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MULTIDIRECTIONAL MIGRATION WITHIN ASIA AND TO THE WORLD



26-27 NOVEMBER 2026

HYBRID FORMAT

NUS AS8 & Online via Zoom

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Multidirectional migration brings attention to how simultaneity and interconnections characterise emigration, immigration and/or re-migration flows, rather than studying them as compartmentalised migration trends (Ho, 2019; Abdelhady and Norocel, 2023; Zhou, 2024). The approach of multidirectional migration emphasises how migration links multiple sites trans-territorially through not only individual migrants' journeys but also global events. As migrants navigate inclusion and difference across nation-states, they carve out ongoing trajectories that shape citizenship, belonging and personhood (e.g. Ong, 1999; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005; Waters, 2006). Their multidirectional movements are framed not simply as economically motivated but as deeply tied to aspirations, transnational householding, social reproduction, and political belonging (e.g. Liao, 2020; De Silva, 2023; Zani, 2025; Barabantseva, 2026). Contemporary migration could involve multiple hubs, loops, and detours. Taking multidirectional migration as a vantage point challenges approaches that analyse migration through systems theory, traditional "sending/destination" categories or as one-directional and sequential movements (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014; Bal et al, 2020).

Multidirectional migration starting from or taking place in Asia manifests through overlapping regional corridors, serial labour flows, and transitions within trans-territorial circuits. A country may simultaneously function as an origin, destination, and transit hub, and in this context, its social cohesion is shaped by the interplay of simultaneous inflows, outflows, and return movements. Or different countries in a regional corridor or trans-territorial circuit can take on the role of origin, destination or transit hubs as migrants make pit-stops during criss-crossing journeys over the life-course.

Treating migration as a one-off event (or a single decision) no longer fits in such scenarios; instead, decisions and identities unfold over time and across several sites. Migrants who undertake multidirectional migrations navigate migration regimes, nationality laws and cultural differences in ways that chart multi-jurisdictional "citizenship constellations" (Bauböck, 2010) which connect individuals by legal membership or lived ties to multiple nation-states.

This workshop aims to unpack the architecture of directionality in migration studies by foregrounding the non-linear, multi-sited, and provisional nature of contemporary cross-border movements. We welcome papers that critically interrogate vocabularies of directionality in migration studies—and their underlying temporal assumptions such as by:

- Investigating the role of states in shaping diaspora mobilisation and/or immigration controls and national identity politics as they intersect in migration hubs, regional corridors or trans-territorial circuits
- Foregrounding the multiple belongings, transnational sojourning and citizenship constellations which migrants experience and states seek to manage during multidirectional migrations
- Examining the intersectionality of migration with class, race, gender and nationhood in intimate and cultural domains during multidirectional migrations

Capturing multi-directional flows requires tracking people and their ties across different locations and time periods, which strains traditional single-case, single-site fieldwork and census-based sampling. We are also open towards papers that foreground innovative methodological interventions for studying multidirectional migrations.

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

Prof Elaine Lynn-Ee HO
Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

Prof Elena BARABANTSEVA
Department of Politics, The University of Manchester

Dr Jin L. LI
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

26 NOVEMBER 2026 • THURSDAY

10:30 – 10:45	**WELCOME REMARKS**
	ELAINE LYNN-EE HO, National University of Singapore **ELENA BARABANTSEVA**, The University of Manchester **JIN L. LI**, National University of Singapore
10:45 – 12:15	**PANEL 1 • MULTIDIRECTIONALITY IN MIGRATION HUBS**
Chairperson	**JIN L. LI**, National University of Singapore
10:45	Singapore as a Multidirectional Migration Hub **ELAINE LYNN-EE HO**, National University of Singapore **RAO DAI**, National University of Singapore
11:05	Multidirectional Migration through Diaspora Nodes: The Hindu Sindhi Merchant Diaspora in Hong Kong **RADHIKA MATHRANI CHAKRABORTY**, University of Manchester
11:25	Negotiating Migration Directionality: Diaspora Governance, Ethnic Boundaries, and Higher Education in Taiwan **WEI-YUN CHUNG**, National Cheng Kung University
11:45	Questions & Answers
12:15 – 13:15	**LUNCH**
13:15 – 14:45	**PANEL 2 • MULTIDIRECTIONALITY IN BORDERLAND AND ARCHIPELAGIC CROSSINGS**
Chairperson	**ELENA BARABANTSEVA**, The University of Manchester
13:15	Migration Refraction: The Changing Labor Pathways of Indonesian Maritime Workers **BEATRICE ZANI**, French National Center for Scientific Research **VANNY EL RAHMAN**, National Dong Hwa University
13:35	Archipelagic Constellations of Home(s): Yemeni Humanitarian Sojourners in South Korea's Refugee Regime and Beyond **YURA HYEON**, University of Tokyo
13:55	Survive and Thrive through Leaks and Cracks: Fragmented Border Governance and Grassroots Cosmopolitan Society in China's Southwestern Borderlands **TIANLONG YOU**, Sun Yat-sen University
14:15	Questions & Answers
14:45 – 15:15	**AFTERNOON TEA**
15:15 – 17:15	**PANEL 3 • MULTIDIRECTIONALITY IN REGIMES OF PROVISIONALITY**
Chairperson	**BEATRICE ZANI**, French National Center for Scientific Research
15:15 *Online*	From Maputo to Lisbon: Chinese Entrepreneurs, Retirement Aspirations, and Accidental Stepping-Stone Migration across Asia, Africa, and Europe **JOHANNA VON PEZOLD**, University of Amsterdam
15:35	Navigating Irregularity: How China Becomes a Destination in Filipino Domestic Workers' Multidirectional Mobility **XINRONG MA**, Sun Yat-Sen University
15:55 *Online*	Step, Stop, or Somewhere Else? Indian Women Navigating Multidirectional Migration through the UAE **SHRUTI GUPTA**, The International Institute of Migration and Development
16:15	Out of and Back to Asia: Shifting Geography of Highly Skilled Migration in the Era of Trumpism **SHAOHUA ZHAN**, Nanyang Technological University
16:35	Questions & Answers
17:15	**END OF DAY 1**
17:30 – 20:00	**WORKSHOP DINNER** *(For Presenters and Organisers Only)*

