

QUAMAFA CLOSING WORKSHOP

Final event of collaborative project “Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia” (QuaMaFa)

18-19 December 2024 | Göttingen

Wednesday, 18 December

09:00-09:15 **OPENING REMARKS**

Conference room villa

09:15-10:45 WORKSHOP PART I

Conference room villa

HELENA HOF: “Social incorporation versus professional dissociation among migrant startup founders in Singapore and Japan”

MICHELINE VAN RIEMSDIJK: “Making the employable subject: Professional (re)socialization of foreign-born pharmacists in communication classes”

AIMI MURANAKA: “Reluctant stay-ing of Vietnamese IT professionals through their working, social and family life in Japan”

10:45-11:15 *Coffee break*

Wintergarden villa

11:15-13:15 WORKSHOP PART II

Conference room villa

RUTH ACHENBACH: “Precarity and opportunity in the labor market transitions of Chinese top-level graduates in Japan and Singapore”

MUSTAFA AKSAKAL: “Highly-skilled migration and career development: A multi-level analysis of the (re)production of social inequalities in Europe”

JOOHYUN JUSTINE PARK: “Transitional migrants: Rethinking retention and integration strategies for skilled migrants in South Korea”

MEGHA WADHWA: “At the crossroads of leaving and staying: Indian migrants’ journey in Singapore and Japan”

13:15-14:30 *Lunch break*

Wintergarden villa



14:30-16:00 IN DIALOGUE “MIGRATION, RETENTION & INCORPORATION OF THE HIGHLY SKILLED”

Library hall

16:30-18:00 FILM SCREENING OF QUAMAFA FILM “HOME IN THE “MAKING”

Conference room module building

18:45- *Dinner*

Restaurant Bullerjahn

Thursday, 19 December

9:00-10:30 WORKSHOP PART III

Conference room villa

Theoretical reflections on skilled migrants' social and professional incorporation

10:30-11:00 *Coffee break*

Conference room villa

11:00-13:00 SCD MEETING: QUAMAFA GROUP PRESENTATION

Library hall

13:00-14:00 *Lunch break*

14:00-15:00 WORKSHOP PART IV (wrap up & reflection)

Conference room villa

Abstracts and Bios

Precurity and opportunity in the labor market transitions of Chinese top-level graduates in Japan and Singapore

Ruth Achenbach – Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

Student migration is big business: in addition to bringing in substantial tuition payments, it is discussed as a means of channeling skilled migrants into the host country's labor market. In turn, countries of origin usually hope for either remittances or the return of skilled workers bringing knowledge from abroad and consequentially economic development. And yet, depending on the host country's philosophy, retaining the student migrant might not necessarily be the goal: in Singapore, immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive, making it harder for students to remain in the country long-term after graduation. This does not necessarily stop the graduates from trying to stay, though: Many Chinese students opt for comparatively low-

paid employment with long working hours, and see this as a better option compared to China. To the contrary, Japan has facilitated access to its labor market, amounting to as much as inviting migrants of any skill level to stay long-term (all the while not calling these fundamental changes “immigration” policy). Despite comparatively low salaries, slow career advancement, strict hierarchies and long working hours, Chinese graduates search for ways to make their careers in Japan, preferring it over a return to China. The study at hand is based on 100 interviews with 41 Chinese migrants in Tokyo and Singapore carried out between 2021 and 2024. It analyzes aspirations, strategies, and the role of perceptions of opportunity structures of Chinese

graduates of Japan's and Singapore's elite higher educational institutions, placing the analysis in the field of tension between agency and structure.

Ruth Achenbach (Goethe University Frankfurt) is the leader of and a principal investigator 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. Her sub-project analyzes labor market transitions of Chi-

nese top-level graduates in Japan and Singapore. She is also PI of the EU-funded project AspirE – Decision making of aspiring (re)migrants to/within the EU: The case of labor 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.

Highly-skilled migration and career development: A multi-level analysis of the (re)production of social inequalities in Europe

Mustafa Aksakal – University of Bielefeld

There is a growing body of literature addressing highly-skilled migration from different analytical perspectives and in distinct spatial contexts. In relation to career development, it is striking that only a few studies provide a differentiated analytical view of the relationship between (highly skilled) migration and related inequalities of outcomes. In this entry, I address therefore the multi-level social dynamics that contribute to the (re)production of these inequalities among highly-skilled migrants. Methodologically, the paper builds on two qualitative research tools. On the one hand, I analyze recent global policy documents. On the other hand, I draw on semi-structured interviews with Indian professionals, working in Germany. Based on the findings, different mechanisms (re)producing drawbacks can be identified: on the system level valuation propelled by global policies, on the organizational level brokerage through recruitment agencies, and on the interaction level opportunity hoarding, resulting from social, cultural and symbolic capital. To conclude, it is suggested that social inequalities among highly-skilled migrants are (re)produced on multiple societal levels. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the identified mechanisms may not only operate in isolation but also in interrelated ways, leading to ac-

cumulative disadvantages for some mobile professionals.

