



NEW DYNAMICS IN ASIA'S MIGRATION REGIMES

Global Labour Shortages and
Rising Demand for Migrant Workers

15-16 JANUARY 2026

HYBRID FORMAT

Online via Zoom & NUS AS8-04-04

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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
15 Jan 2026 (Thu)	10:30 – 10:50	WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	10:50 – 12:20	PANEL 1 – Reassessing Asia's Migration Policies Amid Demographic Change
	13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 2 – Recalibrated Middle Spaces and Increased Competition
	15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 3 – Emerging Destinations of Asian Labor Migration
	18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER <i>(For speakers, chairpersons and invited guests only)</i>
16 Jan 2026 (Fri)	10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – New Dynamics in Employment Regimes
	13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 5 – Mobility Power as a Driver of Change
	15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 6 – Negotiating Settlement in Shifting Migration Regimes
	16:30 – 17:00	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS

15 JANUARY 2026 • THURSDAY

10:30 – 10:50	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	BRENDA S.A. YEOH <i>National University of Singapore</i> EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:50 – 12:20	PANEL 1 – REASSESSING ASIA'S MIGRATION POLICIES AMID DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE
<i>Chairperson</i>	THEODORA LAM <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:50	From Guestworkers to Residents: Developmental Migration States and the Expansion of Settlement Pathways in East Asia YI-CHUN CHIEN * <i>National Chengchi University</i> SOHOON YI <i>Korea University</i>
11:10	Multilevel Governance and the Developmental Migration State: Migration Governance in the Neoliberalization of Japan's Borderlands YUNCHEN TIAN <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 JOOWON YUK <i>Kyungpook National University</i> MINGKYUNG KOH <i>Kyungpook National University</i>
11:50	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:20 – 13:30	LUNCH BREAK
13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 2 – RECALIBRATED MIDDLE SPACES AND INCREASED COMPETITION
<i>Chairperson</i>	EXEQUIEL CAMARIG CABANDA <i>National University of Singapore</i>
13:30	Brokering Labor in Transnational Markets: The Recruitment for Specified Skilled Worker Program in Japan and Indonesia GRACIA LIU-FARRER <i>Waseda University</i> BUDIANTO FIRMAN <i>Waseda University</i> PAMUNGKAS YUDHA DEWANTO * <i>Waseda University</i>
13:50	Uzbekistan's Emerging Migration Regime: Balancing of Dependency and Diversification BHAVNA DAVE <i>SOAS University of London</i>
14:10	Competition within the Middle Space of Migration: The Case of Migrant Nurses YASMIN Y. ORTIGA <i>Singapore Management University</i>
14:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:00 – 15:30	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 3 – EMERGING DESTINATIONS OF ASIAN LABOR MIGRATION
<i>Chairperson</i>	BERNICE LOH <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>15:30</i>	<p>Is Europe Moving Towards an “Asian Migration Regime”? Eastern Europe as a New Frontier of Asian Labour Migration</p> <p>ANDREW LACSINA * <i>Ateneo de Manila University</i> NYIRI PAL <i>Budapest University of Economics</i> PAMUNGKAS YUDHA DEWANTO <i>Waseda University</i></p>
<i>15:50</i>	<p>Varieties of Migration Governance: A Comparative Study of Two Guestworker Programs in China</p> <p>ADAM HUANG <i>Renmin University</i></p>
<i>16:10</i>	<p>Building Skill Mobility Partnerships with India, Indonesia and the Philippines: How Stakeholders on the German Corridor Side Negotiate 'Triple Wins' Towards Labor</p> <p>JOHANNA ULLMANN <i>University of Osnabrück</i></p>
<i>16:30</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:00	END OF DAY 1
18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER <i>(For speakers, chairpersons and invited guests only)</i>

