RECALIBRATING 'SKILL' IN CHANGING IMMIGRATION REGIMES

Skilled Migrants and the Nature of Work in Asia

16–17 JANUARY 2025

HYBRID FORMAT

NUS AS8 04-04 & Online via Zoom

For more information, visit https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/recalibrating-skill/

This workshop is jointly organized by the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore and the Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA) project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany (BMBF).

The meaning of 'skilled' or 'white-collar' work, that is, work that requires a certain set of expertise and educational credentials, has changed in the last decade. In tandem, so has the meaning attached to 'skilled migration', namely, knowledge-intensive work carried out by professionals outside of their home countries. After a peak in global human mobility in the 2010s due to a proliferation of budget airlines and a surge in bilateral and multilateral agreements that cover and ease international labour mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006), the late 2010s brought about unprecedented changes. Digitalization is the most prominent to name, facilitating international business and the communication of globally dispersed teams. Other developments include first the rise, and then the fall, of coding professions, which used to represent a highly-demanded skill that triggered large migration flows from countries where IT skills were trained but which have most recently shifted to become skills at risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence.

Overall, structural shifts rooted in changing migration policies, the 'tech wreck' laying off IT personnel around the world, and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to reconfiguring skilled labour mobility. While some skilled workers were suddenly able to work remotely from home (or even anywhere they prefer), others had to remain in areas of rising geopolitical tensions or risk of infection, denied the freedom to move or work from safe spaces (Zhang and Wang 2023). These countervailing developments, added to labour shortages and demographic change resulting from rapid ageing, brought to light which skills are 'essential' and in short supply, which can be outsourced to other countries, and which to machines (Horii and Sakurai 2020). These shifts in work styles and labour market demands have raised the question who can be accorded the label 'skilled workers' and who can (soon) be denied of it.

In this light, this workshop examines the changing working environment skilled migrants encounter in contemporary Asia. The continent is the largest producer of varied 'skilled' professions such as IT and nursing, with intraregional migration flows almost doubling between 1990 and 2020 (IOM 2024). At the same time, Asia is also known for less liberal migration regimes than those in Western countries (Boucher and Gest 2018). Given labour shortages at almost all skill levels in most industrialized Asian economies, the region provides an important context to observe new meanings of 'skill', changing attitudes towards skilled immigrants, and resulting reconfigurations of immigration policy. While foregrounding the sphere of work, we acknowledge that even within skilled migrants' spatial and life trajectories, 'work' is not only a means to secure a visa and to earn financial income, but also a way to pursue upward socio-economic mobility, to build a life (and sometimes family) in the host society, and to attain life satisfaction (Yeoh and Huang 2011). However, the extant scholarship has yet to give full attention to the interplay between the redefinition of skill, the changing nature of work skilled migrants encounter, and their perception of and responses to the way this affects their social positioning, life aspirations, and family dynamics. Subjective interpretations of a 'successful' migration may neither depend on a career in an occupation or industry that is labelled skilled; nor do migrants necessarily perceive their social positioning in line with that stipulated by visa categories and state policy (Boese et al. 2022).

As such, this workshop examines the intersections between the new structural conditions that shape work and life in contemporary Asia and skilled migrants' subjectivities. On a conceptual level, it seeks to clarify how changing ways of work and ensuing redefinitions of skills affect skilled migrants' self-positioning and family strategy in a landscape of both tightening and emerging immigration regimes in Asia. Potential workshop participants are encouraged to submit original research papers that address the following areas of interest, which include but are not limited to:

- How have new working styles and changes in labour market demands recalibrated 'skill' categorisations? How do skilled migrants, including digital nomads and remote workers, experience changes and continuity in the way their skills are assessed, and how do they manoeuvre their resultant new positioning – including the impact on their legal status, family life, migration trajectories, and more – on a hierarchy of skills?
- How do new and emerging narratives surrounding digital work and the use of AI influence migrants' expectations and aspirations of long-term opportunities in the host society, self-actualization, and skill development?
- To what extent do skilled migrants carve out professional careers and migratory trajectories deviating from state-determined 'skill' trajectories, as their own qualifications, family roles and life stage no longer fit the (updated) 'ideal' path?
- What kind of soft skills, creativity, or psychological capital are valued in the new world of work and facilitate the realization of migratory projects, allowing migrants to perceive themselves as having autonomy and competence over their lives?

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

Dr Helena HOF
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and University of Zurich

Dr Aimi MURANAKA
University of Duisburg-Essen

Dr Ruth ACHENBACH
Goethe University Frankfurt

Dr Yang WANG
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Prof Brenda S.A. YEOH
Asia Research Institute & Department of Geography, National University of Singapore

PROGRAMME AT-A-GLANCE

DATE	TIME (SINGAPORE TIME)	SESSION
16 January 2025 (Thursday)	10:30 – 11:00	Welcome Remarks
	11:00 – 12:30	Panel 1 – Social and Professional Integration
	13:30 – 15:00	Panel 2 – Precarity and Opportunity in Skill Hierarchies
	15:30 – 17:00	Panel 3 – (Geo)Politics and Migration Corridors
17 January 2025 (Friday)	10:30 – 12:00	Panel 4 – Family and Migratory Projects
	13:00 – 14:30	Panel 5 – Professional Identities and Career Strategies
	15:00 – 16:00	Panel 6 – Gender and Career Pathways
	16:00 – 16:30	Closing Remarks