27 NOVEMBER 2026 • FRIDAY

10:00 – 10:45	**PARTICIPATORY ART ACTIVITY**
Moderator	**JIN L. LI**, National University of Singapore
	The activity provides a more informal and visual way for migration researchers to think together about mobility, geographical connections and the importance of different places. The main outcome will be one collectively created physical artwork. This art piece will provide a visual record of how researchers working on different forms of migration visualise the routes, connections, directions and hubs across the region in their research.
10:45 – 11:15	**MORNING TEA**
11:15 – 13:15	**PANEL 4 • MULTIDIRECTIONALITY AND MORAL ECONOMIES OF MOBILITY**
Chairperson	**ELAINE LYNN-EE HO**, National University of Singapore
11:15 *Online*	Neither Sending nor Receiving: Khoja Ithnāʿasharī Networks and the Western Indian Ocean as a Multidirectional Migration Circuit **IQBAL AKHTAR**, Florida International University
11:35	Multidirectional Migration and Family Reconfiguration: Rethinking Matrifocality in Javanese Muslim Migrant Households **MUNA YASTUTI MADRAH**, Sultan Agung Islamic University
11:55	Beef Noodles That Rock Asia: Itinerant Hui Restaurateurs from Hualong, Northwest China **PU YANG**, National University of Singapore
12:15	When Faith Moves: Multidirectional Migration and the Circulation of Emotion and Religious Practices among Filipina Migrants in Singapore **EVANGELINE O. KATIGBAK-MONTOYA**, De La Salle University
12:35	Questions & Answers
13:15 – 14:15	**LUNCH**
14:15 – 16:15	**PANEL 5 • MULTIDIRECTIONALITY AS STRATEGIC NAVIGATION**
Chairperson	**WEI-YUN CHUNG**, National Cheng Kung University
14:15 *Online*	Transient Migration and Strategic Home-Building: Exploring Hong Kong Migrations **YUK WAH CHAN**, City University of Hong Kong
14:35	Multinational Migration of South Asians from the Gulf to Canada, Australia and New Zealand **RICHA SHIVAKOTI**, Toronto Metropolitan University **ANOJI EKANAYAKE**, Centre for Migration Research and Development
14:55	Living Multidirectional Migration: Transnational Families in China and their Membership Strategies **JIN L. LI**, National University of Singapore
15:15	Multidirectionality, Entrepreneurial Experimentation, and Affective Infrastructures: Mobility of a Chinese Family across China, Vietnam, and Belarus **PETER GUANGPEI RAN**, American University of Paris **ELENA BARABANTSEVA**, The University of Manchester
15:35	Questions & Answers
16:15 – 16:30	**CLOSING REMARKS**
	ELAINE LYNN-EE HO, National University of Singapore **ELENA BARABANTSEVA**, The University of Manchester
16:30	**END OF WORKSHOP**

Singapore as a Multidirectional Migration Hub

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Transnational migration research bridges sending and receiving countries yet researchers typically still regard migrants as either immigrants or emigrants, approaching inflows and outflows as separate fields. Taking multidirectionality as the analytical anchor — asking how emigration, immigration and re-migration converge simultaneously within a single site — reveals what a mono-directional lens conceals. Analysing directionality matters for three reasons: it exposes the entanglement of flows, whereby the same regimes that admit arrivals also expel, retain and recirculate them; it captures how a single biography folds arrival, departure and return together across the lifecourse; and it repositions the state as an actant that actively redirects movement rather than merely receiving or sending migrants. To hold these dynamics in view, we adopt a topological reading that treats "sending" and "receiving" not as fixed locations but as relational positions which fold, twist and stretch — so that, like the two apparent sides of a Möbius strip, immigration and emigration prove to be one continuous surface. We develop these arguments through analysing Singapore as a "multidirectional migration hub" — at once destination, origin and transit point. Our paper is informed by long-term research on multidirectional migration and draws specifically on an ongoing study with multidirectional migrants in Singapore from varied countries of origin, visa types and life-stages. We show how multidirectional migration decisions set in at distinct life-course stages. Directionality thus warrants treatment as a unit of analysis in its own right, repositioning migration research from *who* settles towards *how* states, sites and people flows continually reconstitute one another topologically.

Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho is Provost's Chair Professor at the Department of Geography and Research Leader of the Migration and Mobilities Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research examines the geographies of citizenship through studying various transnational migration streams, as well as the ageing and the wellbeing of non-migrant and migrant older adults. She is Editor of the journal, *Social and Cultural Geography*, and the Routledge Series on Asian Migration. She also serves on the editorial boards of geography, citizenship, migration and area studies journals.

Rao Dai is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests include migration, diaspora, transnationalism, identity politics, geopolitics and digital geographies. Her doctoral research examines the role of digital platforms in shaping belonging and diaspora diplomacy among new Chinese migrant associations in Singapore.

