

## INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

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# MIGRATORY TRAJECTORIES: EVOLVING CAREERS ACROSS BORDERS AND TIME

**Tue/Wed, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2025**

**Waseda University, Tokyo**

The workshop is co-organized by

**Helena Hof** *University of Zurich /*

*Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen*

**Gracia Liu-Farrer** *Waseda University* & Marina Obukhova

**Aimi Muranaka** *University of Duisburg-Essen*

**Kikuko Nagayoshi** *ISS, University of Tokyo*

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**TOSHIBA**

Toshiba International Foundation

## Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2025

Room 501, Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University

### 9:00–9:15 Opening by organizers

### 9:15–10:45 Section 1: Gender and Skilled Migration in Asia

Discussant (hybrid): Hee Jung Choi *Jeonbuk National University*

#### **Temporal Spectrum and Gendered Aspirations: Rethinking Temporariness and Permanence among Chinese Single Skilled-labor Migrants in Singapore**

Anni Ni *National University of Singapore*

#### **Mobility and Agency of Taiwanese Skilled Migrant Women in China**

Yuling Song *National Changhua University of Education*

10:45–11:15 Break

### 11:15–12:45 Section 2: 'Careers' of Skilled Migrants in Asia

Discussant: Takeshi Miyai *National Institute of Population and Social Security Research*

#### **The Production of Migratory Careers: An Integrative Approach to Skilled Migration in Asia**

Helena Hof *University of Zurich*, Aimi Muranaka *University of Duisburg-Essen*,  
Justine Park *Inha University*

#### **Mismatch Between Organizational Career Development and Global Career Prospects: A Case Study of Highly Skilled Migrants in Traditional Japanese Firms**

Kaoru Sonoda *Keio University*

12:45–14:00 Lunch break

### 14:00–16:45 Section 3: Employment Practices of Skilled Migrants in Different Sectors

Discussant: Kumiko Kawashima *Rikkyo University*

#### **The Interplay of Immigration Controls and Employment Practices: The Precarity and Settlement Paradox of High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan**

Yen-Fen Tseng *National Taiwan University*

#### **Who Chooses a "Proximate Periphery"? : The Logic of Temporary Stays and Exit among South Korean Highly Skilled Migrants in Japan's IT Sector**

Namiko Matsushita *Suzuka University*

15:30–16:00 Break

#### **'Staggered' Social Mobility of Chinese Female Professionals in 'Non-Feminised' Sectors: A Comparative Study of Seoul and Tokyo**

Meiyung Meng *University College Cork* and Gracia Liu-Farrer *Waseda University*

### 16:45–17:30 Wrapping up and Concluding Remarks

## **Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2025**

Room *tba*, Waseda University, Waseda Campus

**10:00 Follow-up discussion on Special Issue, work on  
co-authored papers**

# **MIGRATORY TRAJECTORIES: EVOLVING CAREERS ACROSS BORDERS AND TIME**

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## **ABSTRACTS**

### **Temporal Spectrum and Gendered Aspirations: Rethinking Temporariness and Permanence among Chinese Single Skilled-labor Migrants in Singapore**

*Anni Ni* National University of Singapore

Temporariness and permanence represent two ends of a temporal spectrum in migration studies. While temporariness often implies precarity and heightened mobility, it can also create a state of temporal liminality—an ambiguous period where migrants detach from the chrononormative expectations tied to specific geographic localities. To unpack these dynamics, this paper draws on ethnographic research conducted between March 2023 and July 2025, including life-story interviews with 70 legally single Chinese skilled-labor migrants in Singapore (46 female, 24 male), four focus groups, and 10-months of weekly participant observations. Findings reveal a prevalent preference for Permanent Residency (PR), which requires renewal every five years, over citizenship. This choice reflects migrants' aspirations to balance stability with flexibility, allowing an exploration of how the temporal spectrum engages in their life goals and how these dynamics operate differently across gender. This research presents two primary arguments. First, these Chinese legally single skilled migrants aspire to stability without sacrificing flexibility. This reflects a strong, individualistic motivation to redefine temporality by challenging both the lineal progression of visa statuses and normative life trajectories. Second, gender significantly shapes attitudes toward the PR-to-citizenship transition. Female migrants exhibit a disproportionately higher interest in the permanency offered by citizenship compared to their male counterparts. This gendered divergence stems from differing experiences with the normative pressure of adulthood in their home country which translates into divergent strategies in their residing countries. While many male migrants remain bound by these expectations, female migrants often reconstruct their life timelines, creating alternative temporalities that defy convention.