16 JANUARY 2025 • THURSDAY

10:30 – 11:00	**WELCOME REMARKS**
	HELENA HOF, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and University of Zurich **AIMI MURANAKA**, University of Duisburg-Essen **RUTH ACHENBACH**, Goethe University Frankfurt **YANG WANG**, National University of Singapore **BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore
11:00 – 12:30	**PANEL 1 • SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION**
Chairperson	**YANG WANG**, National University of Singapore
11:00	We Were Just People Who Write Codes: The Production of Skilled Entrepreneurs in East Asian Migration Regimes **HELENA HOF**, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and University of Zurich
11:20	How New Workplace Arrangements Shape the Social Integration of High Skilled Immigrants **ERIC FONG**, University of Hong Kong **YUYAO LIU**, University of Hong Kong
11:40	'Good *Wasta* Can Fetch You Office Jobs': Malayali Skilled Migrants in the Persian Gulf **MUFSIN PUTHAN PURAYIL**, O.P. Jindal Global University
12:00	Questions & Answers
12:30 – 13:30	**LUNCH**
13:30 – 15:00	**PANEL 2 • PRECARITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN SKILL HIERARCHIES**
Chairperson	**THEODORA LAM**, National University of Singapore
13:30	Balancing Security and Self-Actualization: Career Changes of Skilled Chinese Migrants in Singapore's Changing Immigration Regime **RUTH ACHENBACH**, Goethe University Frankfurt
13:50	Precarious while Skilled: Creative Migration Labour in Singapore **JUNJIA YE**, Nanyang Technological University
14:10	Navigating Visa Hierarchies in a Calibrated Migration-Citizenship Regime: Transnational Strategies and Emerging Precarity of Chinese Skilled Migrants in Singapore **YANG WANG**, National University of Singapore **BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore
14:30	Questions & Answers
15:00 – 15:30	**AFTERNOON TEA**
15:30 – 17:00	**PANEL 3 • (GEO)POLITICS AND MIGRATION CORRIDORS**
Chairperson	**AIMI MURANAKA**, University of Duisburg-Essen
15:30 *Online*	Go to the Bustling South: Aspirations, Capabilities, and Asian Emigration Regimes in Korean Migration to Vietnam **MY HANG THI BUI**, Leiden University **KWON HEO**, University of California – Los Angeles
15:50	Caught in the Crossfire: How US-China Geopolitics Shape Chinese Professionals' Transnational Mobility in the Global Biopharmaceutical Industry **SHUNAN YOU**, Northeastern University
16:10 *Online*	Persuasion and Prejudice: Are South Korean Attitudes toward Immigration Open to Change? **STEVEN DENNEY**, Leiden University
16:30	Questions & Answers
17:00	**END OF DAY 1**
17:00 – 19:30	**WORKSHOP DINNER** (For Presenters, Chairpersons and Organisers Only)

17 JANUARY 2025 • FRIDAY

10:30 – 12:00	**PANEL 4 • FAMILY AND MIGRATORY PROJECTS**
Chairperson	**RUTH ACHENBACH**, Goethe University Frankfurt
10:30 *Online*	In Search of Silver Linings: The COVID-19 and its Impact on Indian Skilled Migrants in Japan **MEGHA WADHWA**, Free University of Berlin
10:50	Making of Remote Work among Vietnamese IT Professionals in Japan in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Time **AIMI MURANAKA**, University of Duisburg-Essen
11:10	Between Career and Care: Korean Expatriate Families in the UAE **HEE EUN KWON**, The University of Tokyo
11:30	Questions & Answers
12:00 – 13:00	**LUNCH**
13:00 – 14:30	**PANEL 5 • PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES AND CAREER STRATEGIES**
Chairperson	**HELENA HOF**, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and University of Zurich
13:00 *Online*	Revisiting Psychological Capital and Psychological Safety: A Study of Asian-Born Highly Skilled Migrants in Japan and Britain **POLINA IVANOVA**, University of Bremen
13:20	Practices in Field Transitions and Capital Conversion: Social Anchoring of Asian Skilled Migrants with Korean Degrees in the Korean Labour Market **JOOHYUN JUSTINE PARK**, Inha University
13:40	Navigating Evolving Professional Identities and Care Landscapes: Female Keralite Ayurveda Therapists and their (Skilled) Labour Mobilities to Malaysia **NIRMALA ARATH PRABHAKAR**, Monash University Malaysia
14:00	Questions & Answers
14:30 – 15:00	**AFTERNOON TEA**
15:00 – 16:00	**PANEL 6 • GENDER AND CAREER PATHWAYS**
Chairperson	**BERNICE LOH**, National University of Singapore
15:00	Filipino Nurse Migration, a Stratified Hierarchy of Skills and the Construction of "Ideal" Nurse Migrants in Singapore **EXEQUIEL CABANDA**, National University of Singapore **BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore **KRISTEL ACEDERA**, National University of Singapore **MARGARET WALTON-ROBERTS**, Wilfrid Laurier University
15:20	Scaling Up or Down: Evaluating the New Career Trajectories of Female Vietnamese Ex-Educators in Singapore **ROBIN MING FENG CHEE**, Singapore Management University
15:40	Questions & Answers
16:00 – 16:30	**CLOSING REMARKS**
	HELENA HOF, University of Zurich **AIMI MURANAKA**, University of Duisburg-Essen **RUTH ACHENBACH**, Goethe University Frankfurt **YANG WANG**, National University of Singapore **BRENDA S.A. YEOH**, National University of Singapore
16:30	**END OF WORKSHOP**

We Were Just People Who Write Codes:
The Production of Skilled Entrepreneurs in East Asian Migration Regimes

