: India, Indonesia, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, the Philippines and Ukraine). She also co-coordinates the Integrated Research Training Group (IRTG) in the framework of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) Collaborative Research Center 1604 "Production of Migration." In her doctoral thesis she investigated the differential labor market inclusion of female refugees and the role of labor-market organizations in Germany. Theoretically, she draws on approaches of the production of skills and skilled migration, intersectional and postcolonial theory, transnational migration policies and infrastructures as well as migration skill corridors.

## **University-Linked Migration Governance in South Korea: New Pathways for Manufacturing and Care Work**

**HYUNA MOON**

Seoul National University  
mysyrius@snu.ac.kr

**MINSEOK KANG**

Seoul National University  
mskang0315@snu.ac.kr

**BORA YEON**

Seoul National University  
l.borayeon@snu.ac.kr

---

South Korea's demographic crisis has spurred efforts to develop new policy frameworks that seek to integrate previously divided labor and marriage migration domains through university-linked programs. The government has launched two initiatives: the Root Industry Skilled Workforce University Program (Root Program, launched in 2014) for blue-collar workers and the Foreign Care Worker Training University Program (Care Program, launched in 2025) for pink-collar workers, both signaling a move toward a potential shift in migration governance.

These programs introduce a new policy approach in Korea's migration governance by bridging distinct visa regimes and challenging the traditional temporary-permanent binary. The Root Program, incorporated into the Fourth Basic Plan for Immigration Policy, offers potential permanent residency pathways, while the Care Program integrates foreign care workers under a newly created occupational category within E-7 visa system (also called *Foreign National of Special Ability Visa*, a work visa for designated occupations approved by the Ministry of Justice).

While these initiatives echo broader regional trends observed in Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore, Korea's unified strategy to simultaneously address demographic decline, university restructuring, and labor shortages presents distinctive policy dynamics. By providing foreign workers with university-level education and training alongside opportunities for community settlement, these programs chart a potentially transformative course for national migration policy.

However, they also raise critical concerns regarding transformation of universities from academic institutions to labor supply agencies and the hierarchical differentiation among migrant workers. While retaining the existing Employment Permit System, these university-linked programs create differentiated tiers of rights and access through divergent visa categories and residency conditions. Notably, gender-based inequalities persists, as the Root Program offers pathways to permanent residency, whereas the Care Program restricts workers to three-year temporary stay under the E-7 visa.

This presentation critically examines these policy shifts by analyzing both programs, exploring the promises and pitfalls, and assessing the implications of linking migration policy to higher education for blue- and pink-collar migrant labor, thereby offering insights into its evolving migration governance landscape.

**Hyuna Moon** is Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Transnational Migration and Social Inclusion (CTMS), Seoul National University. Dr. Moon received her PhD in Political Science from the Academy of Korean Studies. She subsequently broadened her focus to feminist studies, engaging in human rights activism, gender issues, and civil society movements, continuing to reflect on both theory and practice. Her recent research has centered on care and migration issues, with an added interest in interdisciplinary studies on health and climate change, aimed at fostering meaningful social change. Her major writings include *Who Will Take Care of the Care Workers?* (co-author), *Reproduction and Gender: Intersections and Issues in Korean-Chinese Feminism* (co-author), and "Marriage Migrant Women's 'Doing Family' Practices as the Subjects of Transnational Families," 2024, *PNU Journal of Women's Studies* 34(1), and more.

**Minseok Kang** is a researcher at CTMS. His main research interests include refugee and migration issues, and he is also a co-researcher for the CTMS research project on Young People's Experiences & Attitudes Toward Care in Korea. Kang holds a Master's degree in Area Studies from the Yonsei University, where he published a thesis on the "Effects of European Identity on Refugee Protection: The Case of Six Western European Countries." He also earned a Bachelor's degree in French Language and Literature from the same institution.

**Bora Yeon** is a researcher at CTMS. Her main research interests include the social integration of first- and second-generation migrants, as well as the educational experiences of minorities, migrants, and refugees. She is also a co-researcher in the CTMS research project on Development of Personalized Digital Health and Care Services for Individuals with Severe Illness Experiences. Yeon holds a Master's degree in International Public Management and a Bachelor's degree in North-East Asia and European Studies from Sciences Po Paris (Institut d' Études Politiques de Paris).