## **Mobility and Agency of Taiwanese Skilled Migrant Women in China**

*Yuling Song* *National Changhua University of Education*

Over the past decade, China has become a major destination for Taiwanese skilled professionals seeking overseas employment. Among them, the number of skilled migrant women (SMW) has gradually increased. These women migrate not only in pursuit of career opportunities, but also due to familial roles and emotional considerations, marking a distinct contrast to the migration experiences of their male counterparts. Notably, the number of Taiwanese skilled migrant women significantly declined after the outbreak of COVID-19 and rebounded later than men, suggesting that SMWs are more vulnerable to risk-laden environments. However, existing studies have largely overlooked the role of female skilled migrants, often adopting the household as the unit of analysis and rendering women invisible as secondary actors. In response, this study adopts a power-geometry perspective to examine what drives the transnational mobility of Taiwanese skilled migrant women—and how such mobility is enacted. It investigates how variations in marital status and socioeconomic class shape the forms of agency that SMWs exercise in their work and lives in China, and how China's spatial characteristics—particularly in the workplace—affect their agency. The study explores how gender, intersecting with multiple layers of social construction and spatial configuration, shapes the mobility and agency of Taiwanese female skilled migrants. Empirically, this research draws on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 60 Taiwanese skilled migrants (31 women, 29 men), conducted in 2018 and 2022 through snowball sampling. All respondents either worked in China or had returned to Taiwan after working there. Focusing on the women as the primary subjects of analysis, thematic analysis was employed to categorize their experiences by spatial context, marital status, and class position, with male participants serving as comparative reference. The findings reveal that spatial inequalities, marital dynamics, and economic class significantly shape the forms of agency available to women. Through their transnational movements across Taiwan and China, these women navigate a structurally unequal occupational environment. Married, middle-income women emphasize mobile subjectivity and intra-family negotiation; unmarried women critique cultural dissonance while maintaining affective ties to Taiwan. High-income women challenge structural limits through negotiation, while lower-income women mobilize social and youth capital to overcome disadvantage. By employing diverse strategies to negotiate spatial asymmetries between Taiwan and China—and by responding swiftly to crises such as the pandemic—these women reveal complex forms of agency manifested in both mobility and immobility.

## **The Production of Migratory Careers: An Integrative Approach to Skilled Migration in Asia**

*Helena Hof* University of Zurich, *Aimi Muranaka* University of Duisburg-Essen,  
*Justine Park* Inha University

This paper adopts the concept of the migratory career to examine how Asian highly educated migrants navigate status transitions as foreigners in the restrictive Asian migration regimes of Japan, South Korea and Singapore. Our arguments are based on a mixed-methods approach, drawing from data of 89 interviewees and a survey with 900 highly educated migrant respondents in these countries. Findings reveal that the three economically developed societies appeal by a well-established migration infrastructure upon migration and by the professional, business, educational, and networking opportunities they offer to Asian highly educated migrants once arrived. Despite the professional challenges and the limitations to obtaining a permanent settlement status, our findings show that highly educated migrants in these three countries tend to prolong their stays, sometimes comfortable with the idea of or determined to stay(ing) permanently. Staying on, they acquire relevant knowledge, networks and 'skills', and their priority in life shifts with their life stage. The concept of the migratory career unravels how migrants' lives unfold across life events and how individuals act upon the different conditions and constraints emerged from status changes in their migratory careers. This approach allows us to present the dynamic interplay between the socially constructed production and recognition of skills and migrants' agency in interpreting and directing their migratory lives, including professional development and the multi-level structures of the migration regimes, labor market, academic institutions, neighborhood communities, and schools in which they participate. The analysis foregrounds how goals shift in line with changing life priorities and points towards expected future professional and social opportunities as reasons to invest in staying among those who are considered 'skilled'.