Helena HOF

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This article argues that the promise of starting a knowledge-intensive business abroad can drive migration, and how long-term migrants use transnational entrepreneurship to avoid deskilling or mundane jobs global business practices in the light of changing migration regimes and the proliferation of digital work. As migration scholarship has demonstrated migrants face barriers when trying to access the host country labour market. One strategy to avoid unemployment or underemployment long used to be ethnic entrepreneurship, which operates in a highly context-specific niche economy and is often established for and sustained by an ethnic migrant community. This paper shifts the focus to highly-educated foreigners in Singapore and Japan who, often after paid employment in either country, found their startups in the knowledge-intensive sector such as IT or business consulting. Building on qualitative fieldwork among 71 migrants in the Singaporean and Japanese startup sectors the paper reveals how transnational entrepreneurship is undergirded by the fetishized buzz worlds of innovation and skills, which find their climax in the aspiring startup ecosystems that have emerged around the globe and of which Singapore and Tokyo are two of the East Asian hopefuls to name. The transnational entrepreneurship these institutions promote promises professional freedom from corporates, autonomy over one's daily work, location independency, and monetary success. Using the concepts of risks and hope to understand the formation of the entrepreneurial subject in neoliberal market economies the article contends that 'sponsored' startup entrepreneurship is a new 'career path' in skilled migration regimes. It blossoms through a fetish of risk and self-enterprising in neoliberal labour markets, in which a growing number of knowledge-workers embrace indeterminacy and a narrative of self-reliance, mobility, and flexibility in the hope to sustain themselves in the country of their choice, or escape underemployment or a mundane everyday life through migration.

Helena Hof is Senior Research and Teaching Fellow in Social Science of Japan at the University of Zurich and Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity as part of the German-government funded collaborative research project "Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia" (QuaMaFA). Her work lies at the nexus of mobility studies, the sociology of work, skilled migration, gender, ethnicity and race, and global cities and entrepreneurship. Helena holds a guest researcher affiliation with Waseda's Institute of Asian Migrations in Tokyo, where she conducted her graduate training. Her work has been published widely and include, among others, 'Migratory Class-Making in Global Asian Cities: The European Mobile Middle Negotiating Ambivalent Privilege in Tokyo, Singapore, and Dubai (with Jaafar Alloul, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies)* and the book *The-EU-Migrant-Generation-in-Asia (Bristol University Press).*

How New Workplace Arrangements Shape the Social Integration of High Skilled Immigrants

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With the advancement of technology and the implementation of work-from-home policies during COVID-19, the traditional workspace arrangement has shifted drastically to remote working in the last few years. According to Forbes' estimates, approximately one-fifth of the workforce in the United States now embraces remote work, such as working from home or without a fixed place of work in 2024. Many jobs, particularly those that require high skills or education, have adopted this working arrangement. While these trends are well-documented and rapidly growing, there have been few studies attempting to understand how such arrangements impact the social integration of immigrants.

Immigrants may miss out on opportunities to interact with colleagues and clients from diverse backgrounds, develop stable social connections, and gain insights into the host society if they are not working in a physical office with other colleagues. However, without a fixed place of work could potentially expand their networks and increase the chances of meeting people from diverse backgrounds. Drawing from the 2021 Hong Kong census, a major financial hub in East Asia that has attracted highly educated immigrants over the years, we examine how working from home and without a fixed place of work affect the integration patterns of migrants in Hong Kong, particularly in terms of acquiring the local language, Cantonese. Through this study in Hong Kong, we aim to shed light on the situation in East Asia, where the second and third largest economies are located.

Eric Fong is the Chair Professor of Sociology, Director of the Research Hub of Population Studies, and the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Hong Kong. Fong has been widely published in the area of immigration and is currently completing a book on migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Yuyao Liu is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong.

'Good *Wasta* Can Fetch You Office Jobs':
Malayali Skilled Migrants in the Persian Gulf

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The Persian Gulf's integration into global markets in recent decades has attracted tremendous transnational capital into the region. It has opened up new economic opportunities in sectors such as IT, engineering, banking and financial services that require a skilled workforce. The Southern Indian state of Kerala became one of the early regions to respond to this demand, as, starting from the 2000s, a large number of Malayali skilled workers began migrating to the Persian Gulf. This demand for 'Gulf office jobs' also coincided with the sudden popularity of technical and managerial courses in India starting from the late 1990s. While Gulf studies and Indian mobility scholarship have written extensively about low-skilled migrants, there is a lack of research on the mobility experiences of skilled professional workers.

This ethnographic study investigates the job search and mobility strategies of Malayali skilled migrants in the Persian Gulf. In particular, the study focuses on how Malayalis have carved out a niche in the highly competitive skilled labour market of the Gulf by internalising and strategically investing in the Arab cultural practice of *wasta* (securing favours through social connections). The paper focuses on the *wasta*-building strategies of skilled Malayali migrants. Apart from providing the necessary informational and infrastructural capital, it is widely known among the Malayalis that the right *wasta* can land a migrant in a skilled Gulf job. However, I argue that contrary to the emancipatory potential often attached to *wasta*-based networks by migrants, the relationship between employer (*kafeel*) and migrant (*makful*) is built on racial and ethnic differences that limit migrants, despite possessing the expertise and educational credentials, into the lower echelons of the skilled jobs with low wages, less job security, and limited upward mobility opportunities. The findings, which also include in-depth interviews with skilled Gulf migrants in different stages of their careers, suggest that the reciprocal nature of *wasta* relations, operating in a racially hierarchized labour market of the Gulf, normalises precarisation and subjectivation among skilled migrants.

Mufsin Puthan Purayil is Assistant Professor at the Jindal Global Business School, O.P. Jindal Global University, India. He holds a PhD in the area of Public Policy and Management from the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, India and an M.Phil degree in the area of Planning and Development from IIT Bombay, India. Additionally, he has qualified for the UGC Junior Research Fellowship and was a DAAD PhD Exchange Fellow (2019-2020) at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany. Mufsin's work has been published in various journals, including *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India, Global Change, Peace & Security*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, *Sociological Bulletin*, and *Decision*. His research interests include labour migration, social networks, immigrant entrepreneurship and migration policy in contemporary India and the Persian Gulf.