Mustafa Aksakal holds a PhD in Sociology and Development Studies. He currently works as a research coordinator and research fellow at the Faculty of Sociology at Bielefeld University. His habilitation project is concerned with the multidimensional analysis of the integration of highly skilled migrants and the various ways in which this is linked to social inequalities. In a second research project, Mustafa is analysing the institutional and civil society practices in dealing with and integrating migrants stuck in Mexico or deported from the US, focusing in particular on the interdependencies between the actors involved. As part of the research projects mentioned above, he is the editor and author of several edited volumes and research articles on migration policies and processes in Europe and Latin America. This includes among others the following edited books:

- *Responsando el vinculo entre migración y crisis*, published by Clacso;
- *Characteristics of Temporary Migration in European-Asian Transnational Spaces*, published by Springer.

Social incorporation versus professional dissociation among migrant startup founders in Singapore and Japan

Helena Hof – Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity / University of Zurich

This presentation examines migrant entrepreneurs' global business practices against their attempts to root themselves in their host societies. Migrants are often excluded from the primary labour market

and opt for ethnic entrepreneurship to avoid unemployment or underemployment. Aiming to develop theorization of skilled migrants' social incorporation and retention, I analyze highly-educated migrants'

startup practices through the concept of status passages. I argue that a practice-theory approach to migrants' access to the country, transition through educational and labour market institutions, followed by transnational entrepreneurship, helps us understand how they build lives and develop claims to staying in their current host societies. The arguments are based on qualitative fieldwork among 69 ethnically and nationally diverse migrants who have (co-)founded startups in the knowledge-intensive sectors in the Singaporean and Japanese startup scenes. The presentation demonstrates that the highly-educated migrants place their hopes on transnational entrepreneurship in order to avoid deskilling or loss of status. In the attempt to maintain their migratory life projects in Singapore and Japan, two countries known for restrictive immigration policies and exclusionary labour market institutions, respectively, the migrants find themselves constrained by a variety of structures but also able to exert varying forms of capital while they transition through a row of legal and professional statuses. Eventually, startup ventures neither lead to ethnic entrepreneurship nor to gradual incorporation in the host society labour market. Rather, migrant entrepreneurs rely on their transnational networks and target overseas markets with the objective to develop a viable business model and obtain a secure

legal status that in turn allows them to prolong their staying in Singapore and Japan and thus, facilitates their local incorporation.

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. Her work lies at the nexus of the sociology of work, skilled migration, gender, ethnicity and race, mobility studies, and global cities and entrepreneurship. Within QuaMaFA, Helena focuses on the link between highly-educated migrant entrepreneurs' involvement in local entrepreneurial networks and the startup ecosystem, and their professional as well as overall embedding in the host society. Her work has been published widely and include, among others, 'Employment as an anchor: The prospects of emerging East Asian skilled migration regimes through the lens of migrants' access to the labor market' (with Aimi Muranaka and Joohyun Justine Park, APMJ), '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 in the book *The-EU-Migrant-Generation-in-Asia* (Bristol University Press).

Reluctant stay-ing of Vietnamese IT professionals through their working, social and family life in Japan

Aimi Muranaka – University of Duisburg-Essen

This study sheds light on the working, social and family life of Vietnamese IT professionals in Japan, where is as an emerging immigration regime. IT professionals are often perceived to transcend border and relocate relatively easily because their skills and knowledge are considered transferrable from one country to another. However, the experiences of Vietnamese IT professionals in Japan indicate a contrasting picture; they are often constrained from being globally mobile, and their socialisation activities and shifts in their family life often end up keeping them in the host society longer than they initially planned. Based on semi-structured interviews with Vietnamese IT professionals living in Japan, the current study explores various aspects of shifting migrants' working, social and family lives to capture a process of their prolonged stay in the host country. While they do not necessarily undergo or not able

to project upward career mobility, their socialisation activities, family and life stage changes not only keep skilled migrants staying in the host society, but also make them difficult to leave the current country or to move elsewhere. For example, participation in hobby and socialisation networks and property ownership in the host society establish a certain level of foothold in Japan, while they continuously feel a lack of belonging in the host society. Combined with shifts in their life stage, the skilled migrants in this study often end up prolonging their stay in the country but simultaneously share a strong intention of not to settle permanently in the host society.