16 JANUARY 2026 • FRIDAY

10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – NEW DYNAMICS IN EMPLOYMENT REGIMES
<i>Chairperson</i>	EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:00	University-Linked Migration Governance in South Korea: New Pathways for Manufacturing and Care Work HYUNA MOON <i>Seoul National University</i> MINSEOK KANG <i>Seoul National University</i> BORA YEON <i>Seoul National University</i>
10:20	An Exploitative Demand for Middling Migrant Workers: The Deskillling of Chinese Female Corporate Employees in Japan and South Korea MENG MEIYUN <i>University College Cork</i> ADRIAN FAVELL <i>University College Cork</i>
10:40	Unveiling Transnational Labour Migration in Agricultural Sectors: Comparative Evidence from China and Japan XIAOBO HUA <i>China Agricultural University</i>
11:00	Household Preferences and the Emerging Care Migration Regime in South Korea JIWEON JUN * <i>Seoul National University</i> ITO PENG <i>University of Toronto</i>
11:20	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH BREAK
13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 5 – MOBILITY POWER AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE
<i>Chairperson</i>	ANNA TRIANDAFYLLIDOU <i>Toronto Metropolitan University</i>
13:00	Reverse Bargaining Power: Migrant Agency In Choosing Destinations under Global Labour Shortages AKM AHSAN ULLAH <i>University of Brunei Darussalam</i>
13:20	Migration Infrastructures as Sites and Means of Contestation: A View from Thailand STEPHEN CAMPBELL <i>Nanyang Technological University</i>
13:40	Mobility of Labour as Method RUTVICA ANDRIJASEVIC <i>University of Bristol</i>
14:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
14:30 – 15:00	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 6 – NEGOTIATING SETTLEMENT IN SHIFTING MIGRATION REGIMES
<i>Chairperson</i>	YOGA PRASETYO <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>15:00</i>	Mobility-Work for Long-Term Settlement ANH PHUONG LE <i>Waseda University</i>
<i>15:20</i>	“Anak Kita” and Spaces of Intimacy: Indonesian Migrant Family-Making in Taiwan’s Labor Migration Regime TZU-CHI OU <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 EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER <i>National University of Singapore</i>
<i>16:00</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
16:30 – 17:00	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS
	BRENDA S.A. YEOH <i>National University of Singapore</i> EVA SAMIA DINKELAKER <i>National University of Singapore</i>
17:00	END OF WORKSHOP

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

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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 an 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 the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Critical Sociology*, and the *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 an 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 labor, 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.

Multilevel Governance and the Developmental Migration State: Migration Governance in the Neoliberalization of Japan's Borderlands

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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

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This study explores the multidimensional positionalities of Asian international students in South Korea through the lens of the “education-labour-migration nexus.” These students occupy fluid and shifting roles that defy a simplistic categorization as merely ‘students.’ They are learners enrolled in Korean universities, a means of overcoming the financial difficulties of the universities, and labourers engaged in both formal and informal economic activities. This paper specifically aims to analyse how shifts in South Korea’s immigration and education policies have reframed and repositioned these students over time.

While such flexible positionalities are not unique to Korea, international students in this context are being assigned additional social roles. Increasingly, they are viewed as a remedy to Korea’s demographic challenges—particularly the declining birthrate and aging population. As a result, they are being encouraged to settle in underpopulated regions and fill local labour shortages. This transformation is actively facilitated by a coordinated effort among the central government, local governments, and universities, who are collaboratively constructing the figure of the “international student-labourer.” This research will closely examine key government policy documents related to immigration and education to critically assess the implications and problems within these new frameworks.

Against the common assumption, the rise in international student numbers is not solely a result of globalization or K-culture, but rather part of broader structural shifts in Korean society. As inter-Asian student mobility intensifies, it becomes essential to examine how these movements interact with both local and global forces. This study analyses how the education-labour-migration nexus amplifies and exposes existing structural issues in Korea. By critically assessing the challenges students face, this research will highlight the homologies and differences between Korea’s nexus and those of other Asian countries, offering significant policy implications.

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 an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography Education at Kyungpook 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.

**Brokering Labor in Transnational Markets:
The Recruitment for Specified Skilled Worker Program in Japan and Indonesia**

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International labor migration is a socially ordered market phenomenon (Shire 2020). Transnational labor markets (TLM) are shaped by institutional norms, state regulations, and asymmetrical power relations, with employers and intermediaries usually exerting more power over migrant workers. How do labor shortages and the rising demand for workers reshape these power relations? Taking a TLM approach, this study examines the brokerage process in the recruitment of Specified Skilled Worker-type 1 (SSW1) visa holders from Indonesia to Japan. Introduced in 2019 to address acute shortages in manual and service sectors in Japan, the SSW program was significantly expanded in 2024, with a new target of 840,000 workers. Drawing on interview data, the paper analyzes how intermediaries in both Indonesia and Japan—often established recruitment firms diversifying into this new channel—manage SSW recruitment alongside other labor placement programs. It investigates how the introduction of SSW influences their existing business models and intermediary practices; how workers are selected, trained, commodified, and regulated to meet SSW requirements; and how these processes reveal shifting power relations among states, employers, intermediaries, and workers. It also examines the ways in which patterns of social inequality are reproduced and enforced.