**The Evolving Migration State:  
An Analysis of China's Skilled Immigration Policies across Four Decades and Implications  
for Future Trajectories**

**AENEAS ZI WANG**

Nanjing University  
aeneaswang@nju.edu.cn

---

Recent scholarship on migration states has made remarkable strides in conceptualising different varieties of migration regimes. Amidst this burgeoning trend, China has remained underexplored, partly due to the fundamental doxa that China attracts few international migrants. Yet the country has become an important destination for skilled labour. Drawing on a detailed analysis of Chinese skilled immigration policies from the reform and opening-up period to the present, I argue that China has been an active migration state since the early 1980s in the realm of skilled immigration. This study underscores the evolving and fluid nature of the Chinese migration state, revealing distinct characteristics across different phases and targeting skills in diverse sectors and on varying levels. Moreover, there exists a devolved agency of regional and sectoral actors in shaping and implementing certain policies, often balancing the economic rationale of openness with the politico-legal logic of border control. This study hence challenges assumptions that migration state characteristics are static and that authoritarian regimes do not exhibit a liberal paradox regarding immigration. This research offers important implications for anticipating future trajectories of the Chinese migration state regime amid the double challenge of drastic demographic decline and global competition for skills. It furthermore advances studies on migration states within broader Global South and Asian contexts.

**Aeneas Zi Wang** holds the Jiangsu Province Specially-Appointed Professorship and is Associate Professor of Sociology at Nanjing University. His research interests lie in international migration and Global China studies. Prior to his current position in Nanjing, Aeneas Zi Wang was an EU Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at INALCO in Paris. His articles have appeared in *Migration Studies*, *International Migration Review*, and *International Migration*, and he has published monographs and edited volumes with Routledge and De Gruyter. He is currently a visiting scholar with the Migration and Mobilities Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He also holds a Visiting Associate Professorship at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Malaya for the 2025-26 academic year. He has served as Associate Editor for *Migration Studies* (Oxford University Press) since 2024.

## **Household Preferences and the Emerging Care Migration Regime in South Korea**

**JIWEON JUN**

Seoul National University  
jiweon.jun@snu.ac.kr

**ITO PENG**

University of Toronto  
ito.peng@utoronto.ca

---

Across Asia, migration regimes are being reshaped by demographic ageing, labour shortages, and the rising demand for care. South Korea has only recently joined this regional conversation, with growing debate over whether and how to expand the role of migrant caregivers, including a pilot initiative by the Seoul Metropolitan Government to introduce migrant childcare workers. While policy design and cost considerations dominate public discussion, little is known in the Korean context about how households, the potential employers, perceive and shape the prospects of care migration.

This paper draws on original evidence from the 2022 Care Work in Korea Survey, a nationally representative study of parents of young children and family caregivers of older people. The survey examined household willingness to hire migrant caregivers, preferred forms of employment, and key considerations in decision-making. Results indicated limited willingness overall, with reluctance driven primarily by concerns about language, trust, and cultural compatibility rather than cost. Among the small number of respondents willing to hire migrant caregivers, there was a pronounced preference for live-out (commuting) arrangements. This pattern, while sharing noticeable similarities with public preferences for institutionalized live-out systems in Japan, stands in stark contrast to the entrenched live-in systems that structure care migration in Hong Kong and Singapore. Families emphasized Korean language ability and prior care experience as key hiring criteria. Parents also distinguished between tasks they wished to retain, particularly direct caregiving, and tasks they were willing to delegate, such as housework. This suggests that many households seek domestic support that enables their own involvement with their children, rather than substitutes for parental care.

These household preferences suggest that Korea, like Japan, cannot simply replicate regional precedents. Policies that overlook demand-side considerations risk misalignment between what is supplied and what households are willing to accept. By foregrounding household demand, this paper highlights a distinctive feature of Korea's emerging care migration regime: the shaping power of domestic preferences. It contributes to debates on the new dynamics of Asian migration by underscoring that effective policy design requires careful attention to household expectations and cultural norms around privacy, family boundaries, and the definition of quality care.

**Jiweon Jun** is Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Transnational Migration and Social Inclusion (CTMS), Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. Her research focuses on work–family balance, examining caregiving burdens and how care responsibilities are distributed within households. Her broader interests include care work and social inclusion, demographic change, time use across the life course, and the well-being of older people. She has led major national surveys, including the Care Work in Korea Survey (2018, 2022), which provide empirical evidence on childcare, eldercare, and public perceptions of migrant care workers. Dr Jun is also actively involved in international collaborations on care and time-use research, contributing to projects such as Care Work and the Economy and Care Economies in Context. She has extensive experience in survey design, data collection, and comparative analysis. She worked as Research Fellow at the Centre for Global Social Policy, University of Toronto, and at the Centre for Time Use Research, University of Oxford. She received her BA in Anthropology from Seoul National University and her MSc and DPhil in Sociology from the University of Oxford.