Multidirectional Migration through Diaspora Nodes: The Hindu Sindhi Merchant Diaspora in Hong Kong

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This paper offers a critical engagement with directionality in migration through a focus on diaspora nodes. Drawing on the case of the Hindu Sindhi merchant diaspora in Hong Kong, it argues that particular places (diaspora 'nodes') become significant and meaningful for diasporas through the simultaneous and interconnected movements and orientations that converge and emerge through them. This merchant diaspora emerged through overlapping and co-constitutive migrations: merchant mobilities from Sindh from the late 1800s; displacements during the 1947 Partition of India; and multiple migration across the globe for marriage and business over time. Through these migrations and mobilities, Hong Kong became a site of aspiration, wealth and success in the Sindhi diasporic imaginary. However, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted during the tumultuous years of 2019-2021 revealed that Sindhis in Hong Kong expressed varied narratives of uncertainty, belonging, citizenship, and future migration. Rather than linear trajectories of origin or destination, interlocutors' narratives drew on merchant histories and past migrations, while maintaining an eye towards the future, and elsewhere, revealing a multidirectional diasporic orientation.

This paper therefore frames diaspora nodes as 'points of convergence'—in space and time, where people, things, and ideas collect; and as 'points of articulation'—(or, to extend a corporeal metaphor, as 'joints') for 'articulating' connections and belonging, as well as orienting and facilitating movement to elsewhere. Considering diaspora nodes, and the mobilities mapped through them, offers a way to reframe diaspora's reliance on ethnicity, nostalgia and a (singular) shared history of displacement, and foregrounds the non-linear, multidirectional, and multi-temporal dimensions of migration. Theorising diaspora nodes in this way brings sociological understandings of place and belonging into conversation with directionality in migration, to reframe 'nodes' – beyond flat, spatial points in networks, but instead as lived and lively sites of belonging, through which orientations to elsewhere emerge.

Radhika Mathrani Chakraborty is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester, and her research explores the intersections of migration, diaspora, and gender in Asian contexts. Her work on the Hindu Sindhi business diaspora explores how the historical trading mobilities of merchant networks have translated into contemporary diasporic social forms. Her research on refugee journeys, transnational charity and diaspora, and gender-based violence has appeared in *Journal of Refugee Studies, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Economic and Political Weekly*, and others. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the National University of Singapore, and has an interdisciplinary background, with a Master's degree in Women's Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and a BA in English Literature from Delhi University. She has also previously worked with socio-legal support services for survivors of gender-based violence.

Negotiating Migration Directionality: Diaspora Governance, Ethnic Boundaries, and Higher Education in Taiwan

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Influenced by the Cold War legacy of the "Two Chinas", Taiwan's higher education system incorporates overseas students with Chinese heritage through two institutional pathways: the Overseas Chinese Student (OCS) scheme and the international student track. While the former frames student migration as a form of "return" grounded in cultural and ethnic belonging, the latter categorises students as foreign nationals subject to international student regulations. Drawing on policy documents, observations from state-led recruitment fairs and campus events, and in-depth interviews with 35 ethnic Chinese students of diverse nationalities, this paper examines how migration directionality is negotiated through interactions between state governance, migrants, and local actors. Through categorisation practices, the Taiwanese government attempts to shape student migrants' trajectories and identities by framing overseas Chinese students as ethnically and culturally proximate subjects who are expected to integrate into Taiwanese society and the labour market. Recruitment fairs, campus activities, and tuition and bursary policies further function as extensions of diaspora governance, differentiating ethnic Chinese students' future mobility pathways and senses of belonging according to imposed institutional categories. However, these state-imposed categories and trajectories are not necessarily shared by students themselves. Many strategically navigate between OCS and international student categories to express identity, maximise educational advantages, and expand transnational mobility opportunities. Rather than treating Taiwan as a fixed endpoint, students often see it as an option, a transit point, or a provisional stop within broader multidirectional migration trajectories. At the same time, local students frequently reproduce symbolic boundaries through everyday language practices that position themselves as "authentic" cultural insiders, thereby complicating the state's narrative of ethnic return and reshaping migrants' senses of belonging and future mobility decisions. This paper thus argues that migration directionality is a multi-scalar process continually negotiated through interactions between state migration regimes, everyday boundary-making, and migrants' own aspirations.

Wei-Yun Chung is Assistant Research Fellow in the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) at National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. Prior to joining CHASS, she held research positions at the Department of Geography and the Global Asia Research Center at National Taiwan University, as well as at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She received her PhD in Geography from the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on marriage, family, student migration, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education. Her work has been published in *Gender, Place & Culture* and *International Journal of Social Welfare*.

Migration Refraction: The Changing Labor Pathways of Indonesian Maritime Workers

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National Dong Hwa University

This paper examines how Indonesian maritime workers' migration pathways are reworked through return, occupational change, and labor intermediation. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research in Indonesia, Taiwan, and other maritime sites, including interviews with former fishers, prospective migrants, brokers, and recruitment actors, it follows workers across departures, returns, and subsequent occupations. The analysis shows how return can coexist with continued employment abroad, how maritime experience can be reworked as a resource for recruitment and brokerage, and how limited opportunities at home can prompt renewed migration. We conceptualize these shifts as migration refraction, contributing to scholarship on multidirectional migration by showing how changing labor positions rework the pathways through which mobility unfolds across places and over time.