Balancing Security and Self-Actualization:
Career Changes of Skilled Chinese Migrants in
Singapore's Changing Immigration Regime

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Many governments in industrialized countries attempt to implement targeted migration policies, meaning that migrants should only enter in limited numbers into sectors with dire labor shortages. Yet, it is a well-described phenomenon in migration studies that there is often a mismatch between migrants' skills and labor market demands, resulting in migrants' deskilling in the host country. Singapore is one country that tightly regulates migration, be it through past restrictions into which study programs foreign students can enter or recently by raising the income threshold for employment passes and reducing the number of migrants accepted for permanent residency (PR).

Despite these efforts for targeted immigration into specific sectors, migrants may develop the wish change careers over their migratory trajectories. Unlike nationals of the host country, they will usually (have to) wait for PR to secure their legal status before taking a risk in their careers and making a switch.

This paper analyzes the career aspirations of 17 migrants in Singapore who entered through various immigration schemes (e.g., self-financed or government-sponsored students on SM1–3). The paper investigates how immigration policies are decisive for the content and timing of career decisions, and traces how migrants carve out a sense of autonomy in their career trajectories over time. It takes into consideration migrants' shifting priorities over the life course, and adopts an intersectional lens in the analysis of migrants' decision-making processes.

Ruth Achenbach is Leader of and Principal Investigator (PI) in the BMBF-funded research project Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA) at the Interdisciplinary Center for East Asian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. The project analyzes intra-Asian mobility trajectories of skilled migrants. She is also PI of the EU-funded project AspirE – Decision Making of Aspiring (Re)migrants to/within the EU: The Case of Labour Market-Leading Migrations from Asia at the same institution, focusing on Japanese migrants in Germany. Her work focuses on the migration of Chinese students and professionals in East and Southeast Asia, Japanese migration to Germany, migrants' locational decision-making processes and Japanese development cooperation.

Precarious while Skilled:
Creative Migration Labour in Singapore

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The language of skill has been very attractive to policy makers when it comes to admitting – or, indeed, denying – immigrants. The borders of migration are therefore being reinforced through policy, using the language of skill. What constitutes as skill is also not static. Rather, it changes along with recalibrations of labour and migration regimes. The change of what skill means is a part of the changing nature of work, through conditions produced by neoliberal changes to labour markets and migration regimes. This paper addresses the institutionalized uncertainty (Anderson, 2013) – precarity – that is produced through changes in the definition of skill among highly trained migrant creative workers in Singapore.

Through qualitative interviews with migrant animators, illustrators, local studios and senior educators at art institutions in Singapore, I highlight how the skill is part of the changing labour regime that forms the precarity that highly trained migrants have to navigate. Skill is not a neutral sorting mechanism. The language of skilled work, instead, neutralizes the politics of skill even as it rationalizes precarity. Furthermore, there is a political productivity to this shifting nature of skill. Rather than skill being in a linear relationship with job certainty, the redefinition of skill produces the precarious migrant worker subjectivity.

Junjia Ye is Associate Professor in Geography at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Her research and teaching interests lie at the intersections of migration studies, cultural diversity, and the political-economic development of urban Southeast Asia. One of her current projects investigates the intersection of precarious creative labour and migration. Her work has been published in *Progress in Human Geography, Antipode, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Annals of the American Association of Geographers* and *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.*

Navigating Visa Hierarchies in a Calibrated Migration-Citizenship Regime: Transnational Strategies and Emerging Precarity of Chinese Skilled Migrants in Singapore

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In recent decades, Singapore's migration-citizenship regime has undergone careful calibration in balancing, on the one hand, the escalating demand for skilled migrant labour to fuel a global city, and, on the other hand, the pressing need to protect citizen access to a competitive labour force in the nation-state. Central to the regime, the Employment Pass (EP) – a high-tier work visa symbolising Singapore's recognition of a migrant's 'skilled' status – has undergone progressively tightened eligibility criteria over the past decade, culminating in the introduction of a 2022 point-based system with higher salary thresholds and stricter workforce complementarity assessments. Concurrently, pathways to permanent residency (PR) and citizenship have become increasingly opaque, characterised by unpredictable timelines and evaluations contingent upon perceived contributions and serviceability to the nation. As a consequence, many migrants once recognised as 'skilled' now face the erosion of their status and privileges, contending with challenging skill conversion, disrupted career and life trajectories, and the spectre of downward social mobility. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 40 Chinese skilled migrants in Singapore, this paper examines the emerging forms of precarity and differentiation experienced by skilled migrants amid significant shifts in Singapore's migration-citizenship regime. Engaging critically with literature on the temporality of migration, we employ the concepts of temporal economies (Meeus, 2020) and temporal dispossession (Sutherland, 2020) to explore the dynamic interplay between macro- and micro-temporalities in migrants' lives. This allows us to investigate how the temporal and spatial experiences of migrant professionals are shaped by Singapore's evolving skill regimes.