**Ito Peng** is the Canada Research Chair in Global Social Policy and the Director of the Centre for Global Social Policy at the Department of Sociology, and the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on global social policy and political economy, specializing in the care economy, and family, gender, migration, and climate change policies. She currently leads two research projects: 1) Care Economies in Context, a global partnership research project that investigates care infrastructures in 9 countries in 5 global regions and uses that data to develop gender-sensitive macroeconomic models of care economies in these countries; and 2) Care and Climate Change Policies project, a Taskforce for the Royal Society of Canada. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a member of the Sectoral Table on the Care Economy for the Employment and Social Development Canada, and a distinguished fellow of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, currently serving as a thought leader for the foundation's Women's Business Missions to Asia Pacific initiative. She was a co-lead for the Room 5 for the Rockefeller Foundation-Brookings Institute's 17-Rooms Global Flagship project (2021-2023).



## **An Exploitative Demand for Middling Migrant Workers: The Deskilling of Chinese Female Corporate Employees in Japan and South Korea**

**MEIYUN MENG**

University College Cork  
mmeng@ucc.ie

**ADRIAN FAVELL**

University College Cork  
adrian.favell@ucc.ie

---

Middling migration – often a non-linear form of regional-scale “free movement”, seen in the career movement of professionals, but including students and other mid-skilled migrants – continues to be a blindspot in migration research. Asia is not distinctive in this respect, with significant, growing trends in regional free movement that appear largely “invisible”, but are not free of the cross-national injustices and injuries felt by more typical “labour migrants”. These transnational mobilities, ostensibly following individualised trajectories, are also less visible in Asian migration paradigms which focus more attention on organised state- and broker- based systems.

Our paradigmatic contribution is to identify the specific stratification experienced by Chinese workers admitted to Korea and Japan in what might be thought as “high skilled” categories. Drawing on a set of biographical narrative interviews with 34 Chinese women (aged 25-40) employed in creative service sector corporations in Tokyo and Seoul – investigating education, mobility and migration choices, career aspirations and household strategies – we show how migration policies, employer practices, and workplace gender norms interact to deskill these well educated women, drawing out comparative differences across the two cases.

Pink-collar logics have spread into (even) corporate domains, leading to (failed) integration, glass ceilings, discrimination, temporariness, and undermined bargaining power. Migration classification functions as a mechanism to constrain and contain skill. Programmers become code reviewers; animation designers coordinators; medical graduates administrators. A threefold nexus drives such reclassification: (1) migration policies enabling entry without addressing workplace discrimination; (2) corporate HR practices that reframe technical skills as “cultural fit” and support competencies; (3) and gendered workplace norms reserving creative/strategic roles for natives and/or male employees. These mechanisms reveal how the transnational labour market in creative service industries creates “skilled support workers” who perform disaggregated technical tasks without corresponding authority—extending the “feminisation of migration” upwards into corporations.

**Meiyun Meng** is a feminist cultural geographer and postdoctoral researcher at University College Cork. She is responsible for MIGMOBS’ fieldwork on East Asian migration-mobilities systems. Her research explores contemporary China and East Asian migration, with a particular focus on the experiences of middle-class women navigating internal migration within China and transnational opportunities across borders, notably as a way of looking at the shifting international status of East Asian nations in global capitalism.

**Adrian Favell** is Professor of Social and Political Theory and Director of the Radical Humanities Laboratory at University College Cork, where he leads the ERC AdG Project *MIGMOBS: The Orders and Borders of Global Inequality: Migration and Mobilities in Late Capitalism*. This looks at Euro-Mediterranean, Latin American and Asian migration-mobilities systems in comparative perspective. He is the author of various works on immigration politics, integration, citizenship, multiculturalism and cosmopolitan cities. He was Associate Editor of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2000-25).

**Path-Dependency and New Forms of Precarity:  
Cross-Border Labor Recruitment Practices in Changing Labor Migration Regimes**

**GRACIA LIU-FARRER**

Waseda University  
glfarrer@waseda.jp

**FIRMAN BUDIANTO**

Waseda University  
fbudianto@asagi.waseda.jp

**PAMUNGKAS AYUDANING DEWANTO**

Waseda University  
pdewanto@aoni.waseda.jp

---

This paper examines how cross-border labor recruitment practices have evolved following the introduction of Japan's Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) scheme, using the Indonesia–Japan corridor as an empirical case. While SSW was designed as a skill-based, employment-oriented alternative to the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), promising reduced brokerage and enhanced worker protection, this study asks to what extent it has transformed the organization of transnational labor markets in practice. Drawing on transnational labor market theory, the paper analyzes how states, intermediaries, and individual migrants coordinate labor mobility through the intertwined mechanisms of commodification and de-commodification, regulation of competition, and cooperation and control. Empirically, the study is based on multi-sited qualitative fieldwork conducted in Japan and Indonesia between 2022 and 2025, including interviews with government-affiliated organizations, recruitment agencies, training institutions, employers, and migrant workers, complemented by policy documents and official statistics. The findings show that the transition to SSW is strongly path-dependent on the established TITP-based migration infrastructure. While SSW expands labor opportunities, diversifies recruitment channels, and enables greater worker agency through digital platforms and alternative intermediaries, access remains uneven. Resource-rich intermediaries and experienced migrants benefit disproportionately, while smaller actors and less-resourced workers face new forms of precarity. The paper concludes that SSW represents not a rupture but a reconfiguration of Japan's transnational labor market, simultaneously broadening opportunities and reproducing structural inequalities.