Aimi Muranaka is a post-doc researcher at the Institute of East Asian Studies in the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. She works for a collaborative research project "Qualification and Skill in the

Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA)” funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany. Her current research project sheds light on transnational and internal (im)mobility of Vietnamese IT professionals in Japan. Her research interest centres on skills/qualifications in international migration, marketisation of migra-

tion and brokerage in Asia. Her recent publications include “Perks or burdens? Being ‘nearly (Im)mobile’ as IT foreign professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan” in *Contemporary Japan* and a co-edited book “Immigration and Quality of Life in Ageing Societies” (co-edited with Aeneas Zi Wang and Florian Coulmas).

Transitional migrants: Rethinking retention and integration strategies for skilled migrants in South Korea

Joohyun Justine Park – Inha University

South Korea has implemented policies to address demographic challenges such as low birth rates, aging population, and regional decline by actively attracting skilled migrants. As an emerging migration country, Korea aims to retain these foreign professionals for long-term settlement, offering various residency incentives and integration programs. However, despite these efforts, skilled migrants often remain in Korea only temporarily, adopting a flexible and open-ended attitude toward their future rather than fully committing to life in Korean society. This qualitative study, involving 90 skilled migrants with Asian background, explores their perspectives on living and working in Korea. The findings reveal that these individuals saw themselves as transitional migrants, adjusting the duration of their stay based on available job opportunities, visa conditions, and the overall stability of their circumstances. Despite their advanced skills and qualifications, many skilled migrants encountered professional and personal instability, facing uncertainty about their long-term prospects in South Korea. They were more likely to extend their stay when stable residency conditions are in place, but not necessarily with long-term integration in mind. This study suggests that, rather

than aiming permanent residency as a long-term goal, South Korea might better address its socio-demographic issues by implementing practical, medium-term policies that support skilled migrants’ stable residency conditions. Such an approach could provide the necessary flexibility for these individuals while also offering Korea a more realistic and sustainable way to establish itself as a more successful emerging migration country in Asia.

Joohyun Justine Park is a research professor at Inha University in South Korea and a member of the BMBF collaborative project, “Qualification and Skill in the Migration Process of Foreign Workers in Asia (QuaMaFA).” Dr Park is a director of the Community Collaboration Center at Inha University’s Convergence Institute for Multicultural Studies. She previously served as a postdoctoral research fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt and earned her PhD in Education at the University of Auckland. Her research interests focus on multicultural local community collaboration and various aspects of migration, including adaptation, integration, sense of belonging, racism, and well-being.

Making the employable subject: Professional (re)socialization of foreign-born pharmacists in communication classes

Micheline van Riemsdijk – Uppsala University

Highly skilled migrants are expected to acquire culturally-specific professional knowledge and skills, including communication skills. The latter is particularly salient in medical professions, where communication with patients, colleagues and other medical professionals is crucial for the safe care for patients. For highly skilled migrants, the acquisition of cultur-

ally-specific communication skills involves a process of professional (re)socialization, a term coined by Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015). This process includes a change in approach to professional work, including the adoption of culturally-specific professional norms and ideologies and new patterns of communication. This presentation examines

the socio-cultural aspects of the professional (re) socialization process through observations of communication classes in a complimentary program for pharmacists at a Swedish university, and a communication webinar offered by the trade union Swedish Pharmacists. It addresses the following research questions: 1) What “correct” professional norms and behaviors are being taught in the communication classes? 2) How do instructors teach and reinforce these behaviors? 3) In a broader perspective, what do these findings tell us about the formation of the employable subject? These questions are examined through the following themes: language proficiency; equal treatment; teamwork and professional roles; customer relations; and professional knowledge. The research findings add a behavioral perspective to the highly skilled migration literature through an examination of the teaching and transfer of culturally-specific communication skills, and conceptualizations of “correct” behavior in the formation of the employable subject. As workplaces are becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse, an understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of the (re)professionalization process is increasingly salient.

Micheline van Riemsdijk is a Professor in Human Geography at Uppsala University. Her research focuses on highly skilled migration, specifically questions related to governance, recruitment, and socio-cultural and labor market integration. Van Riemsdijk’s research projects have explored, among others, the experiences of Polish nurses in Norway, the recruitment of engineers and IT specialists to Norway, talent acquisition in the IT industry in Bangalore, the EU Blue Card, and the global governance of migration. Her latest project examines the labor market integration of highly skilled refugees in Sweden, including the “career rewind,” multi-level governance gaps in the labor market integration process, and professional (re)socialization. Van Riemsdijk holds a Master in Scandinavian Studies (University of Minnesota) and a PhD in Human Geography (University of Colorado), and she has worked at the University of Tennessee. Van Riemsdijk has been a visiting scholar at two research institutes in Oslo, the University of Warsaw, Oxford University, the University of Duisburg-Essen, and the University of Otago.