Beatrice Zani is an economic sociologist and an ethnographer, Associate Research Professor at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), currently Visiting scholar at the Insitute of Sociology, Academia Sinica. Drawing on the case study of transnational labor in the Asian fishing and shipping sectors (China, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia), her ongoing research explores the link between labor and commodity mobilities, globalized labor regimes and grassroot entrepeneurship, informality and digitality in the transformation of capitalism and globalization. She is Principal Investigator of the French National Research Agency (ANR)-funded project FORSEA – "Migrations and Forced Labor in the Maritime Economies of Globalized Asia" (2026-2028).

Vanny El Rahman is a PhD candidate in Asia-Pacific Regional Studies at National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in International Relations. His research interests include migration studies, migrant labor unions, Taiwan's migrant worker regime, as well as terrorism and radicalism. His current research focuses on Indonesian migrant care workers in Taiwan and migrant-led unions. In addition to his academic work, Vanny has been a journalist since 2017 and has been engaged in empowerment activities with migrant worker organizations.

Archipelagic Constellations of Home(s): Yemeni Humanitarian Sojourners in South Korea's Refugee Regime and Beyond

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How much home do we need? What is the force that holds 'temporary' refugees together in this life on the border, seemingly without any belonging or attachment to the territories they foot in, or nowhere? The research closely examines and illuminates this home, membership, and accompanying emotions and affects of refugees in prolonged temporariness. My research project pays keen attention to the stories of noncitizens, who are not completely 'stateless', but in the institutional liminal space. They live 'here', making contributions to society; yet they are encouraged neither to settle in nor to integrate into host societies, with minimal state support and citizenship that remains out of reach.

The arrival of 561 Yemenis fleeing from Yemen civil war on Jeju Island in 2018 has shaped the refugee issue visible in South Korea first time. The unexpected influx provoked intense backlashes, stigmatizing them as fake refugees, and especially sex criminals who would harm Korean women. While Yemenis were granted humanitarian sojourner status by the Korean government with a one-year, renewable G-1 visa, they constantly move within and outside the country. Their incredible bordercrossings are entangled with a fleeting sense of freedom amidst the harsh grind of their daily life, fun, envy, and homemaking. This hypermobile life of Yemeni humanitarian sojourners demonstrates their resourcefulness and re/negotiations under the given legal and social constraints, contradictorily creating flexible governmentality and labor exploitation. The study extends the exploration of this theme, approaching it critically yet without succumbing to pessimism, and aims to uncover more nuanced and compelling dimensions of noncitizens' aspirational projects and political meanings. The study unpacks how Yemeni humanitarian sojourner status persons leverage tremendous mobilities, while interrogating how South Korea's refugee regime 'interestingly' and 'cleverly' places them in hypermobility, suggesting the concept of 'archipelagic constellations of home(s)'.

Yura Hyeon is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Tokyo College at University of Tokyo. Her current book project "Settling in Hypermobility – Yemeni Humanitarian Sojourner Status Persons in South Korea's Refugee Regime and Beyond" explores how the Yemenis' sub-refugee legal status of the South Korea's and global refugee regimes shapes their hypermobile, flexible, and exploitable lives. She has studied literature, media, public policy and administration and social and cultural anthropology with a regional focus of East Asia in South Korea, China, Germany, and Japan, publishing works in outlets such as *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*. Her interdisciplinary and migratory background has continually shaped her positionality on the periphery as a migrant, fueling her motivation for her research project on how 'temporary' status refugees create membership across East Asia.

Survive and Thrive through Leaks and Cracks: Fragmented Border Governance and Grassroots Cosmopolitan Society in China's Southwestern Borderlands

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China's southwestern borderlands have long been shaped by porous frontiers, cross-border kinship, trade, religious networks, and multiethnic coexistence. In recent years, these borderlands have been reconfigured by two overlapping state projects: infrastructure-led regional integration associated with the Belt and Road Initiative, and intensified border securitisation through fencing, surveillance, immigration enforcement, and pandemic-era control measures. This research asks how grassroots cosmopolitan communities emerge and endure within the "leaks and cracks" of fragmented border governance. Based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2025, with Ruili as a primary field site, this research draws on 121 semi-structured interviews with migrants, traders, religious actors, state agents, community mediators, and migrant-serving organisations. It shows that border governance is not a coherent system of inclusion and exclusion, but an uneven assemblage of developmental and securitising logics enacted across sites and levels of authority. These uneven arrangements produce "leaks and cracks": spatial, institutional, relational, and temporal openings through which borderland actors sustain mobility and social life. Through tacit knowledge, kinship ties, linguistic skills, informal passages, and local relationships, they cross, wait, return, settle, or move onward. The findings suggest that grassroots cosmopolitanism is not celebratory openness or an elite ethical stance, but a precarious and practical mode of coexistence forged under constraint. Fragmented border governance does not merely restrict mobility; it reshapes long-standing cross-border relations into unstable but durable forms of grassroots cosmopolitan society.

Tianlong You is Associate Professor of Sociology at Sun Yat-sen University. His research sits at the intersection of migration studies, political sociology, borderland studies, citizenship studies, and China studies, with a particular focus on how mobility, governance, markets, and infrastructures reshape local societies in China and across transnational borderlands. He serves in editorial roles for *Comparative Migration Studies*, *Citizenship Studies*, and *PLOS ONE*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including *Comparative Migration Studies*, *Citizenship Studies*, *Canadian Review of Sociology*, *Journal of Chinese Sociology*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *China Perspectives*, *China Information*, and *American Behavioral Scientist*.

Huize Li is a research assistant at the Yunnan University. She is currently studying Chinese digital nomads' lifestyle mobility in contemporary Asia.