**Gracia Liu-Farrer** is Professor of Sociology at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies and the Director of the Institute of Asian Migration at Waseda University, Japan. Her research has investigated post-war immigration to Japan and the country's transition into an immigrant society. She examines migration patterns, the economic activities of immigrants, their social integration, and their sense of belonging and identity in Japan. Another aspect of her work looks at the mobility of educational and labor migrants within and beyond Asia. She studies the actors and processes involved in shaping transnational labor markets as well as in assessing, utilizing and developing migrants skills in cross-border labor contexts. Her publications, including books, book chapters, and journal articles, have brought Asian perspectives into discussions on international migration. Her recent books include *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (with Brenda Yeoh, Routledge, 2018), *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and Belonging in an Ethno-nationalist Society* (Cornell University Press, 2020), *Tangled Mobilities: Places, Affects, and Personhood across Social Spheres in Asian Migration* (with Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Berghahn Books, 2022), and *The Question of Skill in Cross-border Labour Mobilities* (with Brenda Yeoh and Michele Baas, 2023).

**Firman Budianto** is a research student at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, and a junior researcher in Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN). His research interests include international skilled migration, diversification in contemporary Japanese society, and Indonesia-Japan sociocultural relations. In 2022-2025, he is involved in the JICA Research Institute project "International Migration Routes and Route Selection Mechanism in Indonesia" as a collaborator. Currently, he works on a PhD research project examining the mobility of Indonesian skilled workers in Japan.

**Pamungkas Ayudaning Dewanto** (or just "Yudha" for short) is MIGMOBS Post-doctoral Research Fellow at Waseda Institute of Asia Pacific Studies as well as an adjunct faculty member at the Department of International Relations, University of Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. His research focuses on transnational networks of Indonesian migrants in Asia and Eastern Europe. Yudha earned his doctoral degree at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, majoring in Social Anthropology. Yudha has also published with *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* and various academic blogs.

## **Competition within the Middle Space of Migration: The Case of Migrant Nurses**

**YASMIN Y. ORTIGA**

Singapore Management University  
yasmino@smu.edu.sg

---

Academic discussion on the global shortage of healthcare workers have mainly drawn a line between two places: an “origin” country that migrants leave behind and a single “destination” that uses their labour. This image belies a more complex reality, where multiple nations compete for the migrant labor needed within their local institutions. While researchers have examined specific state efforts to attract migrant labor, these studies rarely discuss how the recruitment strategies of different destination countries impact each other. Numerous scholars have also noted the important role played by the middle space of migration, where different actors mediate how people move from origin to destination. Yet, few have investigated this middle space as a competitive space, where institutions deliberately seek to shift migrants’ trajectories in line with their own interests. Focusing on the case of Filipino nurses, this paper presents a preliminary analysis of how state institutions, employers and professional associations attempt to channel healthcare workers toward specific destinations by drawing them away from others. We base our analysis on two sources: 1) in-depth interviews with migrant nurses and 2) a document analysis of state reports and news media from Singapore, a nation that serves as a destination for migrant nurses, but also suffers from an outflow of nurses to other countries like the US and UK.

**Yasmin Y. Ortiga** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University. She studies how ideas of desirable “skill” shapes how people move across borders, changing institutions within both the countries that send migrants, as well as those that receive them. Yasmin has studied the experiences of different groups of migrants – from students to farm workers. However, much of work focuses on the experiences of migrant nurses, one of the most highly regulated professions in the world. She is the author of the recent book, *Stuck at Home: Pandemic Immobilities in the Nation of Emigration* (Stanford University Press).