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).

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 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 'Yudha' Dewanto is a 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. Yuda has also published with *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* and various academic blogs.

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

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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 S. 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.

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

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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 an 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).

Is Europe Moving Towards an “Asian Migration Regime”? Eastern Europe as a New Frontier of Asian labour migration

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Since 2010, Asian labour immigration to Eastern Europe, 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.

The immediate reasons behind this unexpected emergence of Eastern Europe as a destination of Asian labour are labour shortages combined with industrial growth, the spread of labour brokerage and, in some countries, declining labour protections. Yet it comes at a time of intensifying anti-immigrant rhetoric across Europe, a rhetoric championed by some Eastern European governments. The Hungarian government opposes what it terms “migration” yet has introduced a “guest worker” scheme targeting designated Asian countries. This scheme, based on state-to-state agreements, ties workers to specific employers, limits their stay in the country to three years, and makes brokers and sending-country governments responsible for their eventual repatriation. It thus breaks with post-1970s liberal European immigration norms and is reminiscent of migration regimes in East Asia, Singapore, or the Gulf. Parties that advocate similar arrangements are leading in the polls in a number of Western European countries. Yet for Asian migrant workers, Eastern European countries offer greater freedoms than Asian destinations.

Our presentation, based on ethnographic fieldwork, explores the motivations of Filipino and Indonesian workers in Hungary. We show that Eastern Europe is not only a destination, but for labour intermediaries and workers, it is also a „circuit breaker” of traditional and exhaustive mobility pathways to Asian and Gulf destinations as it offers relatively more generous welfare, less close surveillance, and the possibility of mobility within an imagined „borderless” Europe. Thus, even as Europe moves closer to the restrictive „Asian” model of labour mobility, it opens itself up as an alternative to it.

Pamungkas ‘Yudha’ Dewanto 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.

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).

Andrew Lacsina holds an MA in Sociology with a specialization in Global Social Studies from the 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.

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

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In the past two decades, guestworker programs have become increasingly prevalent across the globe, especially in Asian countries struggling with demographic challenges. Yet there remains limited research on how these newly emerged temporary migration schemes govern labor migrants and what explains the specific migrant governance strategies adopted. This article addresses these questions through a comparative case study of two recently implemented guestworker programs in Yunnan Province and Guangxi Province, China. Both initiated in the mid-2010s, the former recruited Myanmar migrants while the latter drew on Vietnamese labor. Based on interviews and archival data, I trace the policy development of these two guestworker programs and analyze their on-the-ground implementations. While the Chinese central state has gradually relaxed its restrictive immigration policy in response to the demographic changes and economic restructuring, it has remained distant from the actual policy design and implementation. Instead, the local governments were delegated the role of managing international migration, and their governance strategies and outcomes diverged. The Yunnan guestworker program focused on incorporating the existing undocumented Myanmar migrants, while its counterpart in Guangxi leveraged this opportunity to recruit authorized migrant workers in addition to the undocumented migrants. Rather than following a coherent logic, I show that the ways the local governments managed the guestworker programs were significantly shaped by local socioeconomic conditions, bureaucratic capacities and incentives, and historical connections between destination and source regions. Therefore, amidst the overall trend of the relaxation of migration restrictions in China in response to labor shortages, the development of guestworker programs was complex and fragmented. This study contributes to the growing research in Asia's migration regimes and the migration governance literature.

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Building Skill Mobility Partnerships with India, Indonesia and the Philippines: How Stakeholders on the German Corridor Side Negotiate 'Triple Wins' towards Labor Shortages and Demands

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Germany has recently adopted a highly proactive approach to attract skilled migrants from non-EU countries. To facilitate medium-skilled migration, particularly in the healthcare, hospitality or industry sector, the German government strongly invests in establishing new strategic skill mobility partnerships with the global south, including various sending states across Asia. These bilateral labor migration obligations or agreements follow the political claim to enhance fair, ethical, transparent and sustainable labor migration that benefits all involved parties ("triple-win"-approach). So far, the actual implementation of related programs and projects and its effects is underresearched.