The paper makes three arguments. First, the micro-temporalities of skilled migrants' career and life trajectories are increasingly disrupted by the macro-temporalities of Singapore's ever-tightening visa and citizenship systems, forcing many to confront growing social and legal precarity. Employment Pass holders find themselves ensnared in a 'vicious circle of permanent temporariness', struggling to secure stable employment as temporary sojourners, while their un/underemployment further erodes their prospects of acquiring permanent residency (PR), prolonging – and in some cases solidifying – their temporary status and career immobility. Even permanent residents are not exempt from emerging precarity, as their eligibility for full citizenship is increasingly subjected to reassessments of their skills and perceived serviceability to the nation. Second, a new skill regime has emerged in Singapore, where legal statuses – whether EP, PR, or citizenship – are increasingly regarded as privileges reserved for skilled migrants with 'higher-end' skills and 'desirable' profiles. This recalibration of value within the evolving framework of skilled migration governance has introduced new forms of differentiation within the broader category of 'skilled migrants', leaving those at the 'lower' end of the skill hierarchy to grapple with significant challenges in translating their skills into viable career opportunities or meaningful social mobility. Third, in negotiating their career and migratory trajectories under rapidly changing conditions, Chinese skilled migrants actively exercise agency, crafting diverse strategies to renegotiate favourable micro-temporalities of their professional and life trajectories. Leveraging transnational capital – such as language skills, networks, and multicultural knowledge – they navigate and adapt to the macro-temporalities imposed by a tightened regime, while also forging alternative migration pathways.

Yang Wang is Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Her research interests intersect migration, family dynamics, and information and communication technologies. She has conducted research on various topics including transnational householding, mediated intimacy, skilled migration, mobile parenting, and workplace digital transformation. Currently, her research focuses on exploring diasporic connections and pandemic-induced (im)mobilities of Chinese professional migrants in Singapore. Her work has been published in prestigious

international journals such as *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, New Media and Society, Journal of Children and Media*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Brenda S.A. Yeoh, FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster in the Asia Research Institute (ARI). She was recently awarded the prestigious Vautrin Lud Prize (2021) for her outstanding achievements in the field of geography, and was also elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy as a Corresponding Fellow. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics and international marriage migrants.

Go to the Bustling South:
Aspirations, Capabilities, and Asian Emigration Regimes in Korean Migration to Vietnam

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Intraregional mobilities within the Asia-Pacific has predominantly been studied through Southeast and South Asian migration to East Asia, focusing on migrant workers, including domestic worker migrants and seasonal guestworkers, international students, marriage migrant women, and also undocumented migrants. However, inter-Asian mobility is far more dynamic, with flows of corporate expatriates, self-initiated expatriates, and short-term migrants such as language trainees moving from the Global North to South, yet these flows receive significantly less attention. This study introduces South Korean migration to Vietnam into the fields of migration studies and inter-Asian mobilities, particularly through the exploration of Koreans' aspirations and capabilities to go to Vietnam. How can we read the emerging phenomenon of North-South mobility within the specific context of the Asia-Pacific region? This research draws on observations and in-depth interviews with South Koreans migrating to Vietnam—not only to their own ethnic concentration neighbourhoods in the metropolises of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City but also to less familiar areas of Vietnam like the North Central Coast. This paper demonstrates how inter-Asian North-South mobilities operate at the intersections of generational perspectives, developmental neoliberal emigration policies and contemporary inter-Asian engagements. This examination further challenges and contributes to critical discussions on neocolonialism within decolonising migration studies.

My Hang Thi Bui is Postdoctoral Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies at Leiden University. She holds a PhD in Geography from Seoul National University. Her interdisciplinary research engages political geography, mobilities, and inter-Asian engagements. Dr Bui has published work on Vietnamese migrants in South Korea in *International Development Planning Review*, *Food, Culture & Society*, and *Asian Ethnicity*. Her current research, which examines both Vietnamese communities in South Korea and Koreans in Vietnam, aims to bring an inter-Asian perspective to the field of decolonising migration studies.

Kwon Heo is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles. His research interests include international migration, immigrant networks, mobilities, and communities. His dissertation project focuses on how changing migration patterns in East Asia affect the dynamics of Asian communities in the United States, specifically in the case of Korean diasporas and Koreatown in Los Angeles. Titled "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once: The Mobility and Spatial Dynamics of Koreatown, Los Angeles", his dissertation explores the intergenerational and interracial relations taking place within the area. He has previously worked on immigrant communities in South Korea, particularly on the social and spatial changes within multicultural governance networks formed by immigrants and host society members.

Caught in the Crossfire:
How US-China Geopolitics Shape Chinese Professionals' Transnational Mobility in the Global Biopharmaceutical Industry

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The biopharmaceutical industry, a key battlefield in the US-China decoupling, is crucial to national security, public health, and economic growth, with its development heavily reliant on Chinese-born, Western-trained scientists in both countries. This study examines this understudied yet vital scientific workforce, which is caught in the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China. Based on 100 in-depth interviews and 300 hours of multi-sited ethnographic observations in the Greater Boston Area and the Yangtze River Delta between April 2022 and November 2023, this article asks the central question: how has geopolitical rivalry shaped the high-tech migration between the US and China in the biopharmaceutical industry? Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory and the geopolitics of migration, I examine how US-China geopolitical tensions influence their professional lives in the workplace and their involvement in biotech entrepreneurship. I argue that they face a particular dilemma known as the 'geopolitical ceiling,' which hampers their career advancement and their ability to secure venture capital across borders. All these barriers have produced blocked and frictional mobility, reshaping their cosmopolitan visions. This study reveals how macro-political schemes influence the mobility trajectories of high-skilled migrants, which has not been paid enough attention in existing scholarship. It critiques the myth of "flexible citizenship" and provokes reflections on "brain circulation" in the increasingly divided world.