## **Uzbekistan's Emerging Migration Regime: Balancing of Dependency and Diversification**

**BHAVNA DAVE**

SOAS University of London  
bd4@soas.ac.uk

---

As the largest Central Asian country of about 38 million, Uzbekistan is a relative latecomer as a source of labour migrants to destinations in East Asia, Middle East and EU. About 80-85 percent of Uzbeks working abroad go to Russia and Kazakhstan given the CIS visa-free regime, historical links and cultural-linguistic familiarity. An estimated 2-3 million are working in CIS countries in official or informal capacity. Russia's attempts to recruit Central Asian migrants for its war in Ukraine through citizenship and financial incentives have failed, prompting many to return home or seek alternative destinations. Its president Shavkat Mirziyoyev has recognised labour migration as a vital resource, regulating it through creation of Agency of External Labour Migration and granting licenses to a number of quasi-private agencies to officially recruit, train and prepare migrant workers to work abroad.

Seeking to diversify migration channels for its migrant workers Uzbekistan has concluded bilateral agreements with South Korea, Japan, UAE, Turkey, Israel and several EU states to send workers. About 28,000 Uzbeks officially work in Korea but almost 100,000 are estimated to be living and working in some capacity. The relaxing of labour migration regimes in Korea and Japan is likely to bring more Uzbek migrants. Although the number of those working outside of CIS is about 10-15 percent, they contribute about 24 percent of all remittances. Based on interviews in Central Asia, Russia, this paper examines how Uzbekistan is developing a multi-tiered migration policy with the state pushing out intermediaries, consolidating the niche of Uzbek migrants in Russia's economy while enhancing vocational, technical training for migrants to work in East Asia and EU. In channeling migrants to East Asia, Uzbekistan has also sought to capitalise on diaspora links through ethnic Koreans in Uzbekistan, ethnoracial affinity, strong work ethic of the Uzbeks, and deep attachment to homeland.

**Bhavna Dave** (PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University, NY) is Senior Lecturer in Central Asian Politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS, University of London. She is the author of the book *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Routledge: London, 2007). She has published works on issues of labour migration in Kazakhstan and Russia, language and ethnic identities, minorities, elections and patronage in Kazakhstan, and EU-Central Asia relations, the role of the Russian Far East in Russia's 'pivot to Asia' policy, social and security implications of China's Belt and Road initiative in Central Asia, and India-Central Asia relations. Her current research and writing are centred on: 1) geopolitics and alliances in Eurasia, and the consequences of China's Belt and Road initiative for Central Asian states; 2) the political economy and legal framework of labour migration, migrant and diaspora networks in Russia and Kazakhstan.

**Reverse Bargaining Power:  
Migrant Agency in Choosing Destinations under Global Labour Shortages**

**AKM AHSAN ULLAH**  
University of Brunei Darussalam  
akmahsanullah@gmail.com

---

Demographic decline and labour shortages across East and Southeast Asia have produced a distinctive moment in which migrants are no longer merely passive subjects of restrictive regimes but increasingly active agents shaping the geographies of labour mobility. Drawing on theories of labour market segmentation and migrant agency, this paper interrogates how global shortages in sectors such as healthcare, construction, and logistics are recalibrating the power relations between states, employers, intermediaries, and workers. Through comparative analysis of Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants negotiating pathways to Japan, South Korea, and the Gulf, alongside Filipino and Indonesian care workers choosing between Singapore, Taiwan, and Europe, the paper demonstrates how heightened demand allows migrants to exercise “reverse bargaining power” by strategically selecting destinations that promise better wages, pathways to permanence, or safer working conditions. Case studies show how some migrants leverage multiple offers to negotiate favourable terms, while others mobilize transnational networks and recruitment agencies to reorient their mobility trajectories away from historically dominant destinations. By foregrounding migrant decision-making within the structural constraints of Asia’s migration regimes, the paper reveals what is new and distinctive about this moment: the erosion of the myth of one-sided state and employer dominance in shaping mobility. The analysis highlights not only emerging opportunities for migrants but also the fragility of these gains, as governments recalibrate policies to retain control and employers seek to reassert dependency mechanisms. The findings underscore the need to rethink Asian migration regimes as sites of contestation where labour shortages open new, though uneven, spaces for migrant agency.

**AKM Ahsan Ullah** is Professor of Geography, Environment and Development at the University of Brunei Darussalam. He has an extensive research portfolio and has worked with institutions such as the City University of Hong Kong, IPH at the University of Ottawa, McMaster University, Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University in Canada, the American University in Cairo, Osnabrück University, Germany, and the Asian Institute of Technology, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, and Dhaka International University, Bangladesh. His research areas include migration and mobilities, international relations, intercultural encounters and development, with a geographic focus on the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Middle East, and theoretical focus on globalization and neoliberalism, development and human rights, transnationalism, gender, intersectionality and the everyday life.