This paper investigates how skill mobility partnerships between Germany and three Asian sending countries (India, Indonesia and the Philippines) were formed, how they work and what impact they have. Conceptually, I refer to the migration skill corridor approach. This means to consider that labor migration regimes and dynamics of receiving societies have consequences on sending societies (and vice versa). I draw on rich empirical data with various stakeholders from the German corridor side of the three (re-)emerging migration skill corridors: 28 interviews with governments, intermediaries and employers as well as official program and policy documents collected in mid-2025. Additionally, two focus-group discussions with skilled migrants in Germany will be conducted.

The paper reveals that German stakeholders of skill mobility partnerships view the 'Asian market' as ideal source for qualified laborers and, simultaneously, promote the German vocational training as international 'gold standard'. Yet, political contestations and tensions over recruiting and decent work principles, migration bureaucracy, skill recognition, matching and circulation as well as reinvestments into skill development pose a challenge. Dynamics in one corridor also have effects on others. I highlight how the German stakeholders' 'triple-win' negotiations are permeated with contradicting logics (developmental or business-oriented or others) and shed light on the approaches' effects on Asian skilled migrants and sending societies.

Johanna Ullmann is a sociologist and post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS) at the University of Osnabrück (Germany). In her research she 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 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 and migration skill corridors.

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

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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.

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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).

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

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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.

Meng Meiyun 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).

Unveiling Transnational Labour Migration in Agricultural Sectors: Comparative Evidence from China and Japan

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Against the backdrop of aging populations, out-migration, and labour shortages, certain regions in both China and Japan have recruited foreign migrant laborers to supplement their agricultural workforce. Beyond the urban-rural and North-South dichotomies, this paper adopts a problem-oriented approach, focusing on shared dilemmas in the two countries based on fieldwork in Southwest China (bordering Myanmar) and Japan's Tohoku and Kanto regions. From a comparative perspective, it aims to address four research questions: What motivates the introduction of migrant laborers? What institutional settings and dynamics are involved in their recruitment? How does hiring migrant laborers shape agrarian changes? And what challenges hinder sustainable development through migrant labour employment? Key findings are as follows: China's agricultural employment share dropped from approximately 60% in 1991 to around 25% in 2021, while Japan's fell from 6.7% in 2009 to 3.2% in 2019. Undoubtedly, agricultural labour has declined sharply—exacerbated by low fertility and aging populations—a trend conflicting with agricultural development goals that rely on labour- and capital-intensive inputs. To tackle this, China and Japan have formalized foreign migrant integration through distinct strategies and institutional arrangements. Employing migrant laborers shapes smallholders' land use decisions and labour practices; however, challenges persist: in China, political uncertainty in Myanmar causes disruptions to and rising costs of migrant recruitment, while Japan faces hurdles in social and cultural integration of migrants. This paper highlights East Asia-Southeast Asia interconnections in agricultural labour supply and demand. These findings offer insights for rethinking migration governance in China and Japan, and shed light on the migration-sustainability nexus.

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Household Preferences and the Emerging Care Migration Regime in South Korea

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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 indicate a pronounced preference for live-out (commuting) arrangements, in contrast to the entrenched live-in systems that structure care migration in Hong Kong and Singapore. Families also emphasized Korean language ability and prior care experience, while citing privacy concerns and the desire to maintain clear boundaries between family and paid work as decisive factors.

These household preferences suggest that Korea cannot simply replicate regional precedents. Distinctive infrastructure such as subsidized housing for workers, regulatory frameworks for commuting care, and recruitment strategies targeting skilled rather than low-cost workers could be required, as policies that overlook demand-side needs risk misalignment between migrant supply and household acceptance, undermining sustainability and the quality of care. 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 a 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 a 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 B.A. in Anthropology from Seoul National University and her M.Sc. and D.Phil. 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 (ESDC), 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).

Reverse Bargaining Power: Migrant Agency In Choosing Destinations Under Global Labour Shortages

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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 (UBD). 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 (AUC), Osnabruck University, Germany, and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, and Dhaka International University (DIU), 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 Sites and Means of Contestation: A View from Thailand

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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 operate as both sites and means for such contestation. While “migration regimes” are the rules, laws, and practices that govern the movement of people across borders, “migration infrastructures” are the channels that enable such movement. Migration regimes play a determining 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 about which I have been conducting ethnographic research over 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

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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 (UBBS), UK. Working at the intersection of political economy, feminist theory and migration studies, her research examines how just-in-time (JIT) 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.

Mobility-work for Long-term Settlements of Manual Workers: The Vietnamese Specified Skilled Workers in Japan

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Japan's immigration policies have long maintained strict control over low- and medium-skilled labor migration. However, with the severe shortage of labor, especially in manual sectors, the country opened the front door for 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 the case of Vietnamese workers, the largest group of SSWs in Japan, to analyze how migrants navigate the institutionalized hierarchy of skills in their pursuit of long-term settlement.