## **Mismatch Between Organizational Career Development and Global Career Prospects: A Case Study of Highly Skilled Migrants in Traditional Japanese Firms**

*Kaoru Sonoda* Keio University

This paper examines the intersection of organizational career development and individual career prospects focusing on the employment relationship between highly skilled immigrants and the traditional Japanese firms in Japan. It explores how the misalignment between these two actors shapes the career rationales and strategies of highly skilled migrants in Japan. Japan adopts a selective approach to admitting highly skilled talents. However, the complexities and inconsistencies of its immigration and employment policies mean that assessments of migrant expertise often rely on vague, socially constructed criteria. While official discourse emphasizes individual skills and expertise, in practice, the prestige of the employing organization often

serves as the de facto validation of a migrant's competence. This dynamic is further shaped by the institutional features of Japanese corporate society, particularly in traditional large firms, where career development is embedded in long-term, organizationally driven skill formation. Within a system where evaluation is heavily influenced by organizational affiliation, highly skilled migrants may find their global career prospects unexpectedly constrained by the internal career structures of their organizations. In this context, the study examines how highly skilled immigrants working in Japanese companies respond to the mismatch between their own career prospects and the career development paths offered by their employers. Drawing on qualitative data, the paper analyzes interviews with 31 highly skilled migrants and human resources personnel in 15 Japanese companies which employ them. Focusing primarily on large manufacturing firms—where traditional Japanese employment practices are most deeply embedded—and using SMEs or selected industries as comparative cases, the analysis highlights the concerns of highly skilled immigrants regarding their work environments and geographic locations of residence. Within the Japanese employment system, characterized by the absence of clearly defined job descriptions, individual workers often have limited agency in shaping their own career path. Nevertheless, many highly skilled immigrants initially place high value on their employment relationships, particularly when hired by well-known firms, anticipating that this association will enhance their marketability in the global labor market. Over time, however, as their career trajectories narrow, these individuals are compelled to reassess their value in the global market relative to the limited career advancement opportunities available to them domestically. The more globally prestigious the employing Japanese firm is, the longer it takes for this cognitive dissonance to surface. Yet in many cases, by the time such tensions become apparent, the employment relationship has already been expected to be long-term or semi-permanent. At this stage, factors such as the desirability of settling in a particular location—especially in relation to family life—often begin to outweigh considerations of global value in labor market. This study suggests that these evolving conflicts and recalibrations over time are crucial to understanding the migratory trajectories and long-term career decisions of highly skilled immigrants.

### **The Interplay of Immigration Controls and Employment Practices: The Precarity and Settlement Paradox of High-Skilled Migrants in Taiwan**

*Yen-Fen Tseng* National Taiwan University

Recent studies on high-skilled migration have shown that despite increasingly open immigration policies, many migrants continue to face precarity akin to that experienced by low-skilled workers—including barriers to long-term integration, even when legal pathways to residency or citizenship exist for them. In response to population decline, Taiwan has introduced more accessible immigration routes, particularly targeting foreign graduates of its universities. This study examines the employment experiences and settlement prospects of these emerging high-

skilled migrants, drawing on thirty-six semi-structured interviews. It explores how immigration controls intersect with employment practices to shape migrant trajectories and conditions of precarity. Findings reveal that restrictive permit regulations and exploitative labor practices diminish migrants' bargaining power and compel them to accept unfavorable conditions, such as suppressed wages. These dynamics significantly undermine both their ability and willingness to settle. The challenges are especially pronounced for migrants in non-STEM fields, who often struggle to meet the high-income threshold for permanent residency and remain in prolonged temporary status. In addition, the study identifies uneven impacts across migrant groups: women, individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those from less developed countries face heightened precarity. Their extended temporariness reflects not only legal and economic barriers but also deeper structural inequities embedded in Taiwan's immigration regime and labor system.