## **Migration Infrastructures as Means and Objects of Contestation: A View from Thailand**

**STEPHEN CAMPBELL**

Nanyang Technological University  
stephen.campbell@ntu.edu.sg

---

Since Myanmar's 2021 military coup, outmigration from the country has surged, as people have fled political persecution, armed conflict, and deteriorating livelihood conditions. In response, Myanmar's post-coup junta has sought to block outmigration, especially of young men attempting to evade military conscription. This has led aspiring border crossers to embrace clandestine travel options. In neighbouring Thailand, the sharp increase in Myanmar nationals seeking employment has driven down wages, benefiting employers and the Thai government. Meanwhile, brokers and employment agencies have inserted themselves as labour market intermediaries—amassing significant profits while inflating the cost of migrant registration and pushing foreign workers into debt and debt-bondage. Under these conditions, how might marginalized border crossers contest the regulatory regimes deployed to control their cross-border mobility? In this paper, I argue that migration infrastructures have become means and objects for such contestation. While “migration regimes” are the rules, laws, and practices that govern the movement of people across borders, “migration infrastructures” are the interconnected means that enable such movement. Migration regimes play a structuring role in shaping migration infrastructures. Yet, migration infrastructures are never wholly determined by state policy or practice. This imperfect alignment between migration regimes and migration infrastructures allows for contradiction, contestation, and clandestine mobility, all of which foster regulatory instability and adaptation, with potential benefits for marginalized border crossers. To develop this analysis, I consider the dynamics of Myanmar labour migration to Thailand. This is an empirical case on which I have been conducting ethnographic research for the past fifteen years.

**Stephen Campbell** is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University. His research focuses on labour, migration, and borders, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Myanmar, Thailand, and Singapore. On these and related topics, he had published two books and close to thirty articles.

## **Mobility of Labour as Method**

**RUTVICA ANDRIJASEVIC**

University of Bristol  
ra14611@bristol.ac.uk

---

My argument in this paper is that while migration studies approach rightly picks up on the role of the state in fostering the vulnerability and exploitation of migrant workers, the primacy that this strand of scholarship gives to state-migrant labour nexus hides the relevance of industry/business in both shaping of the migration flows and the very concrete working and living conditions of migrant workers. Moreover, the persistent privileging of the state as the main analytical standpoint also blackboxes the firm: we still know exceptionally little about the ways in which industry structure and firm business model shape migratory flows as well as worker agency. I ground my argument empirically by drawing on interviews with migrant workers in electronics manufacturing in Eastern Europe and in the context of changing government regulations that target in particular non-EU migrant workers, especially those from Asia. Building on labour studies scholarship as well as the scholarship that bridges labour and migration studies, I deploy mobility of labour as method to show how states' migration measures enable firms to recruit a heterogeneous workforce much needed to front both the variable market demand as well as worker-driven turnover. I then use the mobility of labour to challenge the notion of a singular employer and show how mobility 'fragments capital' into client and subcontractor capital, thereby resulting in the client firm substantially losing control over workers on the shopfloor and opening space for worker agency. In sum, it is by deploying the mobility of labour as method to unbox the firm/business, that this paper attempts to shift the attention from states to capital and provide a novel perspective on researching labour migration.

**Rutvica Andrijasevic** is Professor of Work and Employment at the University of Bristol Business School, UK. Working at the intersection of political economy, feminist theory and migration studies, her research examines how just-in-time manufacturing and lean logistics reshape the temporal organisation of labour and mobility. She analyses how accelerated production schedules and time-sensitive supply chains rely on migrant workforces and reproduce gendered and racialised divisions of labour. Her work shows how temporal regimes in manufacturing influence migration recruitment, duration and status, and how women and racialised workers are differentially positioned within these systems. She is the (co)author of *Media and Management* (2021), *Flexible Workforces and Low Profit Margins: Electronics Assembly between Europe and China* (2016), *Migration, Agency and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking* (2010) and has published in *Work, Employment and Society*, *Environment and Planning D*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, and *Organisation* among others. Andrijasevic collaborates across sociology, business, geography and gender studies, and leads international projects on time, global production and labour mobility. Her contribution to the conference speaks to how temporal logics of production intersect with state migration regimes and the governance of migrant workers in Asia and beyond.

**From Extended to Permanent Temporariness:  
Navigating the Specified Skilled Worker Program in Japan**

**ANH PHUONG LE**

Waseda University  
lephuonganh@fuji.waseda.jp

---

Japan's immigration policies have long maintained strict control over low and medium-skilled labor migration. However, facing severe labor shortages, especially in manual sectors, the country opened its doors to manual workers in 2019 under the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Program. While this policy shift appears to create new opportunities for settlement, the SSW visa remains temporary and conditional, requiring migrants to repeatedly prove their employability and value to Japanese society. This paper examines Vietnamese workers, the largest group of SSWs in Japan, to analyze how they perceive and navigate their state of "staggered" temporariness, challenging the assumption that temporariness equals vulnerability and precarity. In an emerging immigration state where the pathway to permanent settlement is uncertain and cost-ineffective, these manual workers embrace their extended and permanent temporariness.