Drawing on Rung's (2017) concept of mobility-work—the legal, bureaucratic, and logistical labor required to secure and maintain residency—I argue that SSW migrants engage in intensified forms of mobility-work compared to their highly skilled counterparts, who benefit from clearer and more secure routes to permanent residency. The analysis is based on interviews with Vietnamese workers who initially entered Japan's labor market with a temporary mindset, as the system was not originally designed for their long-term settlement. Over time, however, as institutional changes unfolded and the SSW program created new possibilities, these workers began to recognize emerging opportunities for extended stay and recalibrated their strategies accordingly.

By understanding migrants' efforts at negotiating settlement within a restrictive system, this study contributes to broader debates on how Asian migration regimes simultaneously open and constrain opportunities for manual workers, and what is distinctive about Japan's current developments in managing labor shortages.

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**

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Most receiving societies for migrant workers in East Asia—such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan—enforce strict immigration policies that restrict family reunification and long-term settlement. Yet, in Taiwan, the recent implementation of the Gender Equity Act has opened limited pathways for migrant workers to form families, even as they continue to navigate legal and economic constraints. Drawing on interviews with 30 Indonesian migrant mothers who gave birth in Taiwan, this paper explores how previous marital and migration experiences shape their reproductive and family decisions. More than half of these women entered second marriages in Taiwan, many following divorces linked to long-term family separation under transnational labor migration. Some spoke of pregnancies long anticipated, referring to children born in Taiwan as *Anak Kita* (“our children”), highlighting a sense of shared intimacy and the value of “a child for myself and him.” This study combines in-depth interviews with longitudinal fieldwork and digital ethnography to examine how nuclear migrant families in Taiwan practice parenthood and create everyday intimacies. Holiday gatherings, birthday celebrations, and family trips become crucial practices of belonging that affirm both romantic partnership and parental identity. The paper argues that two interrelated forces shape the new dynamics of Asia's migration regimes. First, beyond policy frameworks and labor market conditions, societal infrastructures in receiving societies—such as Taiwan's national health insurance, advanced medical technology, public transportation, and accessible public spaces—expand the space of intimacy for migrant workers. Second, the family strategies and romantic aspirations of Indonesian migrants influence decisions about where to work, whether to settle, and how long to remain abroad. By foregrounding migrant family-making, this paper demonstrates how reproductive desires, marital histories, and intimate practices intersect with policy regimes and social conditions, ultimately reshaping the new dynamics in Taiwan's labor migration regime.

Tzu-Chi Ou is Assistant Professor at the International College of Innovation, National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She received her PhD in Anthropology from Columbia University in 2018 and was a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica. Her research examines migration regimes, the rural–urban divide, and how intimacy, family-making, and place shape the lives of migrant workers in China and Taiwan. Her current projects focus on the reproductive rights and parenting practices of Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan, alongside community-engaged initiatives that connect international students with migrant communities. Her work has appeared in *Pacific Affairs* and *positions: asia critique*.

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

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This paper approaches dynamics in Asia's migration regimes by examining the role of migrant practices in the transformation of “guest worker”-regimes. It builds on my research that compares Taiwan's contemporary temporary labor migration program with West Germany's post-World War II “guest worker”-migration. I argue that migrant workers' empowering actions and community building drove the transformations of West Germany's migration regime in the 1960s and early 1970s, and that the examination of this dynamic can inform our understanding of how the formation of migrant communities will catalyze ongoing changes in East Asian migration regimes in the upcoming years. I draw on German and English-language scholarship studying migrant practices that undermined “guest worker”-regimes' central principle of low-skilled workers' temporariness: the usage of several recruitment channels for family and chain migration, the establishment of networks providing material, legal, and moral support, the escape from lives in the dormitories, and the demand for better working conditions and social infrastructures. I relate this literature, which frames such practices as “autonomy” or “willfulness of migration,” to insights from my own ethnographic research among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan's fishing and manufacturing industries carried out between 2022 and 2024. Accounting for distinct material conditions and contexts in both cases—the massive demand for migrant labor during the post-war economic boom in West Germany, and labor shortages resulting from demographic shifts in East Asia today—I discuss how evolving social networks and settlement practices among Southeast Asian migrant workers will contribute to reshaping Taiwan's “guest worker”-regime in the future.

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