### **Who Chooses a “Proximate Periphery”? : The Logic of Temporary Stays and Exit among South Korean Highly Skilled Migrants in Japan's IT Sector**

*Namiko Matsushita Suzuka University*

This paper examines the paradoxical experience of South Korean high-skilled IT professionals in Japan, who, despite benefiting from favorable immigration policies, often remain in peripheral positions within the labor market and leave the country after a short period. While Japan's recent policy reforms—such as the Highly Skilled Professional visa and relaxed requirements for permanent residency—nominally promote long-term settlement and integration, many foreign professionals do not stay.

This is particularly notable among migrants from geographically and culturally proximate countries such as South Korea, who are assumed to be easily integrable yet frequently exit Japan's labor market after a few years.

This paper proposes the concept of a Proximate Periphery to describe the structural condition in which migrants are institutionally welcomed but practically marginalized. In Japan's IT industry, the multilayered subcontracting system and client-centered communication norms prevent foreign workers from accessing core roles, despite their technical competence and formal recognition. The analysis draws attention to the disjuncture between an ostensibly open system and the constrained realities of workplace participation.

By situating the case of Korean IT professionals within the broader context of non-settlement regimes in Asia, this study reframes short-term migration not as failure or mismatch, but as an outcome of intersecting institutional, cultural, and organizational logics. The paper contributes to theorizing how spatial proximity, formal inclusion, and structural exclusion coexist in high-skilled migration systems, particularly within ostensibly open yet implicitly restrictive societies like Japan.



## **'Staggered' Social Mobility of Chinese Female Professionals in 'Non-Feminised' Sectors: A Comparative Study of Seoul and Tokyo**

*Meiyung Meng* University College Cork *and* *Gracia Liu-Farrer* Waseda University

International migration entails not only geographic relocation but also shifts in social class positioning. Existing research shows that highly skilled women from the Global South frequently experience downward social mobility, shifting from professional positions to feminised occupations, including care work, domestic service, and a range of service sectors. Yet this scholarly attention has focused primarily on westward migration, leaving eastward movements comparatively understudied. Drawing on 34 biographical narrative interviews with Chinese women aged 25–40 now pursuing careers outside these feminised niches in Seoul and Tokyo, this paper examines how social class positioning is negotiated. This paper identifies the 'staggered' social class trajectories: an initial downward followed by subsequent upward rebounds in economic mobility, while their social and cultural capital continues to erode in both the sending and receiving societies. Structural conditions shape their subjective class positioning in distinct ways. In both Japan and Korea, gendered labour market segmentation and everyday racialisation constrain social and cultural integration; yet Korea's stratified visa regimes further erode social and cultural capital of non-Korean Chinese women. Yet these women evaluate their social position, for instance viewing regional migration through a comparative lens, by emphasising different quality of life aspects within the family unit, and by challenging dominant meanings associated with class hierarchies. The paper foregrounds the intersection of class and gender in female migrants' experiences and argues that subjective class narratives in eastward skilled migration offer a valuable lens for capturing the multifaceted nature of social positioning.



## Map around Waseda Campus, Waseda University



### By BUS

Bound for Sodai-Seimon: 10 min.

from **A** Takadanobaba St. (JR Yamanote Line or Seibu Shinjuku Line), 3 min. walk from **E** Nishi-Waseda bus stop

Bound for Kudanshita or Ueno-Koen: 12 min.

from **B** **C** Takadanobaba St. (JR Yamanote Line or Seibu Shinjuku Line), 1 min. walk from **D** Kansen'en Koen-Mae bus stop

### By SUBWAY

10 min. walk from Exit 3b or 2 of Waseda St. (Tokyo Metro Tozai Line)

15 min. walk from Exit 3b or 2 of Nishi-Waseda St. (Tokyo Metro Fukutoshin Line)

### By STREETCAR

5 min. walk from Waseda St. (Toden Arakawa Line)



**Waseda University**  
**Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies**

早稲田大学大学院アジア太平洋研究科

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies Waseda University

TEL: +81-3-5286-3877 FAX: +81-3-5272-4533

Nishi-Waseda Bldg. 7F, 1-21-1 Nishi-Waseda, Shinjuku-ku, TOKYO  
169-0051 JAPAN