Shunan You is a sociology PhD candidate in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Northeastern University. Her research uses a transnational lens to examine the socio-political and human impacts of educational and skilled international migration, situating migration as an ongoing process shaped by state development, institutions, and individual aspirations. Her book manuscript dissertation, titled *Science on the Move: China-US High-Tech Migration in the Global Biopharmaceutical Industry*, uses comparative and multisided ethnography in both the US and China to show how cosmopolitan mobility is an aspirational world-making, enabled by complex infrastructures involving education, capital investment, urban technological centers, and state policies. Her sole-authored article "Cosmopolitan Pathways from the Global South: How Non-Middle-Class Students become Desirable Fulbright Applicants" was published in *Global Networks*. She writes extensively to engage the public on issues related to international student and skilled labor mobility. Her scholarship bridges the fields of transnational migration, political economy, intersectionality theories (gender/race/class), science and technology studies, Asian and Asian American studies, and global China studies.

Persuasion and Prejudice:
Are South Korean Attitudes toward Immigration Open to Change?

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Can South Koreans be persuaded to adopt more favorable attitudes toward immigration by framing pro-immigration messages around national concerns like economic growth and demographic challenges? Despite South Korea's pressing need to liberalize its immigration regime to address a demographic crisis, public attitudes remain lukewarm, posing barriers to immigration-based solutions. While persuasion has been studied in other contexts, little is known about its effects in societies where immigration is a newer phenomenon linked to pressing economic challenges. This study examines whether pro-immigration messages emphasizing low birth rates and economic growth can shift public opinion in South Korea and reduce origins-based discrimination against high- and lower-skilled migrants. Using a framing experiment and conjoint analysis with a nationally representative sample (n=2,010), the study finds that persuasion cues fail to increase overall support for immigration. However, framing immigration in terms of economic growth reinforces status quo preferences, even among those predisposed to favor immigration. A fertility-related cue shows minimal impact but offers some limited evidence of reducing origins-based discrimination. The findings highlight the difficulty of shifting entrenched attitudes toward immigration in South Korea and suggest risks of backlash if policymakers promote immigration as a solution to the demographic crisis.

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Making of Remote Work among Vietnamese IT Professionals in Japan in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Time

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The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak rapidly expanded remote work, which is still implemented in some sectors, including IT industry. Although foreign IT professionals are often considered an in-demand workforce in many host societies, including emerging immigration countries (e.g. Japan), the literature on international migration during COVID-19 has heavily centred on their transnational mobility or immobility, precarious working and living conditions, and immigration policies stemming directly or indirectly from the pandemic. Relevant literature has indicated that work-style shifts from office to home remain after the pandemic; however, studies on highly skilled migrants, including IT professionals undertaking remote work, remain scarce. This study focuses on Vietnamese IT professionals in Japan and explores how these migrants introduce, establish and maintain remote work in the host society, which rapidly introduced remote work after the pandemic. The paper applies the conceptual framework of 'bricolage' to understand the process of mobilising resources available to migrants to introduce and maintain remote work. This paper uncovers how remote work exposes these Vietnamese IT professionals to work transnationally and forces them to engineer their remote work and family lives. Drawing from multiyear ethnographic fieldwork in Japan, the study finds that the job characteristics in IT allow them to work remotely. However, they are challenged to balance professional and family life in the same location. These professionals bear the financial and time costs of remote work. Assembling the necessary resources is insufficient for highly skilled migrants to maintain this work mode; they must be heavily self-sufficient to engage in remote work.

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In Search of Silver Linings:
The COVID-19 and its Impact on Indian Skilled Migrants in Japan

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The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for skilled migrants, and those in Japan were no exception. Border closures, prolonged family separations, and the loss of employment severely impacted Indian professionals and their families. Many were forced to pay rent and residence taxes for homes they were barred from returning to, leading to questions about their sense of belonging and future in Japan, some of whom also considered leaving.

However, once the borders reopened, Japan became an even more attractive destination for Indian talent than it had been before the pandemic. At the same time, the rise of remote work allowed for unexpected opportunities, especially for women who had relocated as trailing spouses post pandemic. Unlike pre-pandemic migrant women who were constrained by geographical boundaries, these new migrant women were able to continue their jobs in India while job-hunting in Japan, benefiting from the flexibility that remote work provided.

It also opened doors for those existing migrant women who were unable to enter corporate world due to childcare pressure. Additionally, remote work also enabled husbands to support their wives with childcare, creating new dynamics within migrant families. However, the shift to remote work was not without its challenges, as isolation became a significant issue for many new migrants.

This paper draws from online and in-person interviews with 15 new and 12 long-term Indian migrants in Japan to explore how these dynamics—both the opportunities and the difficulties—reshaped the lives of skilled Indian migrants in Japan. By examining their experiences during and after the pandemic, this study highlights the evolving nature of skilled migration and the role of digital work in redefining skill and mobility in a post-pandemic world.

Megha Wadhwa is an anthropologist, filmmaker, and writer based at the Free University of Berlin's Japanese Studies department. She is an adjunct assistant professor at Temple University Japan. She is also a visiting scholar at Sophia University Tokyo. She is the author of *Indian Migrants in Tokyo: A Study of Socio-Cultural, Religious and Working Worlds* (Routledge:2021). Her current research looks into migration trends of Indians in Japan, Singapore and Germany.

Between Career and Care:
Korean Expatriate Families in the UAE

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This study explores the experiences of Korean expatriate families living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), focusing on the intersections of family dynamics and social positioning in skilled migration. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are significant migration destinations with heavy reliance on foreign labour to sustain their dynamic economy, with the UAE standing out as a prominent hub for expatriates. And yet, the state maintains exclusionary policies that restrict integration pathways, thereby enforcing the temporariness of migrants regardless of their skill levels. In this context, the Korean expatriates employed by multinational corporations (MNCs) must navigate complexities in career and family life due to their eventual return to Korea.