From Maputo to Lisbon: Chinese Entrepreneurs, Retirement Aspirations, and Accidental Stepping-Stone Migration across Asia, Africa, and Europe

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Mozambique between 2017 and 2024, this paper examines how Chinese entrepreneurs living and working in Maputo increasingly imagine Lisbon as a future destination for retirement, investment, and family relocation. Rather than understanding migration as a linear movement from origin to destination, I conceptualise these trajectories as forms of accidental stepping-stone migration: mobility projects in which Mozambique was initially pursued as a site of business opportunity, but later becomes an unplanned intermediary stage in longer transcontinental trajectories toward Europe.

Drawing on long-term participant observation and in-depth interviews, the paper explores how entrepreneurs mobilise capital accumulated in Mozambique to access Portuguese residency regimes, purchase property, secure education for children, and prepare for later-life settlement. These aspirations are shaped not by immediate labour market needs, but by concerns with social reproduction, wealth preservation, security, healthcare, and lifestyle enhancement. Lisbon emerges as a strategic node where economic pragmatism intersects with imaginaries of 'the good life', European citizenship, and postcolonial familiarity through language and historical ties.

The paper contributes to debates on multidirectional migration by tracing how Chinese mobility links Asia, Africa, and Europe through sequential, non-linear, and future-oriented movements. It also highlights Mozambique's role not simply as a destination for Chinese migration, but as a provisional hub within wider trans-territorial circuits of accumulation and onward mobility. More broadly, the study challenges conventional North-South migration binaries and demonstrates how contemporary Europe is being reimagined by entrepreneurs from the Global South whose movements are driven by aspiration as much as by opportunity.

Johanna von Pezold is Postdoctoral Researcher at the China Africa Fashion Power ERC project, based at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis and the Media Studies Department, University of Amsterdam, where she also teaches. After studying in Hamburg, Rio de Janeiro, Oxford, and Beijing, she graduated with a PhD in Sociology from the University of Hong Kong, examining the trade and consumption of Chinese fashion in Mozambique. Johanna is especially interested in transnational exchanges of non-Western fashion and material culture, privileged South-North migration, and China's relations to the Portuguese-speaking world. She has published in *African Studies Review, European Journal of Cultural Studies, International Journal of Fashion Studies, Global Media and China, Journal of Consumer Culture, Consumption Markets & Culture*, and *Critical African Studies*.

Navigating Irregularity: How China Becomes a Destination in Filipino Domestic Workers' Multidirectional Mobility

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With its economic development and demographic transition, China has emerged as an important destination for international labor migrants, particularly those from neighboring Southeast Asian countries. However, in the absence of a nationwide visa regime for foreign labor migration, international labor migrants are generally categorized as "three-illegal people" (sanfei renyuan), a term referring to those who have entered, overstayed, or worked without authorization. This paper draws on ethnographic research with Filipino domestic migrants in China and were later repatriated to the Philippines under immigration enforcement targeting undocumented migrants. Unlike some existing scholarship that describes migration pathways as a linear process—from less developed to more developed countries, from temporary status to residency, or from lower- to higher-status positions—the case of Filipino migrants in China reveals a scenario of non-linear migration pathways in their transnational migratory experience. Prior to arriving in mainland China, most Filipino domestic workers had already accumulated work experience in other destinations, such as the Gulf States, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Compared with these previous destinations, China is a destination that provides Filipino domestic workers with no pathway to legal status, formal employment contracts, and institutionalized labor protections, while subjecting them to immigration enforcement. How does China, as a country that offers no legal status to foreign domestic workers, become a desired destination in Filipino domestic workers' multidirectional mobility? What does the status of irregularity mean for foreign domestic workers in China?

This paper examines the paradox of irregularity, in which irregular status exposes migrant workers to precarity while enabling them limited forms of mobility and bargaining power. While acknowledging the precarious conditions faced by foreign domestic workers, I point out that compared with legal/ regular migration regimes in other destinations, irregularity in China disrupts the sponsor-employer bond, generates room for foreign domestic workers' mobility, and endows them with limited bargaining power to negotiate with employers over salary increases and days off. This paper moves beyond an understanding of migration irregularity as merely a matter of individual choice or "free illegality" in labor-market, and further examines the interaction between employment relations and the migration governance regime. It analyzes how decentralized migration governance and the discretionary power of immigration management at the grassroots level reshape the existence and reproduction of irregular migration in China's domestic labor market. In doing so, this paper not only reveals the non-linear trajectories of migration, but also sheds light on how mobility, employment, and migration governance are mutually constituted.

Xinrong Ma is Associate Professor in the School of Government at Sun Yat-Sen University, China, and 2025-2026 Visiting Scholar at Harvard-Yenching Institute. She obtained her doctoral degree in Chinese studies at the Institute of Area Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands. Her research interests include migration, labor, ethnicity, citizenship, and (de-)globalization. Her publications appeared in English and Chinese peer-reviewed journals, such as *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Citizenship Studies, China Information, The China Review* and *China Perspective* etc.

Step, Stop, or Somewhere Else?
Indian Women Navigating Multidirectional Migration through the UAE

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Challenging the enduring origin–destination, home-host, and temporary-permanent logic in migration studies, this paper argues that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) functions not as a destination but as a node—provisional, conditional, and always already oriented toward an uncertain elsewhere—within the multidirectional migration circuits of Indian women. Drawing on two periods of fieldwork (2017 and 2020–21) with women across income categories in the UAE, including nurses, teachers, domestic workers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and janitors, the paper traces how the India-UAE-elsewhere/unknown corridors are made and unmade through intersecting logics of gender, class, and occupation. Drawing on Ho's (2019) concept of "contemporaneous migration" as a framework, the paper identifies four non-exclusive positions the UAE occupies for Indian migrant women: a deliberate step in a career-led circuit oriented towards onward movement; a contingent node shaped by family migration and care responsibilities; an aspirational destination anchored to socioeconomic desires; and an in-between space of longer-term yet provisional belonging. Across all, women's gendered and migrant positionalities force them to always be prepared for uncertainty—return, stuck-in-place and movement to uncertain and unknown spaces.