**Anh Phuong Le** is a PhD student in International Studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Japan, and a research assistant 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. In 2023, Anh co-founded Asian Migration Studies Network, a community that connects students and early career scholars interested in studying Asian Migrations. Her teaching at universities focuses on the topic of multicultural Japanese society. As an advocate for migrants' welfare, she volunteers as an interpreter/translator for NPO POSSE, a Tokyo-based organization that supports the rights of migrant workers in Japan.

**“Anak Kita” and Spaces of Intimacy:  
Indonesian Migrant Family-Making in Taiwan's Labor Migration Regime**

**TZU-CHI OU**

National Chengchi University  
outzuchi@g.nccu.edu.tw

---

Most East Asian host societies—including Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan—enforce strict immigration policies that explicitly restrict family reunification and long-term settlement for migrant workers. However, recent legal shifts in Taiwan, such as the implementation of the Gender Equity Act, have opened narrow pathways for family formation, even as workers continue to navigate significant legal and economic constraints. Drawing on interviews with 57 Indonesian migrant mothers, this paper explores how prior marital histories and labor trajectories shape contemporary reproductive decisions. A key finding is that over half of these women are in second marriages; many experienced previous divorces due to the prolonged family separation inherent in transnational labor. For these women, children born in Taiwan are referred to as *anak kita* (“our child”), signifying a hard-won autonomy and a shared intimacy with a partner of their own choosing. Employing a multi-modal methodology of in-depth interviews, longitudinal fieldwork, and digital ethnography, this study examines how migrant nuclear families cultivate everyday intimacies. The research highlights how societal infrastructures in Taiwan—including National Health Insurance, advanced medical technology, and accessible public spaces—expand the spaces of intimacy beyond the romantic couple to the mother-infant bond. This intimacy is materialized through visual cultures, such as maternity photo shoots and the circulation of ultrasound images. The paper argues that Taiwan's migration regime simultaneously constrains and facilitates family-making, as migrant workers construct family lives that challenge their public identity as mere labor units. Ultimately, this study demonstrates how intimate practices intersect with policy regimes to reshape the dynamics of labor migration in East Asia.

**Tzu-Chi Ou** is Associate Professor at the International College of Innovation, National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She earned her PhD in Anthropology from Columbia University in 2018 and previously served as a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica. Her research examines migration regimes and the rural–urban divide, with a specific focus on how intimacy, family-making, and place-making shape the lives of migrant workers in China and Taiwan. Her current projects investigate the reproductive rights and parenting practices of Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan, alongside community-engaged initiatives that bridge international students and migrant communities. Her scholarship has been published in *Pacific Affairs*, *positions: asia critique*, and the *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*. [www.outzuchi.com](http://www.outzuchi.com)

## **Dynamics in “Guest Worker”-Regimes Then and Now: Migrant Practices in Post-World War II West Germany and Contemporary Taiwan**

**EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER**

National University of Singapore  
samdink@nus.edu.sg

---

This paper approaches dynamics in Asia's migration regimes by examining the role of migrant practices in the transformation of “guest worker”-regimes. It compares Taiwan's contemporary labour migration programme with West Germany's post-World War II “guest worker” migration and draws on ethnographic research among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan's fishing and manufacturing industries carried out between 2022 and 2024. Methodologically, the paper builds on Philip McMichael's (1990; 2016) concept of “incorporating comparison,” which situates processes of social change in broader historical and spatial orders. West Germany's post-war and Taiwan's contemporary labour migration regimes are historically connected: in the early 1990s, Taiwan modelled its own “guest worker” programme on the German experience to fill shortages in dangerous, dirty, and low status jobs. Examining how empowering actions and community building among “guest workers” in the 1960s and early 1970s drove transformations of West Germany's migration regime can inform how the formation of migrant communities may drive ongoing changes in East Asian migration regimes in the coming years. In West Germany, migrant practices undermined the core principle of temporariness for “guest workers” by leveraging multiple recruitment channels for family and chain migration, establishing networks that provided material, legal, and moral support, moving out of dormitories, and demanding better working conditions and social infrastructure. German- and English-language scholarship has framed such practices as “autonomy” or “wilfulness of migration.” I relate this framing to migrant workers in Taiwan today: accounting for distinct material conditions and contexts in both cases—the massive demand for migrant labour during the post-war economic boom in West Germany, and labour shortages resulting from demographic shifts in East Asia today—I discuss how evolving social networks and struggles of Southeast Asian migrant workers will contribute to reshaping Taiwan's “guest worker”-regime in the future.