At the crossroads of leaving and staying: Indian migrants’ journey in Singapore and Japan

Megha Wadhwa – Free University Berlin

For many Indian migrants in Japan and Singapore, life abroad begins as a leap of faith – but do they aspire to stay or to move elsewhere or back home? And what makes someone stay in a foreign land, and what pulls them back home/elsewhere? This presentation looks into the aspirations and staying/leaving decisions of Indian migrants in Japan and Singapore, places where career opportunities are vast, but challenges could also loom large. Many Indians arrive in these countries with dreams of building better lives, whether it’s a quick career boost or a more settled life. But the question they eventually face is: stay or go? Through conversations with Indian professionals, this research explores the factors influencing whether they stick around or decide it’s time to pack up. The answers aren’t simple. For some, the decision to stay means gaining a sense of belonging, professional stability, or even a “home away from home.” For others, societal barriers, career limits, or family needs back in India push them toward leaving. This study breaks down how aspirations evolve over time, showing how emotional comfort, social recognition, and career satisfaction play into their choices.

By contextualizing stories collected from 55 Indians in Japan, 23 in Singapore, and 7 returnees through longitudinal, digital, ethnographic participant observation, and visual-audio research, I aim to shed light on the factors that help retain skilled migrants—or those that drive them away.

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 the book ‘Indian Migrants in Tokyo: A Study of Socio-Cultural, Religious and Working Worlds’ (Routledge:2021). She has also written several articles on the Indian community in Japan and other topics for The Japan Times and various journals. She is trained in fieldwork filming, and her films include “Daughters from Afghanistan” (2019), “Indian cooks in Japan” (2020) and “Finding their niche: Unheard stories of migrant women” (2022). Her current research looks into migration trends of Indians in Japan, Singapore and beyond.

In Dialogue "Migration, Retention & Incorporation of the Highly Skilled"

Chang Won Lee – Migration Research and Training Centre, South Korea

Chang Won LEE is a Research Fellow at the Migration Research and Training Centre (MRTC), a government-funded institute dedicated to immigration policy research. He completed his Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Maryland, where his dissertation used Korean migration to the United States as a case study to reveal how global perspectives can reshape traditional views of stratification and social mobility often constrained by nation-based frameworks. His areas of expertise include labor migra-

tion, skilled migration, immigration policy, and the Korean diaspora. Since joining MRTC in 2013, he has led numerous projects, including recent studies on Korea's population decline and its impact on immigration policy, foreign researchers in Korea, employment pathways for STEM international students, immigration policy and human capital citizenship, and social mobility among Korean immigrants in Australia. Currently, he is focused on the evolving policies and landscape of international students in Korea.

Gracia Liu-Farrer – Waseda University, Japan

Gracia Liu-Farrer is Professor of sociology at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, and Director of Institute of Asian Migration at Waseda University, Japan. Her research examines immigration into Japan, transnational labor and student mobilities in East Asia as well as between Asia and Europe. She hopes to bring Asian experiences to migration and mobility theorization. Her recent books include *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (with Brenda Yeoh, Routledge, 2018), *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and*

Belonging in an Ethno-nationalist Society (Cornell University Press, 2020), *Tangled Mobilities: Places, Affects, and Personhood across Social Spheres in Asian Migration* (with Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Berghahn Books, 2022), and *The Question of Skill in Cross-border Labour Mobilities* (with Brenda Yeoh and Michele Baas, Taylor & Francis, 2023). She has published journal articles and book chapters on migrants ranging from Chinese students, Nepali restaurant workers to Syrian refugees.

Anja Weiß – University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Anja Weiß is professor for macrosociology and transnational processes at the Institute for Sociology at the University of Duisburg-Essen. Her theoretical interests in global and transnational inequalities translate into comparative empirical studies on highly skilled migrants, the glocalization of professional knowledge, (institutional) racism and legal exclusion, anti-racism, and transnational qualitative

research design. Her major publications include a study on high skilled migrants' trajectories into labor markets in Germany, Turkey and Canada (with Nohl, Schittenhelm and Schmidtke: *Work in Transition*, Toronto UP 2014). She serves on the board of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Integration and Migration at University of Duisburg-Essen.

Junjia Ye – Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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, urban diversification, and the political-economic development of Southeast Asia. Her current project investigates how migrant creative labour is made precarious through the skill optic. 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*. Her first monograph, *Class inequality in the global city: migrants, workers and cosmopolitanism in Singapore* (2016, Palgrave Macmillan) won Labour History's annual book prize.