Crucially, no woman fits neatly into one position. Their trajectories criss-cross over the life-course, and for women this indeterminacy is compounded by marriage, childbirth, caregiving obligations, and removal from professional circuits. Centering gender and class illuminates how class habitus and professional culture shape fundamentally different modalities of multidirectionality: low-income women navigate mobility as a primary income strategy, middle-income women are frequently drawn into contingent, care-interrupted trajectories in which labour remains framed as supplementary yet critical to onward trajectories, while high-income women endeavour to stay-in-place through simultaneously mobilising capital in multiple geographies. Global disruptions, such as COVID-19, anti-immigration policy shifts, and changing residency regimes across the Global North (and increasingly, in Asia) further unsettle trajectories, redirecting aspirational movements in unexpected directions. Methodologically, the study's design spanning two research periods with a few overlapping participants alongside recruitment agents and Indian state officials, offers a multi-sited approach to tracking non-linear flows that single-site methods cannot capture.

Shruti Gupta is Senior Research Fellow at the International Institute of Migration and Development, India. She holds a PhD in Comparative Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore. Her broader research interests lie at the intersection of migration, gender relations, and women's economic empowerment. Currently, she works within India's development and policy sector, leading research and programming aimed at enhancing women's representation and experiences within the labour market.

Out of and Back to Asia: Shifting Geography of Highly Skilled Migration in the Era of Trumpism

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In the literature on international migration, Western countries, particularly the United States, are positioned at the top of the hierarchy of destinations. Migration flows are often one-directional from Asian to Western countries, followed by permanent settlement or temporary return. However, recent scholarship has revealed a much more complex landscape of migration directionality, characterized by circular migration, re-migration, permanent return, or "half-way return." This paper contributes to this growing literature and investigates how highly skilled Asian migrants choose to return or consider returning to Asia due to growing anti-immigration policy in the United States. Drawing on the interviews with Chinese and Indian migrants in Los Angeles and Singapore as well as secondary sources, this paper shows how the rise of Trumpism in the United States has, to some extent, changed the aspiration and decision of these migrants on immigration and settlement, forcing or motivating some of them to return or consider returning to Asia. This paper aims to demonstrate how the immigration regime and rising anti-immigration rhetoric have been key factors reshaping the directionality of skilled migration in the contemporary era.

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Neither Sending nor Receiving: Khoja Ithnāʿasharī Networks and the Western Indian Ocean as a Multidirectional Migration Circuit

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Migration studies has increasingly recognized that contemporary mobility defies linear "sending/destination" frameworks, yet much empirical work on multidirectional migration foregrounds recent labor flows or post–Cold War circulations. This chapter argues that the Khoja Ithnāʿasharī—a Shia Muslim trading community of Gujarati origin dispersed across East Africa, South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Euro-American diaspora—offer a historically deep case for theorizing multidirectionality as a durable structural condition rather than a contemporary anomaly. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, community archives, and institutional records across Dar es Salaam, Mumbai, Dubai, and London, the chapter traces how Khoja families simultaneously maintain property, educate children, conduct business, arrange marriages, and perform pilgrimage across multiple jurisdictions, producing layered "citizenship constellations" (Bauböck 2010) that no single node anchors as origin or destination. The chapter's central contribution is the concept of the *confessional corridor*—a religiously governed trans-territorial circuit sustained by sectarian institutional infrastructure including communal councils (*jamāʿat*), endowment trusts (*waqf*), standardized liturgical calendars, and centralized clerical authority emanating from Najaf and London. These non-state governance mechanisms regulate membership, arbitrate disputes, and redistribute resources across borders, functioning as a parallel architecture of mobility that both facilitates and disciplines multidirectional movement. The chapter concludes by reflecting on methodological implications, arguing that communities with formalized trans-territorial religious governance offer embedded, multi-sited archives that address the sampling and tracking challenges that constrain multidirectional migration research.

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Multidirectional Migration and Family Reconfiguration: Rethinking Matrifocality in Javanese Muslim Migrant Households

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This paper examines how multidirectional migration reshapes family organisation among Javanese Muslim migrant households in Indonesia. Moving beyond linear models of migration, it conceptualises migration as a layered process through which families navigate multiple socio-economic spaces across time and place. Migrants in this study did not follow a single trajectory: they departed, returned to Indonesia, and migrated again, sometimes to the same destination and in other cases to a different country. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted between July and September 2024 and follow-up interviews with the same eleven migrant households in 2026, the paper traces how shifting destinations, repeated departures and returns, and differently scaled mobility by wives and husbands reorganised care, authority, financial management, and kinship support. The findings identify three matrifocal arrangements: husband-centred care, kin-centred care, and flexible or shared care. These arrangements show that women's central economic and symbolic position does not produce a uniform reversal of gender roles. Instead, family relations are repeatedly reassembled through negotiations involving husbands, grandmothers, extended kin, and neighbours. The paper therefore proposes liquid matrifocality to describe the provisional, kin-supported, and configuration-dependent forms of mother-centred family organisation that emerge across multidirectional migration trajectories. By treating husbands' internal mobility and the availability of extended kin as analytical variables, the study advances a relational account of family reconfiguration in transnational Javanese Muslim households.