Drawing on 32 months of ethnographic fieldwork, this study explores how Korean expatriate families balance professional demands and family responsibilities. With the majority of the Korean population in the UAE being expatriates employed by MNCs, their migration is closely tied to global economic trends, including the impact of events like COVID-19. Facing the global shifts and changes in perceptions of future planning, this research examines how Korean expatriate parents are willing to undergo socioeconomic downward mobility to grant overseas educational opportunities for their children. By investigating the adaptive strategies employed by expatriate families to prolong their stay abroad, I examine the tension between work and family life in skilled migration. By analyzing the interconnectedness of work, family, and migration, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of family cohesion and caregiving practices of skilled migrant families in the rapidly evolving global labor market.

Hee Eun Kwon is Postdoctoral Fellow at Tokyo College, The University of Tokyo. She is a qualitative researcher and a sociologist interested in international migration, culture, race/ethnicity, and belonging. Her current book project emerges from her dissertation exploring how temporary migrants foster a sense of belonging in exclusionary migration contexts. Building on 32 months of ethnographic research, the project examines cosmopolitanism as a social performance that conceals systems of categorical inequality. Her research has been supported by the Canada Excellence Research Chair Global Exchange Fellowship, and UC San Diego's International Institute, Transnational Korean Studies, and Department of Sociology. Her dissertation was awarded the Gwenn Okruhlik Dissertation Award from the Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies. She received a PhD in Sociology from the University of California San Diego, and a BA in Social Research and Public Policy from New York University Abu Dhabi.

Practices in Field Transitions and Capital Conversion:
Social Anchoring of Asian Skilled Migrants with Korean Degrees in the Korean Labour Market

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Since the early 2000s, the South Korean government has been actively working to attract international students, recognizing their potential as a skilled labor pool. Recent policy measures aim not only to attract international students but also to establish pathways that facilitate their transition from education to employment and settlement. Consequently, the international student population in Korea has grown significantly, with a majority originating from Asian countries. These students, often familiar with Korean language, culture, and social norms, are expected to integrate seamlessly into Korea's labor market as skilled migrants upon graduation. Contrary to the assumption, this study reveals that many Asian graduates with Korean degrees encountered significant challenges during the transition from university to the workplace. Departing from the university field, they often faced the sudden loss of their existing social capital, while also finding it particularly challenging to build new social networks in the workplace. Their cultural capital, including Korean language proficiency, which was acceptable in academic contexts, was frequently devalued or perceived as inadequate in the workplace field. This mismatch exacerbates feelings of insecurity and limits their ability to engage fully in their professional roles. Additionally, the instability of temporary employment contracts and the uncertainty of visa extensions contributed to heightened psychological insecurity. Despite these challenges, the study finds that these individuals engaged in self-empowerment practices when supported by relational footholds—such as supportive colleagues, partner, or friends—that provide socio-psychological stability. These footholds enable migrants to effectively utilize and convert their capital to adapt to the demands of their new field. Drawing on social anchoring theory and practice theory, this research illustrates how transitions between fields within the host society affect skilled migrants' socio-psychological security and demonstrates the pivotal role of social support as a mediating factor in capital conversion processes.

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Navigating Evolving Professional Identities and Care Landscapes: Female Keralite Ayurveda Therapists and their (Skilled) Labour Mobilities to Malaysia

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Ayurveda is an ancient system of medicine indigenous to parts of South Asia and growing in popularity globally. Despite recognition by WHO (2022) as trained and skilled service providers, Ayurveda therapists are an understudied labour force. Recalibrating skill is explored through the evolving professional identities and experiences of female Ayurveda therapists from the state of Kerala, India, facilitated through interviews, fieldwork, content and document analysis, and archival research. Of focus is the phased implementation of the Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) Act 2016 in Malaysia and the creation of a regulated employment pathway to Malaysia for foreign assistant practitioners of Traditional Indian Medicine like Ayurveda therapists as skilled workers, compared to their presence as less-skilled or irregular labour migrants in the previously self-regulated private T&CM sector in Malaysia.

By investigating the migration infrastructure (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014) involved in mediating participants' labour mobilities from India to Malaysia, multi-scalar agendas and the influence of postcolonial power relations in shaping medical globalisation and the migrations of related health workers emerge. This is reflected in technical cooperation between Malaysia, WHO and the governments of China and India, to integrate T&CM systems into Malaysian national health systems, aligned with global aspirations for Universal Healthcare.

Participants attempt to navigate their evolving professional identities amidst several developing, intersecting agendas through occupational mobility. These actions and agendas include, firstly, pursuing training pathways in India- representing a shift from historically informal to formal skilled labour- as part of Ayurveda's continuing modernisation; secondly, meeting professional competency requirements for transnational labour, including Malaysia's regulation of the T&CM sector; thirdly, adapting to opportunities in the burgeoning global wellness industry including expectations of emotional labour. However, participants' attempts at skill recalibration amidst these broader agendas occur through fluctuating entanglements of their aspirations, social stratification, and socio-cultural norms like feminine respectability.

Nirmala Arath Prabhakar is in the final year of her PhD candidature at Monash University Malaysia, pursuing her research as a part-time student. She currently leads a private company's corporate social responsibility strategy, which facilitates private sector-third sector partnerships. Ongoing projects include learning support for children from several refugee communities and students from a public housing (PPR) community in the Klang Valley. At Monash University Malaysia, she was a team member of the research project on Lifestyle Im/Mobilities in/to Malaysia in the Covid-19 era – A Pilot Study, and a sessional tutor on the unit Borders, People, and Identity: Migration in the 21st Century. In addition to experiences in the private and academic sectors, Nirmala has volunteered with several civil society organisations in Malaysia, which focus on supporting foreign workers and students from disadvantaged communities.

