

Glenda S. Roberts and Noriko Fujita

Is 'Short-term' for the long run? Is 'skilled' really skilled? Japan's convoluted short-term labor migration schemes

In Japan, despite rapid demographic decline, until recently, low-skilled migrant workers have been welcomed only through side doors, such as technical interns (TITP) and students. Yet pressure for change comes from two sides: the moral critique of the side-door TITP scheme, and the growing economic pressures of a dwindling labor force. In 2018 Japan put in place a short-term bona-fide labor scheme (SSW: Specified Skilled Workers) to meet the labor demand in fields heretofore largely inaccessible to foreign labor importation. These workers are not expected to need training; they should already have acquired 'skills' to do the work of their sector. Yet we have found the question of 'skill' to be a slippery one, indeed. Currently, skills acquired by most workers in SSWI derive from the workers' experiences in the TITP program, which rests on the premise of technical transfer, not labor provision. Yet, the hourly wage of SSWI is only marginally above that of TITP workers, and while SSWI workers are permitted to remain at their jobs for five years, they are not given opportunities to increase their skills and wages in this status, nor can they easily change employers. While the construction and shipbuilding industries will gain access to a higher status visa, the SSWII, which envisions skills training, pay increases, family reunification and possibility of permanent residence, currently other industries are not slated for this enhanced status. We argue that because SSWI rests on top of the TITP, it keeps migrant workers in precarious low-paying work with no skills pathway upward for much longer than some scholars argue as desirable from the humanitarian viewpoint. Our research, based on qualitative interviewing with farmer stakeholders and labor dispatch agencies in Aichi and Kyoto, as well as with construction agencies in metropolitan Tokyo from 2018-2021, highlights the problems in these schemes, from the stakeholders' viewpoints at the genba.

Glenda Roberts obtained her PhD in Anthropology from Cornell University in 1986. After holding research and academic positions in Honolulu from 1988, she has lived and worked in Japan since 1996, first at the University of Tokyo Institute of Social Sciences, and then, from 1998 to the present, at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies of Waseda University, where she is Professor. Her major areas of research are on gender, work, family, and migration policy in contemporary Japan. Her most recent work in the migration field is "An Immigration Policy by Any Other Name: Semantics of Immigration to Japan" (*Social Science Japan Journal*, 21 (1) 2018).

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Gracia Liu-Farrer

The student-workers: Four decades of international student migration in Japan

Since 1983 when the Nakasone government initiated the plan of accepting 100,000 students by the early 2000s, international student population increased by thirty times from 10,428 in 1983 to 312,214 in 2019 before the COVID pandemic restricted cross-border mobilities. In Japan's official discourses, international education is treated as one of the national strategies for expanding Japan's international presence as presented in the Nakasone Plan, and globalizing Japanese higher education and society as embodied in the plan of accepting 300,000 students proposed by PM Fukuda. However, one of the important functions of international student migration is labor import. Like many other advanced economies, Japan treats international students as potential skilled workers who have the advantage of attaining the linguistic and cultural competency of the host countries. The government aims to retain 50% of international students in Japan's labor market (Japan Revitalization Strategy 2016). Moreover, in Japan where demographic crisis has deepened and yet importing so-called simple labor is out of the question, student migrants have been an indispensable source of low-wage labor, making up one fifth of the foreign work force in the country. Because a student visa permits off-campus work during the school year, international educational institutions, especially Japanese language academies and vocational schools, have become key channels for importing low-wage non-regular migrant workers. The educational institutions have acted as de facto migration industry. This presentation focuses the discussion on this form of labor migration and how the student-worker identity evolves among international students from different national backgrounds over the decades, from the Chinese in the late 1980s and 1990s to the Vietnamese and Nepalese in the 2010s. It highlights the mechanisms, especially the practices of institutional actors, that perpetuate this dual identity, and the impact of this identity on the mobility trajectories of international students.

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examines immigrants' economic, social and political practices in Japan, and the global mobility of students and professional migrants. She is the author of books, *Labor Migration from China to Japan: International Students, Transnational Migrants* (Routledge, 2011), and *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and Belonging in an Ethno-nationalist Society* (Cornell University Press, 2020). She has co-edited *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (with Brenda Yeoh, Routledge, 2018), and *Tangled Mobilities: Places, Affects, and Personhood across Social Spheres in Asian Migration* (with Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Berghahn Books, 2022).