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Beef Noodles That Rock Asia: Itinerant Hui Restaurateurs from Hualong, Northwest China

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This paper examines the multidirectional migrations of Hui people (Sinophone Muslims) from northwest China as entangled with their polysemous ethnoreligious identities. On the one hand, the state frames the Hui—descendants of foreign Muslim merchants who came to imperial China—as an entrepreneurial people naturally gifted in commerce. State policies have encouraged northwestern Hui to 'go out of their mountainous hometowns' (zouchu dashan) to earn livelihoods elsewhere and, once successful, to 'come back and start businesses at home' (fanxiang chuangye). On the other hand, many Hui emphasise the literal meaning of their ethnonym: return. Some interpret this as a call to leave China for a Muslim-majority society, while others invoke it to explain their ultimate homecoming to northwest China after transnational sojourns. Animated by these overlapping ideologies of going out and coming back, Hui Muslim migrants from northwest China have established an estimated 60,000 halal beef noodle restaurants worldwide since China's Reform and Opening. They began in the 1980s in Xiamen, southeast China, a migration hub for Southeast Asian Muslim Chinese diasporas. Encouraged by the latter, some Hui entrepreneurs expanded into Indonesia and the Philippines in the 1990s, before returning to northwest China to found brands such as 'Beef Noodles That Rock Asia' (Zhenya Niuroumian). This paper draws on multi-sited fieldwork to trace the inter-Asian movements of Hui noodle-making sojourners. Their life geographies bring together internal and international, outward and return migrations; reintroduce China's northwest frontier into the well-studied southeast China–Southeast Asia interface; and illuminate Islamicate linkages across the inter-Asian landscape. More importantly, state mobilisation of Hui entrepreneurship and emic interpretations of Hui (lit. 'return') as a spatiotemporally loaded ethnoreligious identity, will enrich the academic lexicon of directionality in migration.

Pu Yang is an incoming PhD student in the Department of Geography at National University of Singapore. They hold an MPhil in Chinese Studies from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, an MSc in Social Anthropology with distinction from the London School of Economics, and a BA in Arabic from Shanghai International Studies University. Their research interests span mobility, ethnicity, Islam and gastropolitics, with particular attention to East and Southeast Asia. Their MPhil project investigated the nationwide proliferation of, and competition among, halal noodle restaurants across China since the Reform and Opening. Their PhD research examines how the transnational circulation of Chinese halal food under the Belt and Road Initiative reconfigures mobility, religion and geopolitics across China and Southeast Asia. They have presented their work at conferences organised by the Association for Asian Studies in Asia, the American Anthropological Association and the East Asian Anthropological Association.

When Faith Moves: Multidirectional Migration and the Circulation of Emotion and Religious Practices among Filipina Migrants in Singapore

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How does faith move across borders, and what else circulates with it? This paper examines the religious and emotional lives of Filipina migrant workers in Singapore and their family members in the Philippines, bringing faith-based transnationalism into conversation with scholarship on multidirectional migration. Drawing on online semi-structured interviews conducted between January and August 2024 with Singapore-based Filipino migrant workers and their family members, interviewed separately, it explores how religious practices, emotions, moral influence, and material resources circulate among transnational families.

The paper argues that faith is neither simply carried from an origin to a destination nor reproduced exclusively within church congregations. Rather, it is sustained through multidirectional circuits connecting migrants, families, friends, and church members. These circuits operate through invitations to worship services, family devotion, emotional support, accounts of moral transformation, emotional remittances, tithes, and digital communication. They also connect and remake physical spaces: church congregations in Singapore become sites of belonging and support, while homes and churches in the Philippines sustain religious practices and family ties. Yet circulation is uneven and contested, as family members may resist religious influence or interpret change differently. By shifting attention from the movements of people to the circulation of faith, care, emotions, and obligations between those who move and those who stay, the paper extends discussions of multidirectionality while distinguishing relational circulation from evidence of serial or onward migration.

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Transient Migration and Strategic Home-Building: Exploring Hong Kong Migrations

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Hong Kong (HK) has long been recognized as a city of migration flows; with both incoming and outgoing human flows. Since the 1950s, HK has been a main destination for mainland Chinese immigrants. Typical immigrants include poor, low-educated women marrying grassroot HK men. In the recent decade, HK has become the recruitment hub for elite Chinese migrants. With several professional and talent migration schemes in place, around 300,000 elite migrants and their families have already relocated to HK. However, many of these elite families from China may not consider HK a suitable home in the long run. After taking the advantages of work and education opportunities, many will either return to China or move to a third place. Contrary to these inflows are the hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers who left HK after the 2019 social protests and the promulgation of the 2020 National Security Law. A majority of these emigrants left through UK's humanitarian BNO scheme, while some moved to Canada through the lifeboat schemes. However, shifting migration policies and anti-migrant social environment have forced some to reconsider where home should be. How long do migration journeys last? In an age of hypermobility, do people consider migrating as settling or as sojourning – with open possibilities of moving further or moving back. This paper examines the multiple factors that make contemporary migration intrinsically transient and a strategy for multiple home-building.

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Multinational Migration of South Asians from the Gulf to Canada, Australia and New Zealand

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Migrants today are undertaking multiple and multidirectional migration as they respond to various opportunities and challenges as well as migration regimes and laws. Multinational migrants are one such group of international migrants who have moved across more than one overseas destination with significant time spent in each country. Through interviews with South Asian multinational migrants who have moved from the Gulf to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, we illustrate their multiple and multidirectional migration trajectories as they attempt to balance obligations related to families, careers and temporary and permanent residencies.