**Eva Samia Dinkelaker** is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Migration and Mobilities Cluster of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. She received her PhD from the University of Osnabrück and recently held postdoctoral fellowships in Taiwan at Academia Sinica and at National Taiwan University. Her most recent research project focuses on the labour, lives, and subjectivities of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan's fishing and manufacturing industries. Her research interests cover the current changes of Asia's migration regimes, the role of migrant workers' power, and how racialisation processes define capitalist political economies.

## **ABOUT THE ORGANISERS & CHAIRPERSONS**

**Anna Triandafyllidou** holds the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration, at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), and the Founding Director of TMU's newly launched Global Migration Institute. She is also the Scientific Director of a \$98.4 mln multi-University and multi-partner Program entitled Bridging Divides funded by the Canada First Research Excellence Fund. Prior to joining TMU in 2019, she held a Robert Schuman Chair at the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy. She is Editor of *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*. In 2021, the University of Liège awarded Triandafyllidou a doctorate *honoris causa* in recognition of her contribution to migration scholarship. Anna has published widely in the field of migration governance, migration and national identity, and migrant integration in comparative perspectives. She was part of the OECD Network of International Migration Experts from 2010 to 2018 and has provided expert opinions for the Senate of Canada, Immigration Refuges and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the European Parliament and the European Commission.  
E | [anna.triandafyllidou@torontomu.ca](mailto:anna.triandafyllidou@torontomu.ca)

**Bernice Loh** is Research Fellow at the National Institute of Education at Nanyang Technological University. She was previously Research fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research centres on cross-national marriages and families, including the experiences of mixed children and youth from these households. Her work lies at the intersection of migration, youth studies, and intergenerational dynamics within the cross-national family. Her work has been published in journals such as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* and *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.  
E | [bernice.loh@nie.edu.sg](mailto:bernice.loh@nie.edu.sg)

**Brenda S.A. Yeoh FBA** is Distinguished Professor, National University of Singapore (NUS) and a member of the Migration and Mobilities Cluster, at NUS's Asia Research Institute. She was awarded the Vautrin Lud Prize for outstanding achievements in Geography in 2021 for her contributions to migration and transnationalism studies. Her research interests in Asian migrations span themes including social reproduction and care migration; skilled migration and cosmopolitanism; and marriage migrants and cultural politics.  
E | [geoysa@nus.edu.sg](mailto:geoysa@nus.edu.sg)

**Eva Samia Dinkelaker** is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Migration and Mobilities Cluster of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. She received her PhD from the University of Osnabrück and recently held postdoctoral fellowships in Taiwan at Academia Sinica and at National Taiwan University. Her most recent research project focuses on the labour, lives, and subjectivities of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan's fishing and manufacturing industries. Her research interests cover the current changes of Asia's migration regimes, the role of migrant workers' power, and how racialisation processes define capitalist political economies.  
E | [samdink@nus.edu.sg](mailto:samdink@nus.edu.sg)

**Exequiel Camarig Cabanda** is Research Fellow at the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. He is a policy scientist whose research focuses on health human resource policy, the mobility of health workers, and the interconnectedness of health, migration, and higher education. His interdisciplinary approach encompasses policy sciences, international political economy, and labour studies.  
E | [ecabanda@nus.edu.sg](mailto:ecabanda@nus.edu.sg)

**Theodora Lam** is Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research interests cover transnational migration and families, the web of care within transnational households, geographies of children and young people, and gender studies. She has researched on both skilled and low-waged labour migrants as well as their families in Singapore and other Asian countries. Theodora has published on various themes relating to migration, citizenship and education, and co-edited several special journal issues and books.  
E | [theodoralam@nus.edu.sg](mailto:theodoralam@nus.edu.sg)



**Yoga Prasetyo** sits in the Migration and Mobilities Cluster at the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. Before joining ARI, he spent over five years doing policy-oriented research and advocacy on temporary migration regimes across Southeast Asia. At present, Yoga is interested in how states use infrastructural governance to produce conditions of irregularity among children of migrants, and how irregular children carve out spaces of survival, learning, play, and work as they come of age. Yoga has won the UK Royal Geographical Society's PopGRG Bob Woods Postgraduate Dissertation Prize, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS)* Best Dissertation Prize, and the UK Development Studies Association Master's Dissertation Award (Highly Commended).

E | [yogaprasetyo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:yogaprasetyo@nus.edu.sg)

## **NOTES**

## NOTES

*SECRETARIAT*

**Ms Valerie Yeo**

Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore  
AS8, 10 Kent Ridge Crescent, #04-04, Singapore 119260  
E | [valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg](mailto:valerie.yeo@nus.edu.sg)