Filipino Nurse Migration, a Stratified Hierarchy of Skills and the Construction of "Ideal" Nurse Migrants in Singapore

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Nurses are among the most mobile migrant professionals in the world. Structurally, labor market demands, and immigration policies are some of the factors influencing their migration trajectories. While some scholars have examined how "ideal" nurse migrants (in terms of skills and competency) are constructed in popular Western destinations, less is known about how such ideals are (re)defined or (re)shaped in temporary destination countries like Singapore. Singapore's nurse migration pathway follows a "bus stop" model where foreign nurses work for certain periods, accumulating resources and skills while awaiting opportunities for onward migration or returning home. Using the case of Filipino nurse migration to Singapore, we examine the construction of the "ideal" nurse migrant, focusing on recruitment and employment processes. Our dataset includes interviews with 13 key informants from Singapore and the Philippines, as well as 10 Filipino migrant nurses working in Singapore, conducted between 2020 and 2022, along with relevant policy documents. Drawing on the literature on skill regimes and stepwise migration, we attend to three themes: First, the study delves into Singapore's "streamlined admission policy" and its interaction with the Philippine nursing education system and labor market, revealing both congruence and contradictions that (re)define the specific skillsets and competencies expected of migrant nurses. Second, we examine the multiple facets of education, recruitment, employment, and career pathways that shape the "ideal" nurse migrant under a temporary migration regime. Third, we also show how migrant nurses, positioned within a stratified hierarchy of skills that also draw lines that divide between local and migrant professionals, utilize the "bus stop" model to pursue onward migration.

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Margaret Walton-Roberts is a human geographer trained in the UK and Canada who focuses on international migration. She is a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University and the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo Canada. Her research interests are gender and migration, transnational networks, and immigrant settlement. Her current research focuses on gender and the international migration of health care professionals, and international student migration. She has been awarded several external grants for her research, and has published over 34 book chapters, and more than 46 journal articles. Her latest book, *Global Health Worker Migration* was published with Cambridge University Press Elements series in 2023.

Revisiting Psychological Capital and Psychological Safety:
A Study of Asian-Born Highly Skilled Migrants in Japan and Britain

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This study investigates how psychological capital (PsyCap) with its four components - hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, often abbreviated as HERO—can contribute to professional success and feeling of belonging among Asian-born highly skilled migrants (HSMs) in Japan and the United Kingdom (UK). The framework of PsyCap, focusing on HSMs' internal strengths, is complemented by the concept of psychological safety covering external dimensions of work environment for a more balanced approach. Additionally, the study explores which skills and attributes are currently valued in their workplaces, which skills that the HSMs possess are underutilised or frequently utilised but not acknowledged, and how this affects HSMs' perceptions of effective migration and career advancement.

Defining HSMs as foreign-born professionals employed as knowledge workers, the study focuses on early- to mid-career academics and nonprofit sector employees in Japan and Britain. Based on semi-structured interviews with 15 Asian-born HSMs, the research explores participants' experiences of loneliness and belonging, skills (under)utilisation at their workplace, the development and application of PsyCap, and how PsyCap might impact their professional fulfilment and career vision.

The findings suggest that HSMs are recurring to PsyCap resources in their attempts to overcome professional challenges in their workplace and navigate the constraints of family structures and restrictive migration regimes in host countries. These factors, alongside their perception of psychological safety, impact their career choices and mobility decisions. While PsyCap may serve as a valuable internal resource for HSMs, its effectiveness seems limited if the structural and organisational environment undermines their psychological safety. In such cases, even strong PsyCap may not be sufficient to overcome the challenges faced by HSMs. Additionally, the findings highlight the significant impact of gendered expectations and family structures on the career choices and migration decisions of female HSMs, underscoring the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in migration studies.

Polina Ivanova is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bremen. Her research interests lie in the areas of migration and migrant integration, focusing on international students, refugees and asylum seekers, and highly skilled migrants. Her work primarily centres on Japan, with comparative analyses extending to Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Her recent books include *Civil Society and International Students in Japan: The Making of Social Capital* (Routledge, 2023) and *Refugees and Asylum Seekers in East Asia: Perspectives from Japan and Taiwan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

Scaling Up or Down:
Evaluating the New Career Trajectories of
Female Vietnamese Ex-Educators in Singapore

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With the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, many tuition teachers in Singapore experienced a sharp decline in demand from the first quarter of 2023. This is primarily due to ChatGPT's ability to generate full-length English essays across various topics and its ability to summarise short passages effectively. With a subscription rate of only 20 USD a month, it has thus proven to be a much cheaper option for students and their parents than engaging tutors who could charge upwards of SGD $100 an hour.

Among the tutors who lost their jobs were several female Vietnamese tutors who specialised in teaching General Paper and Upper Secondary English. These highly educated tutors were permanent residents in Singapore and mostly taught tuition part time as a way of supplementing their husbands' earnings in addition to being the main care-givers of their children. Through semi-structured face to face interviews with 22 of these former Vietnamese tutors, this paper attempts to uncover how they chart new career trajectories upon leaving the education industry.

These former educators could choose to be "up-scalers" and re-skill themselves to take on full-time professional jobs. They could also opt to be "retainers" by taking on part-time jobs which require some academic skills such as copy-writing or editing, thus almost emulating what they did before as tutors. Some would also choose to be "down-scalers" and take on part-time "blue-collar" jobs, or be "leavers" and be contented with being full-time homemakers.

This paper aims to illuminate how these workers adapt to their new work identities through potentially reconfiguring gendered norms, re-defining class statuses, coping with possible stigmatisation, and re-establishing care-giving precepts in the course of presenting and performing their new identities both in Singapore and Vietnam.

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