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries are typically characterised by temporary migration regimes that provide limited opportunities for long-term settlement or citizenship. In contrast, countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand offer structured pathways to permanent residency and naturalisation. Within this context, an increasing number of migrants in the GCC originating from South Asia, particularly those positioned at the higher end of the skill spectrum, pursue onward migration to these countries with pathways for permanent settlement. Some of these migrants engage in more complex and multidirectional mobility patterns that include returning to their home countries, or to the Gulf or onwards migration to other countries after obtaining citizenship in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This study examines these multinational and multidirectional migration trajectories in order to better understand migrants' motivations for onward migration, the decision-making processes that shape these moves, and migrants' comparative assessments of potential destinations. It also explores their labour market incorporation, experiences of identity and belonging, and the dynamics of re-migration and return.

We see the Gulf as an important node for multinational migration, especially for Asian migrants and present findings based on interviews with 45 South Asian migrants who have already migrated from the Gulf to Canada, Australia and New Zealand; those who are planning their migration; and those who have returned to the Gulf after residing there.

Richa Shivakoti is Research Lead on Migration Governance in the Global Migration Institute and Researcher with the Bridging Divides program at Toronto Metropolitan University. Her current research focuses on multinational migration to and from Canada and on Emigration from Canada. She also works on gendered migration policies and the impact of migration bans on migrant domestic workers from Asia and Africa. Previously, she has worked on issues related to the governance of labour migration within Asia, particularly between the labour-sending states of South Asia and South East Asia and the labour receiving states in the Middle East. She is Associate Editor for *Comparative Migration Studies* and on the advisory board for *Public Administration and Development* journal. At the Global Migration Institute, she co-organizes the Migration Winter School and serves as the managing editor for the working paper series.

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Living Multidirectional Migration: Transnational Families in China and their Membership Strategies

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This paper examines multidirectional migration as a temporally organised process through which mobility potential is actively maintained. It engages with debates on multidirectional migration in Asia by analysing how particular trajectories are produced and how particular pathways are sustained, kept open, and rendered reversible within transmigrant families over time. Drawing on qualitative research with 30 transmigrant families raising children in China, this paper captures the notion of 'membership strategy' to understand how the parents assemble legal statuses and multicultural competence, and cultivate multiple forms of belonging, for intensively cultivating to secure future multi-directional mobility possibilities. The analysis focuses on how these practices are organised, particularly through decisions around children's education, families' strategic 'memberships portfolio', and long-term mobility inspirations (Waters, 2005).

The findings show that multidirectional migration is sustained through ongoing temporal and emotional work (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). Families maintain complex 'citizenship constellations' across jurisdictions (Bauböck, 2010), combining passports, permanent residency, visa pathways, and sometimes even Hukou affiliations, while investing in children's education and fostering cultural familiarity and attachment to places. These practices are oriented toward preserving mobility potential rather than enabling immediate movement, allowing families to sustain parallel and reversible pathways across different locations, including mobility within Asia and possibilities of return or onward migration. Within this process, China, where this research was conducted, functions as a provisional and actively maintained anchoring site. Prolonging residence, educational investment, and affective attachment are strategically reproduced in order to stabilise the family's position while keeping future multidirections open.

This paper contributes to debates on the architecture of directionality by showing how multidirectional migration is prepared and sustained through the continuous maintenance of mobility potential within families (Baldassar & Merla, 2013; Ho, 2019). It demonstrates how migration pathways are selectively stabilised and reproduced through the alignment of legal statuses, affective attachments, and intergenerational planning under the constraints of state regimes.

Jin L. Li was Visiting Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Geography at University College London (UCL), prior to taking up a postdoctoral fellow position in the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at National University of Singapore. Her PhD research (UCL, 2025) examined international migration from economically developed countries to China, with a particular focus on family life, transnational education, city internationalisation, and mobility to/within Asia. Her project at ARI will investigate elite and high-net-worth migration to Singapore, exploring how privileged migrants navigate migration regimes, financial infrastructures, and international education as strategies of risk and opportunity amid global uncertainty. She has also led an arts-based public engagement project on migrant belonging in London, and has published widely on transnational migration, education and everyday life across Asian and UK contexts. Her broader research interests lie at the intersection of migration studies, cultural and economic geography, and comparative governance.

Multidirectionality, Entrepreneurial Experimentation, and Affective Infrastructures: Mobility of a Chinese Family across China, Vietnam, and Belarus

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This paper traces the migratory trajectories of a Chinese family across southwest China, Ho Chi Minh City, and Minsk, following their noodle enterprise and other small-scale entrepreneurial ventures. While these trajectories are undoubtedly shaped by shifting geopolitical dynamics—relaxed visa regimes, closer ties between China and Belt and Road Initiative countries, and business opportunities created by Russian-Ukraine war—we focus instead on how a family from a small town in southwest China mobilises these geopolitical openings, together with kinship ties, to realise flexible mobility and entrepreneurial experimentation. Their initiatives exemplify dynamic transnational connections from below: not simply a by-product of China's expansionist global strategies, but a channel for the ambitions and aspirations of ordinary businesspeople navigating a constrained domestic market amid China's economic downturn. We therefore read this multidirectional, reversible mobility as a set of tactics improvised in response to global geopolitical shifts and local market pressures. These strategies are sustained by mutual support, emotional labour, and a gendered division of labour across distance, all of which constitute the everyday affective infrastructures that have been largely overlooked in the literature on globalising China.

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